

## **Part Four (chapters 15-21): The Life of Wisdom**

Whereas part three of this text leaned toward the theoretical side, part four will lean toward the practical side. In part three you clarified your beliefs. In part four you will plan your life. In part two you sat still for a few minutes. In part three you summarized your opinions about right and wrong. In part four you will record your expenses and make a budget.

You have been introduced to the love of wisdom and have learned a few skills related to facilitating this love and the wisdom itself. Furthermore, you have summarized some of your most important beliefs as you have worked through the chapters in part three. Now you are ready to put it all together in the midst of the nuts and bolts of everyday living. The development of a real “life of wisdom” requires reflection on various practices and areas of life. After a chapter introducing the whole idea of “the life of wisdom” in general, you will examine the following areas of life in the chapters ahead:

16. Self and self-care
17. Community
18. Time
19. Place and Nature
20. Work and Money
21. Suffering
22. The Details of Life

We mentioned at the start of this book that the love of wisdom for us here today is the practice of meaningful living in the midst of a shallow world. Much of our surrounding culture fails to integrate, fails to reflect on life, fails to practice reality. For this reason, the final part of this book may call into question some of the models of living presented to us in contemporary

culture. The readings from West and East are included not only to inform you about different approaches to time, money, relationships and such, but also to suggest options of life unfamiliar to many. Yes, you will be challenged. But perhaps this challenge will encourage you to go deeper, to reflect on your life, and to choose your life because it truly *is* your life.

CHAPTER 15  
BEGINNING A LIFE OF WISDOM

**Chapter Outline:**

1. Connecting Beliefs, Values, Sources and Practices
  - a. Who Am I?
  - b. What's Important and Why?
  - c. Where Does it Matter?
  - d. What Am I Going to Do About It?
2. Conflict Resolutions
  - a. Types of Conflict
  - b. Types of Conflict Resolution - note a degree of overlap here
3. Introducing and Maintaining Change
  - a. The Process
  - b. Means, Aims and Strength
  - c. The Consequences of Change
4. Conclusions

**Chapter Objectives:**

This chapter is the transition from the theoretical material to the more practical part of your text. For this reason, it may be a good opportunity to review what you have learned thus far. This chapter first helps you tie some of the connections together between philosophical beliefs, sources of wisdom, guiding values, and the practices of life. We explore (again) our sense of self, and we examine the ways in which we decide what is important to us and make live such that those important things remain important. Then, because living our values is often conducted in

and through conflict, we spend some time thinking about conflict and conflict resolution. Finally, we approach the introduction and maintenance of change in our lives (after all, learning to apply our well-examined values to the nuts and bolts of everyday life is a matter of change, is it not?). We look at the process of change itself, reading an excerpt from British/American philosopher Alfred North Whitehead. We reflect on the objects of our change, the means we use for change, the strength we bring to the task, and the consequences of such a process. In your journal assignment you will explore your guiding values, those values that concretely guide your everyday life. When you are done studying this chapter you should be able to:

- tell someone else how their beliefs are related to their values and practices
- articulate some of the key guiding values of your life
- identify a few different types of conflict faced when we try to live our values and give examples of how those conflicts might be resolved
- summarize the key points of Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy of change
- describe how the steps introducing and maintaining change outlined in the chapter might be used in an example of your own life.

The first day of my first class in philosophy in college, my professor stood up and told the class, "philosophy is the most practical subject you can study, because once you learn how to think, you can do anything." I have never forgotten his words. Furthermore, I think he was right, insofar as he intended his comment. Only now I would take it further. Philosophy is not just about learning how to *think*, in order to inform our life. Rather the love of wisdom is the art of learning *to live*, period. Certainly it involves thinking, but as we have come to realize, it involves a whole lot more. Emotions are engaged as, through self-examination, we facilitate hatred for those things which we know we should hate. Relationships are employed as we place ourselves with people who help us ask the questions we need to ask. We could go on and on (and we will). The point is this, that while much of our world frequently lives life without learning how to live, a life of wisdom (or a life characterized by the love of wisdom) intentionally invests itself in

such an education. The pursuit of wisdom brings together carefully chosen sources and thoughtfully clarified values to bear upon concrete areas of life (how we spend our time, money, relationships . . .) by means of skills of wisdom that have been developed through experience.

By now you have wandered through a number of questions, issues, and schools of thought in chapters 7-14. You have wondered about the existence of matter. You have asked if beauty really *is* in the eye of the beholder. You have probed the meaning of life. If you have not been distracted by the novelty and complication of these issues, perhaps you have begun to clarify your own philosophical *beliefs*. And perhaps you have begun to consider or re-consider your guiding *values* in life: what you consider to be important.

Perhaps along the way, your sense of the key *sources* of your philosophy have shifted a bit. Take note of this. What/who are your most important sources of wisdom *now*? Furthermore, you have probably gained some experience in the *skills* of philosophy. You have begun to pay attention: to stop, wait, watch, and notice. You have learned how to ask questions: when to ask, who to ask, how to ask and so on. You have also done some experimenting in practicing reality: deciding reality through practice, putting reality into practice, seeing reality through practice. What skills have you developed the most thus far? What skills need improvement?

In order for you develop a fully philosophical life, however, one step remains. It is one thing to learn to pay attention. It is one thing to know what you believe (and why you believe it). It is another to order your own life in harmony with your sources, skills and beliefs in the context of a world which may not appreciate them. It is another thing to look carefully at the concrete areas of your own life (for example, how you care for your health) and revise the details of life to fit your sources and your values. This is the choice to *do something* about your life, in practice. This is choosing to live a “form of life.”

Pierre Hadot argues that, “the various schools of antiquity were characterized above all by their choice of a form of life, which is then justified *after the fact* by a given systematic construction.”<sup>1</sup> Perhaps it is time to recover some of the approach of ancient philosophy and see

1. Pierre Hadot, “Postscript: An Interview with Pierre Hadot,” in *Philosophy as a Way of Life*,

it as the expression of a form of life rather than merely the analysis of important questions. For Hadot it involves a combination of reflective thinking, fundamental choice of perspective and practical application. He uses the ancient term “spiritual exercises” to describe it:

What’s interesting about the idea of spiritual exercises is precisely that it is not a matter of purely rational consideration, but the putting in action of all kinds of means, intended to act upon one’s self. Imagination and affectivity play a capital role here: we must represent to ourselves in vivid colors the dangers of such-and-such a passion, and use striking formulations of ideas in order to exhort ourselves. We must also create habits, and fortify ourselves by preparing ourselves against hardships in advance. In Epicurean communities, people help one another, admit their weaknesses to each other, and warn others of such-and-such a dangerous tendency which is beginning to manifest itself in them.

All these techniques can be useful in crisis situations. Yet we must not allow them to make us forget that what is most important is the profound orientation of our lives, the fundamental choice of a life, which engages us passionately. The problem is not so much to repress such-and-such a passion, as it is to learn to see things “from above,” in the grandiose perspective of universal nature and of humanity, compared to which many passions may appear ridiculously insignificant. It is then that rational knowledge may become force and will, and thereby become extremely efficacious.”<sup>2</sup>

Orientation, consideration, community, imagination, affectivity, and particular means. In this kind of philosophy you discover and “become” your own model of life, worked into every area.

trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 282. I think it is fair to say that much of the history of Eastern philosophy can be seen as an interplay between philosophy as a chosen form of life and philosophical discourse, with one or the other having dominance in different periods. The rise of Zen Buddhism, for example, was a shift from discourse to form of life.

2. Pierre Hadot, “Postscript: An Interview with Pierre Hadot,” in *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 284.

In this philosophy the focus is not merely on the debates, but rather on our fundamental values and the ordinary practice of life, how we actually live life day-to-day.

### Connecting Beliefs, Values, Sources, and Practices

This brings us to the question of *how*. How are we to make those connections between our beliefs, values, sources, and practices of life? More particularly, how are we to make these connections *consciously*, as expressions of an “examined” life? This, in turn, leads us to a further set of questions. We ask, “Who am I?” and explore the self we have been and now construct. We ask, “What’s important and why?” and link our philosophical beliefs and guiding values. We ask, “Where does this matter?” and we consider the application of values to the various areas of our life. Finally we ask, “What am I going to do about it?” and we apply theory to practice.

### Who Am I? Elements in the construction of a self

In chapter two, we were introduced to the notion that we not only express ourselves, but that we *construct* our selves. By our choices and actions, by our habits of mind, by the stories we tell about ourselves, by the metaphors we use to identify ourselves and our heroes we construct ourselves into existence, laying act upon context upon relationship and so on. What we must see at this point in our text is that the philosophical examination of life--and especially the practical side of philosophical examination--involves exploring the links between the various elements in this self-construction process.

The first element in that process is our *context of relationships*, the “world” in which we live. Throughout this text we have spoken of human experience as being “in relationship” with a range of other entities. Our place in the field of these others is the vantage from which we look at our possibilities. While our context does not determine our possibilities (novelty happens), it constrains them. It shapes the development of our orientations: to the in-here or the out-there; to nature, self, others, spiritual reality. The beliefs, values, and sources of wisdom we think possible are given to us through our own context of relationships. Furthermore, what our areas of life

*are*--how we house ourselves, eat, communicate, work, and so on--are governed to a large extent by our context. Wisdom begins from where we are.

The next element to be considered is our *guiding values*, a term we have mentioned, but must develop more in this chapter. Just what are “guiding values” and how do they relate to philosophical values and beliefs and to our sources of wisdom? Let’s start by recalling the “shopping” story in chapter one. If you remember we probed the shopper’s reasons for buying food in a certain way. We asked questions like “Why do you buy the food you do?” “Do you buy processed meals or basic ingredients?” “Do you buy food at farmers markets, health-food shops, or super stores?” In doing so we began to discover the shoppers guiding values: the things that are important, and that “guide” our habit of life (in this case, our shopping habits). We buy food at a local market because we value community. We buy food at a super-store because the price is cheaper. Community, thrift. I call those values that guide our concrete actions of life “guiding values.” When we communicate what makes our day great, what makes us who we are, we are usually hinting at our guiding values. Guiding values are not the same as our philosophical beliefs (though they reflect these beliefs). While we thoroughly explored our philosophical beliefs so far, we have only--in the conclusions of the chapters in part three--suggested connections between philosophical beliefs and guiding values. Our belief in a virtue approach to ethics is one thing. Our personal value for character building is another (though they are connected). Guiding values both synthesize a number of beliefs and localize them into a single life-setting.

### **Now would be a good time to do exercise 15.1    My Guiding Values**

Another element present in our self-construction is our *sources* of wisdom, covered in chapter 3. We choose--with the influence of our contexts and such--sources of wisdom, those to whom we give permission to shape us, to inform us about the way things are and how to live. As mentioned above, we also choose our guiding values, our commitments about what is important



to us. Our values and our sources of wisdom mutually affect each other. On the one hand our sources of wisdom *inform* us about values. A trusted elder gives a warning: never speak ill of your spouse in public. We admire that person's marriage and so we listen. And a value is transmitted. Honor spouse. But our values also have an impact on our relationships with our sources. We choose to adopt a value for creativity. A book which used to be a source of wisdom for us has virtually no respect for creativity. Over time the book loses respect, and perhaps it is ultimately placed on the shelf of "old sources," which have served, but no longer serve, as living sources of wisdom. As we clarify our values, these values, in turn, are used to *evaluate* and refine our fund of sources of wisdom. People gain or lose respect over time. We gain or lose sources of wisdom as we e-value-ate them. And then, in turn, our sources re-inform our values. And so the cycle continues.

The final element to mention is that of *practices*. Practices are those concrete actions we do to live. We embody ourselves, we *are*, through our practices (by the way, mental/emotional actions are, of course, "actions"). Practices are modeled to us by our context and especially by our sources of wisdom. The important point here is to recognize that practices are not "neutral." Consciously or unconsciously, our practices are connected to our values and beliefs. Learning to notice these connections--and then to address them once they are noticed--is what this final part of the text is all about.

How are the connections noticed? Just to get you thinking, let me suggest that connections between beliefs/values and practices are often noticed:

- when you use your vision and imagination - Have you ever imagined what life might look like if you really believed *x*? Sometimes you think like that and *zowie, this* is what life might look like if I really believed/valued *x*. Sometimes when we meditate on our values, practical ideas simply suggest themselves.
- when you share with kindred spirits - So you begin to get interested in a value (say cooking for yourself). You attend attend a cooking class and learn all kinds of practices

related to this value. You adopt a value for spiritual things and learn practical insights from ancient spiritual classics. You discover mentors, traditions and so on.

- when you experience inconsistencies - Often you notice these in other people. What aggravates you, and why? Perhaps they say one thing and live another. Every once in a while you might notice this in yourself, especially when you are in the process of transition. Sometimes you discover situations when you *should* be aggravated but are not. Pay attention to where and why conflicts arise.
- when you catch the hints in the system - At times you settle into a system of values and practices that run along just fine--*except*. That “except” is a hint that something is wrong. And if you listen to that “except” carefully enough, it will lead you either to revise your values or to adopt new practices appropriate to the values.
- when that nice accident happens - There are those moments where you are relaxing with some sort of media in the background and there, in front of you, is a random suggestion for a new practice, one which might really fit your values. Or you may bump into a practice in the midst of your daily activities and realize, “Yes, this could fit my values perfectly.”

One of your journal exercises for the chapter on ethics was an experiment in self-examination, where you learned to pay attention to the things without and within your day. Philosophers have long thought this a valuable exercise and it is well suited for noticing the links between beliefs, values, and practices. I recommend it to you as an ongoing nightly practice.

The life of wisdom asks the “Who am I?” question. When we ask who we are, we explore the various elements of our constructed self: contexts, relationships, sources, guiding values. Of course, the question of ‘who am I’ and the deeper examination of the ways we view, experience, and respond to things can--and often *will*--bring us face to face with more “psychological” matters (parental background, past hurts and so on). These matters should be explored when necessary. But here, in this text, we are dealing with a strictly *philosophical* examination of life.

Consequently our aim in this next section is to see how context, values, sources, and practices are connected in light of the larger questions of philosophical belief.

What's Important and Why? Connecting philosophical beliefs and guiding values

As mentioned in chapter 2, if we are involved in a self-construction, then the examination of our lives is the inspection of this 'construction site'. How are things being put together? What materials are being used? What holds values to practices, and values and practices to beliefs?

Whether we reflect on them or not, our guiding values point us to the more philosophical questions about the nature of being, truth, right, beauty and so on. As we examine our guiding value about "getting ahead in life," we may discover that underneath this belief is a philosophical egoist ethic, a belief that it is natural or right to advance one's own interests. As we examine our values of family, we may discover that we hold a fundamental belief that humans are essentially social beings, reflecting the character of a social God. Consequently, when we take the step of examining our lives, we find ourselves exploring the links between our beliefs and our values. In turn, our long-held beliefs find a way of expressing themselves in our guiding values. For, whether we are conscious of it or not, we value what we believe.

Imagine, for the moment, that you are spending a year far-away, in India. You are offering help in a mid-sized village deep in the Darkness of the Indian heartland, a village unchanged by the centuries of modern progress. A few months into your visit you notice a frustration. Here you are, trying to help the people develop valuable technologies (farming, medicine, etc.), and it seems they could care less. They don't show the kind of initiative it takes to really accomplish something. They take numerous days off for local religious festivals. They just don't seem to have any interest in improving their life. But as you stay and learn to listen to them, you discover: it has to do with how they (and you) see "life." *You* understand life (as a 21st century Westerner) in terms of a single lifespan absolutely immersed in "this world," the development, production, and enjoyment of the things of our concrete earthly existence. *They* do not see "life"

that way. A “life” for them, passes from one to the next and the next lifetime. For them, our concrete earthly existence is much less important. For many of the villagers, those religious festivals *are* a matter of improving their life--securing a better position for the next go around. True, they do not value development efforts as you do. And they may not be able to articulate it if you asked them. But you can see it nonetheless. Their guiding values are deeply connected to their religious/philosophical beliefs.

Outside of traveling to a far-away land, how can we become aware of our values and their connection with beliefs? Some may not be able literally to travel. But we can read. Immersing ourselves in the stories of others who lived long ago or far away helps us to recognize our own distinctiveness.<sup>3</sup>

We can also learn to pay attention. And to ask “Why?”. You attend to your own “investments.” In what do you invest your time or your money? Around what matters do your relationships seem to gravitate? When you find yourself preoccupied in thought, what are you thinking about? What do you consider worthy of further education or advanced training? You can ask these kinds of questions about life in general. You can also ask questions like this about each day’s activities (into what did I invest myself in *today*?). And as you reflect on these questions you can catch the hints of your own philosophical beliefs, especially if you have already thought about them before (as you have accomplished through reading section three of this text). Pay attention to your communication: to others, to yourself. When you recount the story of your day, what do you mention? Why? What do you complain about? When do you speak with impassioned animation? Pay attention to your appreciation. What do you notice, along the course of a day, that you appreciate? What did you really enjoy? What are you thankful for? Who do

3. In addition to reading primary sources from far away in time and place, some secondary sources are of great assistance. From the philosophical perspective, Charles Taylor’s *Sources of the Self* does a marvelous job of recounting the history of how the connections between Western values and beliefs have changed through the centuries. See Charles Taylor, *The Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

you admire? Why? Pay attention to your feelings. Where do you feel threatened, what are you concerned about? Why?

As you begin to learn to examine the connections between guiding values and philosophical beliefs, you will discover that issues or questions related to different areas of philosophical discourse have their own particular sphere of influence in the concrete realities of human living, both with regard to human living in general and with regard to your own particular life. Your beliefs about power and social order (politics) will influence your values regarding relationships and community life. Your beliefs about language will affect your values about communication. Your beliefs about beauty will affect your values about clothing, your home, and also your sense of a “beautiful life.” Needless to say, your beliefs regarding “What is (Human) Life (About)?” will influence a wide range of guiding values, perhaps all of them (and this is why carefully thinking about that chapter is so important). And then lying behind these are the more subtle, but central, questions of reality, knowledge, and religion.

Examining the connections between values and beliefs can also help in times of trouble. Let’s say you are having troubles with relationships. It might help you to examine your beliefs and values regarding language and society. An examination here will reveal to you your hopes and expectations that may be threatened in the midst of your troubles. Similarly you might be struggling with anxiety or depression. While philosophical examination does not promise to heal all ills, you might discover some benefit from exploring your sense of the meaning of life to see what you think is important in life and how that may be affected by the circumstances that surround you.<sup>4</sup> So you see, each set of philosophical beliefs has its own connection with guiding values and its unique place in the ordering of human life. Learning how to see these connections between beliefs and values--and to evaluate and to refine them over time--is a precious art of wisdom.

4. For more on philosophical counseling, Google it.

## Where Does It Matter? Areas of life

Our values--influenced by our beliefs-- shape our life, area by area. For example, slowly but surely we begin to develop a value for “ecology” and we start to change a habit here and there. First, we decide it would be a good idea to recycle paper. This changes the way we do work. We plant a garden, which affects how we use our time. Then we create a little bucket to serve as a compost container so that food scraps can go into the garden, which changes the way we eat (not that the garden hasn’t already changed that). And it goes on and on. We value “financial security” and so we decide to buy a house rather than rent (who knows when you might be thrown out). We choose a career that will offer the greatest likelihood of long-term growth without undue risk. We sacrifice other interests to secure our standing in that position. We pick our investments very carefully. And so on. Values shape the way we live our lives, area by area practice by practice.

But our practices in each area of life do not express these values without their own kind of life-evaluation. If values evaluate our sources, than life itself (in this or that area) evaluates our values. Our habits of mind (the area of study and intellectual pursuit) considers the coherence of our value for truth-speaking in difficult situations. We put a value into practice (like the value of personal pleasure) and we see, through embodying this value, where its strong and weak points are--or how it coheres with other values we may have. The day-to-day details of life are the embodiment and the exploration of our values. We discover reality in practice (remember action-intuition?). Why do we do this the way we do? Because of our values, formed and shaped through context, sources, and personal integration.

And again, our values themselves, in the context of particular practices in particular areas of life, can be e-value-ated. This is part of the relationship between our guiding values and philosophical beliefs. It is one thing to know *what* is important to us (our guiding values). It is quite another to examine *why* it is important to us. Yes, it may be important to us because our experiences have shown us this value, or because a wise mentor told us so, but we can also examine the *reasons* we hold our values. Just why *do* we shop locally? Because we value

community? So why do we value community? Because we think society would fall apart without it? Because we are all spiritually “one” anyway? What about when community values and personal wants are in conflict? What do you choose then, and why? What do you really believe? This is what it means to “examine” our lives. And you can see here that this kind of examination has all kinds of relevance for the concrete details of our daily life. And as we mentioned above, each branch of philosophical inquiry has its own unique impact on different areas of life. While our life is all connected., there do seem to be distinct areas of life practices that can be explored, examined, and revised. The chapters in this section of the text are arranged to explore our practices of life area by area.

Ask yourself, “How have my values shaped the various areas of my life?” Think about them, one by one. Ask again, “How have the details of my life embodied or confirmed (or disconfirmed) what I consider to be important in life, area by area?”

What Am I Going to Do About It? Applying theory to practice

Beliefs, values, and practices, area by area. To see and navigate the subtle connections between these is the art of wisdom. The wise, finally, are those who put theory into practice, who *do something* about their values. The process of examining our lives, while exploring philosophical beliefs and guiding values, has its concrete dimension in the examination of practices.

We learned in chapter two that examining practices is learning about how we mediate ourselves, how we express and construct ourselves in the world. In chapter six we explored practice further, seeing how we fix our beliefs through our practices, how we put things into practice, and how we see reality in the midst of practice itself. In this chapter our aim is to pull it all together, to apply the skills of wisdom to our sources, beliefs, values, and practices. We learn to pay attention: to our context (how it is affecting us, what our possibilities express . . .), to our sources (to the kind of admiration we have for them, to the ways that we are shaped by them), to our own distinct areas of life. We learn to ask questions: of our context, of our choice of sources

(why do I spend time at home the way I do? what is this feeling of grief I have all the time? . . .), of our values and beliefs (do I really think this is *important*? why do I not believe religious people? . . .). We learn to practice reality in this or that area of life (I carefully fix my belief in regulated capitalism; I see reality through my practice of compassion at work). Over time (or perhaps suddenly), a life of wisdom is formed, a life which is lived well, artfully, gained through a synthesis of personal experience in the details of life with a careful reflection on the larger issues of life. Just how this is done--practically--is the subject of the remainder of this book.

But before we learn about the philosophical examination of our practice of life, area by area, there are two final skills to be introduced: resolving conflicts, and introducing and maintaining change.

### Conflict Resolution

The fact of the matter is, we face conflict constantly. Indeed, one way of viewing reality is to see it as a constant process of conflict and resolution. In chapter two, in the section about the life we examine, I spoke of the qualities of life arising with a sense of *force*. We learned that the character of the forces within which we live defines our sense of the movement of life into the present. At times life is tranquil; the movement of life is a gentle flow. Other times--or in other situations--life is conflict; the movement of life is a battle as one force appears at odds with another. Some forces in life--relationships, ideas, practices and such--can be introduced into life and they mutually interpenetrate one another without any tension. There is harmony, there is creativity, there is a kind of "fit" to it all. But at times--with other ideas, relationships, practices and the like--the introduction brings not "fit" but tension, abrasion, conflict. This new idea doesn't fit with my lifestyle. This guiding value doesn't fit our context as we have developed. I can't see how *this* practice can be maintained at the same time as *that* practice. And so we find that the examination of life (even the philosophical examination of life) requires a certain amount of conflict resolution.



## Types of Conflict

We face different types of conflicts as a part of the philosophical examination of life. Some of our conflicts are *inner-personal* conflicts. We have always believed in the goodness of humankind, and now we are faced with compelling evidence that people have a capacity for cruelty hitherto unimagined. What are we to do about this? We have recently developed a value for spontaneity, but our temperament just doesn't seem to allow us to let go. There are intellectual conflicts. For example, you might struggle resolving the question of the free-will of human beings, and yet your actions (for example, how you treat legal responsibility) reflect your approach to this question whether you decide or not. There are emotional/spiritual conflicts (I have said that I don't believe in God, but why do I just feel like there is Something nearby sometimes?). If we examine our lives, sooner or later we will encounter inner-personal conflicts, and sooner or later these inner-personal conflicts will touch us at the depths of our soul.

The philosophical examination of life also ushers us into *inter-personal* conflicts. Beliefs, values, practices and such are the identity-markers of circles of people. Our friends often share common interests and values. But what happens when we re-examine them? Tension. You used to share a common style of humor among your peers, but as you have explored your own beliefs about language, you have shifted what you think is important about language and communication and that old style of humor is no longer so funny. A few in your circle of peers notice this and wonder what's up with you. Should you raise your hand in class and voice your opinion? Will you get "judged" by the rest? Should you just say what you believe anyway? Settling one's beliefs and values is a way of defining one's enemies. Be prepared. Those who pursue wisdom must be ready for conflict, not only within, but with others.

A variety of factors affect how we perceive conflict, whether it be within or without. How intense or serious a matter is the issue? Is our confrontation with the conflict sudden or gradual? How long has this tension been present? How familiar are we with the elements related to this conflict? It is one thing to ease into a difficult philosophical question after years of study and

familiarity with similar questions. It is another to be confronted with a life-threatening philosophical question in the context of a sudden medical crisis.

Philosophical examination will also bring us into conflict with the wider social world. And here we return to a topic mentioned earlier in chapter two. Philosophy as a love of *wisdom*, as an examined life, explores areas of life that common culture often does not notice. It calls into question values that are expressed but perhaps uncriticized. Philosophy peers into the contexts, the sources and the models that form our life at any given moment; and it wonders. Consequently, philosophers are often in tension with common customs of the day. Thus Socrates was called *atopos*, “unclassifiable” by the culture of his time. Pierre Hadot writes of the philosopher,

For such a man, daily life, as it is organized and lived by other men, must necessarily appear abnormal, like a state of madness, unconsciousness, and ignorance of reality. And nonetheless he must live this life everyday, in this world in which he feels himself a stranger and in which others perceive him to be one as well. And it is precisely in this daily life that he must seek to attain that way of life which is utterly foreign to the everyday world.<sup>5</sup>

The philosopher will feel this tension with the surrounding culture. She will feel out of place, at times, like the “fool on the hill.” It may appear to the philosopher that the whole world is caught up in a crazy, meaningless, rat race.

But then, the world experiences tension with the philosopher as well. Socrates was forced to drink poison. Confucius’ attempts at social reform were initially rejected by his own country. I could go on. If you are going to re-evaluate the values upon which our culture is built--and especially if you are going to live the results of that re-evaluation--you are bound to appear different. Just expect it.

5. Pierre Hadot, “Forms of Life and Forms of Discourse,” in *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 58.

We are currently riding the wave of a massive cultural transformation. What is passing has been identified as “modernism.” The edge of this wave can be called “post-modern” (in all its various forms). What lies ahead is simply unknown. Critiques of modern forms of life abound. We criticize the meaningless repetition of the modern corporate employment system. We complain about the widening federalism of the modern nation-state. We laugh at the presumptions of the modern hope for scientific solutions to all human ills. We have already spoken of the postmodern crises in philosophical discussion. And so on. But our alternatives to modernism are, at present, unclear. Diverse alternatives appear side by side. On the one hand we see a “hyper-modern” form of life emerging: a life which is faster paced, enmeshed in higher developed technology, and is more “intelligent” than we could ever imagine. On the other hand there are signs of a longing for an almost pre-modern sense of loyalties, communities, and simplicity.<sup>6</sup> We live in interesting times.

It is a time for rethinking things. It is a season for the philosopher, for the lover of wisdom who is willing to take the risk of living differently. It is a time for those who will experiment with meaning, justice, truth, reality--not just on paper, but in life. It is a time for those who will apply the skills of wisdom to the values and forms of life we have inherited, and who, by paying attention, asking questions, and practicing reality, begin to forge alternative cultures (often viewed as “counter cultures”) for future generations. Are you ready for the conflicts?

And then there are other conflicts as well: conflicts with nature, conflicts with differing expressions of beauty, conflicts with spiritual forces, perhaps conflicts with the Ultimate Reality Itself. The conflicts we face in the philosophical examination of life come in many varieties.

6. On these themes, see Albert Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

## Types of Conflict Resolution

It is one thing to experience conflict. It is quite another to resolve it. Learning just when and how to resolve the various conflicts in our life is another art of wisdom. Here are a few common ways of conflict resolution:

(1) elimination/destruction - We resolve the conflict by eliminating the perceived force introducing the tension. In social conflicts this often happens through wars. In inner-personal conflict we simply “do away” with wrong belief or a habit that doesn’t fit.

(2) absorption/assimilation into a “category” - Sometimes we resolve a tension by seeing or stating that *this* (an apparent source of tension) is simply *that* (a category that has a clear and understood place in our system of thought or life). We experience tension with another person and we resolve it by declaring that the other person is a “geek,” explaining their conflicting behavior such that we don’t have to deal with it anymore.

(3) separation, distancing, avoidance - Another way we deal with conflict is through distance. We just decide, for any number of reasons, not to go there.

(4) denial - Distancing, taken to its farthest end, is denial. Either we can’t or won’t acknowledge the reality of the conflict itself. This is a common and natural (conscious or unconscious) means of resolving conflict.

(5) uncritical acceptance or adoption - On the contrary, we can resolve conflict by uncritically accepting the source of our conflict. Someone introduces a practice into our circle of peers which brings us a bit of tension. We resolve that tension by simply adopting the practice without thinking about the potential affects on our life. Ideas, sources of wisdom, people groups and more can all be adopted without consideration of the consequences. Again, this is a perfectly normal response to perceived conflict at times.

(6) reorientation of the whole - Sometimes our experience of conflict forces us to reconsider our comprehensive perspective of things. How can I accept both the bad and the good in human history? Perhaps profound experiences of both force us to re-work our whole world-view where both of these elements have a “place.”

(7) limited welcome, reconstruction of a part - Perhaps we do not feel the need to remodel the whole of things, but we decide that a few things may need “tweaking” here or there. We give permission for conflict to influence us a little. We ask the question, allow ourselves to feel a bit uneasy about things, but we still hold to our basic belief system. We welcome the “different” person, but we don’t open up some areas of our life just yet. We admit spiritual struggles, but don’t “convert” just yet. Wait and see. Or conversely, we do not distance ourselves from the other, but exercise a little force ourselves here or there in order to encourage the other to feel uneasy, to be influenced by us. This is not the elimination of the other, but the introduction of some force that might shape the other to be more vulnerable to us.

(8) mutual vulnerable reception and sharing - And then there are those times when we allow the other to influence us. This is not denial or “uncritical” acceptance: we know there will be tensions. But it is not distance either: we are ready to experience the other (for example, the emotional forces within, the social forces without). We resolve the conflict by diving into it: hoping to share and receive in the process.

(9) help from a third-party - Sometimes the tension is such that we cannot resolve it without help. Apart from counseling, the marriage is bound to end in a bitter divorce. These conflicting forces inside are about to drive me mad. And so we ask for help. Mediators are called in to negotiate peace between conflicting social forces.

(10) live with tension - Finally, some simply decide to “live with” the conflict. The living with our tensions can take many forms: from despair, to free abandonment, to a frank admission of the unresolvedness or unresolvability of this conflict or conflict in general.

Needless to say, there is a degree of overlap between some of these “ways” of resolution. One need not pursue only one approach. We can permit a little influence and receive help from a third party at the same time. But it is hard to open the doors wide open and distance ourselves all at the same time. And at times even the *threat* of conflict is itself a source of conflict for us. The point for us here is to learn to pay attention to conflict. If we don’t learn to acknowledge our conflicts we will not resolve them, we will simply react to them. This is not an examined life.

However we choose to respond to our conflicts, learning to see them for what they are and to consciously respond to them takes us one step closer to wisdom. To explore the ways of conflict-resolution, watching others and experimenting for ourselves, is to take an even further step.

### Introducing and Maintaining Change

The examined life must deal with conflicts. It must also deal with change. As we learned in chapter two, this life we examine is not a static thing. To live what we believe is to change things at times: things within ourselves, things in our surroundings, things in the world at large. We change our minds. We change our habits. We change our relationships. Weather changes. People change. Nations change. What does it require to “respond with all of our resources to the fruit of careful reflection on the larger issues of life”? Change.

So the practical side of philosophy not only involves facing conflict, it also involves introducing and maintaining change. And just as we develop wisdom through attention to the dynamics of conflict, so also we foster wisdom through attention to the dynamics of change. Think about change for a moment. What *is* change? We put our food over the stove and watch chemical change. We read the news and witness social change. We are converted and experience spiritual change. We grow older and discover personal change. We are constantly surrounded by change. But what is it?

In our chapter on “What Is (Real)?” we discovered that in recent decades Western philosophers have begun to question the “substance” approach to reality in which “the real” was construed to be the unchanging stuff of the world. Indeed, some have gone so far as to see reality essentially as change or *process* rather than “things.” Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), a British mathematician and philosopher, has made perhaps the boldest statement in this direction from a contemporary Western perspective. He argues that reality is not made up of material “things,” but rather of “actual entities,” or more specifically “actual occasions,” momentary configurations of events which then influence other, subsequent events. Reality is the constantly changing configuration of actual entities through interaction with other events/entities. Here are a

few excerpts from Whitehead's *Process and Reality*. See if you can get a feel for his comprehensive view of change.<sup>7</sup>

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It is fundamental to the metaphysical doctrine of the philosophy of organism that the notion of an actual entity as the unchanging subject of change be abandoned. An actual entity is at once the subject experiencing and the superject ["object"] of its experiences.

Locke [speaking of John Locke's philosophy of power] misses one essential doctrine, namely that the doctrine of internal relations makes it impossible to attribute 'change' to any actual entity. Every actual entity is what it is, and is with its definite status in the universe, determined by its internal relations to other actual entities.

'Change' is the description of the adventures of eternal objects in the evolving universe of actual things.

Newton's proof that motion does not apply to absolute place, which in its nature is immovable, also holds. Thus an actual entity never moves: it is where it is and what it is, In order to emphasize this characteristic by a phrase connecting the notion of 'actual entity' more closely with our ordinary habits of thought, I will also use the term 'actual occasion' in place of the term 'actual entity.' Thus the actual world is built up of actual occasions . . . . It is sufficient to say that a molecule in the sense of a moving body, with a history of local change, is not an actual occasion; it must therefore be some kind of nexus of actual occasions. In this sense it is an event, but not an actual occasion. The fundamental meaning of the notion of 'change' is 'the difference between actual occasions comprised in some determinate event.'

Thus the imaginations of men are dominated by the quiet extensive stone sith its

7. Excerpts taken from Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: The Free Press, 1929). For a more accessible "key" to Whitehead's work, see Donald N. Sherburne, ed., *A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

relationships of positions, and its quality of colour--relationships and qualities which occasionally change. . . . But the interpretation of the stone, on which the whole concept is based, has proved to be entirely mistaken. In the first place, from the seventeenth century onwards the notion of the simple inherence of the colour in the stone has had to be given up. This introduces the further difficulty that it is the colour which is extended and only inferentially the stone, since now we have had to separate the colour from the stone. Secondly, the molecular theory has robbed the stone of its continuity, of its unity and of its passiveness. . . . But this materialistic concept has proved to be as mistaken for the atom as it was for the stone. The atom is only explicable as a society with activities involving rhythms with their definite periods. . . . The simple notion of an enduring substance sustaining persistent qualities, either essentially or accidentally, expresses a useful abstract for many purposes of life. But whenever we try to use it as a fundamental statement of the nature of things, it proves mistaken. . . . There then remain two alternatives for philosophy: (i) a monistic universe with the illusion of change; and (ii) a pluralistic universe in which 'change' means the diversities among actual entities which belong to some society of a definite type.

We have certainly to make room in our philosophy for the two contrasted notions, one that every actual entity endures, and the other that every morning is a new fact with its measure of change. These various aspects can be summed up in the statement that *experience* involves a *becoming*, that *becoming* means that *something becomes*, and that *what becomes* involves *repetition* transformed into *novel immediacy*.

In this world there is nothing static. But there is reproduction: and hence permanence which is the result of order, and the cause of it. And yet there is always change; for time is cumulative as well as reproductive, and the cumulation of the many is not their reproduction as many.

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What is change? To Whitehead it is the fundamental character of reality. Actual entities (reality) are not best understood as unchanging “things.” Rather we best understand reality when we think of it as an ever mutually related dynamism of occasions or events. A stone should not be thought of as some stable “thing-out-there.” The color we attribute to the stone is really a complex of factors (light, air conditions, retinal acuity, brain functions . . .) that converge in our perception of this stone here and now. The “stone” we perceive is actually a temporary configuration of atomic particles, which in turn are made of configurations of subatomic particles, and so on. Consequently, perhaps we ought not to think of ourselves as human *beings*, but rather as human *becomings*. Whitehead himself simply speaks of human *experience*.<sup>8</sup>

What does all this have to do with our application of philosophy to the practice of life? Just this for now: we live what we believe. How you approach the changes in your own life will reflect (and reveal) your beliefs about the nature of change itself. Remember: philosophy is the art and science of learning to respond to the fruit of careful evaluation on the larger issues of life. What you think about change will matter as you take steps toward simple and practical changes in life.

So now we are brought to the question, “What do we actually *do* in terms of the specifics of our life?” How are the skills of wisdom applied, especially with regard to the concrete areas of life in which we live (our relationships, our jobs, our finances and such)?

There is no real absolute starting point for wisdom. As always, we simply begin where we are. We experiment with this or that area of life. We examine our values through conversation or reading. We spend time in meditation, remembering our past and coming to terms with the contexts we have inherited. We explore new sources of wisdom. There is no single place to begin. As we have seen, each informs the other. Nonetheless, when we look at change, and especially different forms of human change (learning theories, programs for addiction recovery,

8. Needless to say, there are a number of similarities between Whitehead’s thought and some forms of Buddhist philosophy.

health care treatment, counseling models and the like), there are common patterns discernable. By looking at common insights regarding the process, the objects, the means, and the consequences of change--and by considering the sources of our strength for change--we can begin to gain a vision of how in particular the fruit of our careful reflection can make its way into relevant embodiment in life practice.

### The Process

I summarize the process of change within a philosophically-examined life in terms of eight “steps,” though they need not be in this precise order.

#### 1. *Careful Attention* .

We have already learned much about paying attention. Now let us apply what we have learned to the practical work of introducing and maintaining change in our lives. Careful attention in this work involves personal reflection, documentation, and evaluation.

Personal reflection, as we have learned, is often about telling your own story. Only this time, let's make it a bit more specific. Try a few of these:

- **Personal Story** - The first step is simply to tell the story of your life. I recommend giving yourself a chance to tell your “long story” to someone. Often this pulls pieces together that may have not have been able to be pulled together. This is the time to reflect on the various contexts (relationships, models of life, events and so on) that have shaped you and the influence of which you may face today.
- **Health** - Go to your physician and get an examination. Review your own medical history with your physician or someone else competent. What do notice when you look at your life over the years? What patterns have been established? What might you have to face in the near future?
- **Psychological History** - For some it is important to do a psychological history.

Professional help may be valuable for this step for some people.

- Social life - Do a history of key relationships. Where did they come from? Why were they important to you? What kinds of patterns do you notice looking back at your history of relationships?
- Spirituality - Do a history of your spiritual life. Create a graph of the high points and low points. What does the story of your spiritual life say about the direction you have been heading?
- Strongholds - Flowing from the physical, the social, the psychological and the spiritual, you might be able to identify a history of key problems in your life. What patterns of life (usually complexes which involve a mix of the above) have developed over the years which have tended to defeat you? What patterns have the potential of defeating you in the future?
- Experience and Education - Here you might want to think of developing a “resumé of life.” On the one hand I want you to think like you are looking for a job. Record training, experience, classes and so on. But think much, much broader. Think not of job, but of *life, of calling, of vision.*
- Creativity - Another exercise that can be fun and revealing is to do a history of your creativity. Where and how have you expressed yourself creatively through life?

Can you see how personal reflection--simply recounting your own story--can become a specific means of carefully paying attention to the patterns of your life? Helpful indeed. Nevertheless, attention does not end here. Careful attention moves from reflection to documentation.

As you learned from your reading of Francis Bacon, sometimes paying attention is best done with a precise documentation of “instances.” This is true not only when probing the mysteries of Nature, but also when coming to grips with the realities of your own life. Thus, in

order to introduce and maintain change in your life, you will want to record some things--in detail. Different stuff for different people.

- Time - Some need to track their use of time: how much time for work, family, entertainment, devotions, home care, and so on. Usually, for life-transition assessment it is helpful to do this for a three-month segment
- Space - We are shaped by our geography, our “spaces” of life more than we think. Sometimes it is helpful just to take account of our spaces of life. Where do you spend your time each day? How much time in what spaces? What are your favorite spaces? Why?
- Money - Some need to track their use of money: how much comes in from various sources, how much goes out for food, insurance, gasoline and so on. Again, usually a few months of careful observation gives a sense of the pattern of our financial life.
- Diet and Exercise - Our health affects our life, so diet and exercise are areas that need tracking as well. What kinds of foods do you eat? How much? How much exercise do you get each day? What kind of exercise? How much sleep do you get? Tracking this for a few weeks gives a sense of the patterns of physical life.
- Energy - It is also helpful to record the dynamics of our own energy levels throughout a day/week/month/year. When are you generally “on top” of things? When are you at your worst? You can assess physical energy, psychological energy, social energy, or spiritual energy in this way. What kinds of rhythms do you generally have? What kinds of rhythms would facilitate a life that would give the greatest possible glory in the long haul?
- Values - It is also important to keep in mind your guiding values and to recall, once again, why it is they are your guiding values (reflecting on your philosophical values and beliefs). You have already accomplished this in Journal Assignment 15.1. So here you just review what you have written.

You cannot pay attention to your change until you know--with confidence--what is actually going on. So, in addition to personal reflection you need some rigorous documentation of this or that area of life. Later you will find yourself looking at these areas of documentation again when you are planning change. How will it affect my finances if, for example, I start buying organic foods? How will it affect my relationships if I develop space and time for personal solitude?

But first, after telling your story and documenting key areas of your life, you now evaluate what you see in your life right now. As you have learned, evaluation is part of careful attention. Again, you might want to evaluate your:

- Gifts and Skills - Take one of those professional skills evaluation tests or something like it and see what it says.
- Key relationships - Who are your key relationships now? Who are your mentors? Who do you mentor? Who are your close friends, your counselors, your regular acquaintances? Consider all of the different relationships you have. What kinds of obligations do you have to these relationships? What must be considered in these relationships as you think about a life-transition?
- Temperament - Take one of those temperament analysis tests. Ask, are you more extroverted or introverted? More feeling oriented or thinking oriented? The aim here is not to pigeon-hole you, but rather to discover tendencies that may affect your life-transition or provide wisdom for life-transition choices.
- Likes and Dislikes - Believe it or not, we don't often honestly and openly assess our likes and dislikes. Consequently, they affect us subconsciously. So let's be open. What is really the pits to you? What do you love about life? Why?
- Possibilities - At the end of the evaluation stage, it is important to consider your life as a universe of possibilities (by now you are able to pay attention to the reality of your possibilities, to examine just how realistic each possibility in your life is). What are the

models of life you have seen? What new possibilities may lie before you? Think of home, career, spiritual life, creativity, anything. Become conscious of all of the different directions available to you, for good or for ill. Now spend some time reflecting on the character of the culture(s) that surround(s) you (another way of looking at possibilities). Where do you see yourself in relationship with your surroundings? Where is the “fit”? Where are the tensions? Now, venture a few hypotheses. Given your history, values, relationships and such, and given what you have seen in your surrounding environment, what kinds of things could you expect to see in the future? What kinds of things would you *like* to see in the future?

- Vision - Finally, what is your vision? Who are your heroes? What do you think about in your wildest dreams? If you could be or do anything in the world, what would you be/do?

Another exercise that can be helpful is what is called a “360 evaluation.” This is where you get mentors (over you), those you mentor (under you) and peers (at your sides) to write up evaluations of your life. What do these people see your strengths and weakness to be? Where do they see you going? And so on.

I have found that there is sometimes the need to supplement a few skills along the way here. After your evaluation you may discover that there are “gaps” in your ability to cleanly navigate a life-transition. I am not speaking about career development or training. Rather I am speaking about elements missing in your life-experience that might hinder you from making a quality life-transition. For example, reading this text may be your first exposure to some of the most important questions in life and, rather than clarifying your values, this text has shaken them up. The “dis-satisfaction” level is high on a few issues and your living doubt is ever-present. You may need to take some time to go back over some of the questions with greater leisure and devote yourself for a while to settling a few things before you make any major changes. You decide it is worth the effort to figure out what life is about (at least a little more than previously),

as a preliminary step of life-transition. I am not talking about a Ph.D. here. What I am talking about is just getting to a point where an quality life-choice can be made. You may simply need to “supplement” your values education a little before you can move on in life-transition.

## 2. *Appropriate Motivation* .

Introducing and maintaining change in one’s life-- change that may bring harmony with new values but tensions with the world around you--requires motivation. You have got to be able to see this thing through. You will need a clear aim, a concrete decision, and, at times, positive aggression. I think of this motivation interms of developing a full *intention*. The fruit of asking all the questions about a form of life--both those which are more nebulous and those which are very practical--is a decision, a choice, a disposition to move in a certain direction. When you choose to live according to your values, you *intend* a course of life: to bring values, sources and areas of life together into a single expression, to practice this reality. A couple of features are involved in this process of developing intention or motivation:

- Dream - You have dreamed a bit during the previous stages, but now your dreams must take a particular direction. Imagine what life would be like in this new choice. Imagine it in every way. How would it affect your family? Where would you be living? How would you feel about this and that? What about time? Try to project the impact of your life transition into every key area of life, and “test it out.” You can do this dreaming simply in the mind. You can also begin to walk it out a bit at a time, noting the impact on different elements of your life. You could call this kind of work a personal “environmental impact” assessment of a projected life transition. Or you can just call it dreaming.
- Write - I recommend writing down your directions for life. Monastic communities from East and West call this kind of document a “Rule of Life.” Others speak of “resolutions.” No matter the title. What is important is that you put down--for the sake of inspiration, accountability, and support--where you decide to go, given your sense of direction. You

don't need to make this a dissertation. But you don't want to leave out those matters which are important, whether details of practicality or spiritual wisdom.

Motivation also involves you recalling to yourself just *why* you are changing the way you live. Remind yourself what you hope to get out of it. Remind yourself of the difficulties you expect to encounter along the way and how you will find encouragement to keep going in the midst of them. Plan a few rewards along the way. Recovering alcoholics give themselves tokens after certain periods of sobriety. What might you need to help you to the finish line?

### 3. *Conscious Integration* -

An examined life, philosophically speaking, is not simply change for change sake. It is about attempting to respond with all of our resources--relationships, thoughts, depths and the like--to the fruit of careful evaluation on the larger issues of life. Consequently, the introduction and maintenance of change in a *philosophically examined* life involves a conscious integration of values, sources, beliefs, and practices. We have already discussed the links between these elements above and will do so more throughout the rest of the book. What we need to see here is that this kind of conscious integration demands that we ask questions about our life. We must recognize that finding a way of life is different than "career planning." True, we may equip ourselves with much of the trappings of career planning, but first of all, a life is not a career. A *life* includes networks of relationships, habits of pursuing harmony with the Ultimate, a world view that may be contrary to your surrounding culture, and your own sense of identity. Furthermore, the finding of a life is often a matter of listening to deep things, larger issues. We are not merely paying attention to what is profitable, or what may be the most rational decision. It involves attention to head, heart, and hand at the deepest levels of our experience. Ultimately you may find that your life-decisions have nothing directly connected to a career choice or a move to a different location. What you may find is that "no matter what I do for a "career" I always need to be involved in *X*" At this point we focus on the important questions of life. In large, life-transition, integrations I recommend the following:



- A Personal Retreat - Perhaps we can learn here from Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Christian Order known as the Jesuits. Ignatius wrote a little book called the *Spiritual Exercises*. This book was designed, among other purposes, to be a practical guide for people helping others who might be considering joining the Jesuits. It was divided into four “weeks,” as the assumption was that people considering membership would take a month alone to review things before deciding. This month alone was called a “retreat.” With a bit of help from a spiritual director, the person on retreat would spend hours reflecting on their past, their present, and their possible futures. They would spend time reading sacred scripture, soaking in the values that were most dear to them. They would become sad for the ways that they have failed to live life truly. They would become attracted-again to the model of the life of their chief religious model, Jesus. They would see themselves as living out a Jesus-life in their own particulars. They would consider the possibilities of their lives, exploring what might be the best ways of expressing their life here and now. They would consider the costs of living such a life in the midst of the realities of their surroundings. Finally they see the joy of it all, finding God in all things.

I think it might be a real good idea for human beings periodically to spend some dedicated time alone (I mean some *real time* alone, really alone), allowing ourselves to soak in our most important values, to grieve what needs to be grieved in our lives, to get excited about what we need to get excited about and to make our commitments in the light of such a time of reflection. It couldn't hurt! Do you know of a time or a place to go and spend some time alone dedicated to reviewing and re-imagining your life?

- Exploring Options - Frankly it is hard to make choices without exploring the options in a practical way. How much would it most likely cost if you lived here as opposed to there? What would be the foreseeable impact upon the children if you worked at home rather than at another job over there? Would my guiding values be expressed better in *this* kind of a life or in *that* kind of life? This is the time to compare projection with assessment, as

you see whether what might be the case squares with what you recorded in the first stage of life-transition. Such comparisons do not necessarily determine one's choices . You will need to be aware not only of the results of such explorations, but, perhaps even more important, your reactions to the results of these explorations--and why you reacted as you did.

#### *4. Addressing Multiple Factors - .*

Human lives are very complex things. Forces from all directions converge and reinforce habits of thinking and living that are hard to change apart from attending to a variety of factors at once. Think of the simple decision to “take better care of myself.” So easy to say. Not so easy, sometimes, to live. Perhaps you grew up in a home where immediate gratification was a primary value. Food, drugs, comforts and conveniences were never set aside. The consequences, however, of immediate gratification to self-care were ignored. Perhaps your childhood peers ridiculed you about your body. Perhaps, deep inside, you did not consider yourself *worth* better care. Perhaps your current circle of friends doesn't take very good care of themselves. In order to introduce and maintain a change appropriate to your new value of “taking better care of myself” (perhaps as a consequence of a new philosophical belief about the essential worth of human beings), you may have to address your natural impulses, your gut beliefs about yourself, your relationships and more. Change is a complex thing. Be prepared to face that complexity.

#### *5. Employing Community Involvement - .*

I think it helps when we have friends to help us change. Our friends know our blind spots. They know where we tend to lie to ourselves. They have heard us repeat again and again the things that we say we *must* do. Community can serve both to check our direction for problems and to provide insight and direction we may not have noticed. Including community in your process of change provides you with support, encouragement, accountability, sources of

wisdom, and a network of common life wherein obligation and grace are freely given and received.

#### *6. Identifying Realistic Progress - .*

Another step toward maintaining practical life-change is the step of identifying realistic progress. What I mean is that we have reachable and measurable goals along the way. And that they be *your* goals and your measures. You can't just decide to compete in a triathlon and sign up for the next meet nearby. You must first train. You must learn your own strengths and weaknesses on each event. You must try a 5K run or a 50 mile bike ride first. Likewise, if I decide to incorporate the classic virtues of Aristotle or Confucius into my life, I won't be able simply to "do it" after the decision. It will take training: particular exercises and tests that are measurable, personal goals that are reachable, appropriate and consistent development of the things needed for *you* to reach your goals. Some people are morning people. They run (or meditate, or study . . .) best in the morning. Others are evening people. You will have to introduce change in a manner that is appropriate to your situation: your relationships, schedule, body and emotional rhythms and so on. Becoming wise is not about achieving some stereotype of knowledge and lifestyle. It is about becoming truly yourself.

#### *7. Experimentation and Revision - .*

And this will require some experimentation. No, some failure, revision, experimentation, and then some more failure, revision and more experimentation. It is important to give yourself the freedom to experiment with your life. Most of us don't get it right the first time. So we pay attention, ask questions, and put our realities into practice through a process of experimentation and revision. If there is need of re-vision, you revise. Again, it is helpful to do this revision in writing and in communication with friends. No choice of life is perfect in every respect. Over time you learn when to hold strictly to the rule and when to bend the rules. Order and

spontaneity. The right blend for the right time for the right person. This is only learned if we give ourselves the freedom to explore, to experiment, and to revise.

#### 8. *Maintenance* - .

And finally, when we have found something that works for us, we maintain. Sometimes the art of *making* decisions is not so difficult as that of *keeping* decisions. The latter requires systems of support, of encouragement, of accountability, of variety, and of revision and re-habitation. Of course, there is at times the need for a “dehabitation” to clear the way for a new “rehabitation”. At times the former is may be more difficult than the latter. But in time and with experimentation, we discover a life that “fits” our sense of what life is really about. When you have found it, guard it, at all costs.

A Note of Warning - This whole process has been presented in a very linear, structured fashion. It can be helpful at times to proceed through this whole thing just as structured as it is written. But life does not always allow for such structure, and perhaps our style of life would scream against such structure. So be it. But be aware: what you miss, what you skip from the process, can come back to bite you later on. How you navigate through life-transition reveals what you might like to avoid. It indicates something about how you might navigate through life.

#### Means, Aims, and Strength

Having looked at the overall process of life-change, we must now explore the *means*, the *aims* and the *strength* of our change. First, what are we directing our efforts *toward* when we introduce or maintain change? What is the particular *way* we intend on facilitating change? And why? It appears that the skills and actions of philosophical examination can be directed to any matter of context, pressure, or trigger/seed. Furthermore, the skill or actions themselves can function as a trigger or seed of change. For example, after some reflection on ethical and personal questions, and after documenting your own crazy life at work, you decide to follow some of the wisdom of the East and make a seious commitment to “right livelihood.” You

intentionally adjust the means of your employment (you change careers, move positions within the company, or otherwise reshuffle your employment so as that your work is lived more in keeping with your ethical views or your values regarding what kinds of things you want to be doing in life). Here the “means” of your change, the object you focus on in order to promote the kinds of changes desired, is the conditions of your particular employment. The “aim” of your actions is a general livelihood more in keeping with your values.

Or you might, after thinking about the value of human life, decide that you want to improve your health in general (again, “taking better of myself”). So you decide to start flossing your teeth, intentionally initiating a practice of life which is aimed at increased health in general. The *aim* of your change actions is health. But the *means* of your actions in this case is flossing your teeth. You might decide to keep a budget, intentionally paying attention to your expenses and income in order to evaluate and perhaps re-order your finances more in keeping with your values. The budget is the means of your action, the values you want to embody are the aims. You decide to begin a practice of regular meditation in order to pay better attention to your thoughts and just see what is going on within. The means of your change is the practice of meditation. The aim is to open yourself up to see what you may find.

The means and aims of change may also move beyond yourself. After reflecting on your social and political values, you may decide that you want to be more politically active, perhaps even a bit radical. You feel like the course of history is moving in a direction not at all in keeping with your values, and you have decided that you have a part to play in this movement of social and political forces. Your own socio-political involvement is the object of your actions. Social change is the aim. Or you decide to pursue more education in biology. With more experience in biology you would be better able to explore your own beliefs regarding your relationship with the ecosphere. In this case an object of change is undertaken (education) not with the aim of embodying your values, but in order to discover them.

And then there is the *strength* of change, and of the factors involved in change. Sometimes there are strong factors surrounding a situation that are realistically insurmountable.

Some things will not be changed. Other things can be changed easily, given the strength of your own influence. The strength of intention or change-initiation is shaped by a number of factors, including: intensity (how direct, sharp, or intense is your action?), duration (how long do you persevere with the means?), depth (at what level of depth in your/other's experience is the means directed?), and breadth (what or how many factors are addressed simultaneously by these means). We have discussed motivation above. What will give you the strength to keep at the means of change? what encourages you to be determined to live your values?

And then, there are those times when we run out of strength. Where do we go for help? I have known more than one person who got a ways into the process of significant change and then things broke down. It was not just a matter of needing to "fix" this or that. They knew what they needed to do. They wanted to do it. But, for one reason or another, they *couldn't*. They hit the wall. We can have the best intentions, the best motives and step forward and realize that underneath (even unconsciously) we have patterns, motives, and intentions that keep us from realizing our best. At times hitting the wall alerts us to issues that we had not noticed and now can face in order to realize what we had intended. Other times hitting the wall unravels all we had thought about life and we are forced to start over again. In the religions of East and West there is a distinction between "self-power" and "other power," between "works" and "grace." At times we appear to do work just fine under self-power. Sometimes, however, we find ourselves needing to turn to an Other for grace.

### The Consequences

Beginning a life of wisdom requires facing some conflicts here and there. It also requires introducing and maintaining a bit of change. If you will live a life of wisdom, you *will* pay careful attention to things. You *will* address multiple factors simultaneously, rather than presuming that all will be solved by a simplistic answer. You *will* experiment and revise. It is simply the way of wisdom. And, strangely enough, the consequences of change can never be predicted. As Yoda put it, "The future, hard to read, the future is." Human experience is subject

to a wide range of contexts, pressures, and triggers. Hence, one may only guess at the consequences of any given intention. The seeds planted in one place and time may bear fruit in very unexpected ways. You must be prepared for change, but you can never know exactly what will happen.

#### Conclusion -

In this chapter you have gained a sense of what beginning a life of wisdom might look like. You have seen how life (and a life of wisdom) is lived. You have become aware again of the tensions that arise when one chooses a philosophical life in the context of an un-philosophical culture. And you have begun to see what the intentional making of philosophy real in practice might look like in a comprehensive way, through applying the skills of philosophy to different areas and practices of life. In the chapters ahead we will now explore, one-by-one, individual areas of life, considering what it might look like to live a life of wisdom today.

## **Journal Assignment 15.1      My Guiding Values**

In this assignment you are going to explore your *guiding values*, those things, ideas, states of affairs, hopes, and such that are important to you, and which “guide” your life. As with shopping, we choose what we do because we have certain basic “values” that guide our decisions. We will look at different areas of life (like shopping and finances) in the chapters ahead. Here we just want to look more carefully at the values which shape our habits of life: what they are, where they came from, and how they relate to more philosophical values and beliefs

### **1. Returning to My Preliminary Statement**

Start this exercise by returning to **Journal Assignment 2.1 A Preliminary Statement of My Philosophy**. Recall the story of your life you told. Are there any changes you would make in that story now? Now look at your life-story again more closely. When you tell your story to someone (as you did in this assignment), just *what* do you talk about? Do you tell a “rags to riches” story? Do you talk about an “inner journey”? Do you tell a “love story”? What are the primary themes in your story? How would you classify this story if it were a movie? Why do you think your story is told in this way? What do the elements included (and not included) in your story tell you about what are your guiding values, about what is important to you?

Now look again at the images, metaphors, and adjectives you used in that assignment to describe yourself (like: husband, student, “fool on the hill,” short, bald, inquisitive, and so on). Once again, make any changes needed. Then, ask, as above, why you used *these* kinds of images and not others. What do these images and metaphors tell you about what is important to you, about what are your guiding values in life.



Consider again your models and mentors. Who do you admire in life and why? Who and what are your sources of wisdom? What do these tell you about what is important to you, about what values guide your life?

## 2. The Sound Bytes of My Life

Now that you have re-examined your stories, images, and models, it is time to identify the primary “sound bytes” of your life. You know what I mean. Everything these days is reduced to little sounds bytes that summarize it all in one small phrase. So what I want you to do is to read through the *long* list of sound bytes below, thinking about each one. Then I want you to pick the *five* phrases that you resonate with the most, the phrases that most express who you are, or the phrases that you would put on your refrigerator to guide your life. At times you might want to “fill in a blank” in order to complete a phrase.

Whatever	Nothing really matters	Certain foundations
I just don't know	Go with the flow	A good citizen
Be all that you can be	Spontaneity	Vision quest
Family values	Latest and greatest (biggest and best)	Centered in _____
Don't get hurt	A beautiful life	Prove it
Get ahead in life	In harmony with _____	Intimate relationship
Order	Safety first	Who cares
Go for it	Just get me out of here	It's a fight
Experience the present	Path to enlightenment	Financial security
Take care of _____	Climb to the top of the ladder	Serving God
It isn't always what it seems	Bringing honor to _____ (not dishonoring _____ )	
Green	Change	Get stuff done
Add your own _____		

### **3. Actions and Areas of Life**

Like I said, we will get into this in the chapters ahead, but it might be helpful to take a glance at the way you do things practically. Why do you do the things you do? Why do you do *these* things and not others? Why do you do them the *way* that you do? Again, what does this tell you about your guiding values?

### **4. Summary of Guiding Values**

Can you put it all together? What have you learned from the exercises above about your guiding values, about who you consider yourself to be and about what is most important to you in life?

### **5. Guiding Values and Philosophical Beliefs**

Now ask yourself “why.” “Why are these my values?” Now don’t just tell me about your *sources* (my parents taught me this value . . . , my experience has shown me...). I want to hear you give me some of the *reasons* for your guiding values. I want you to think about what philosophical beliefs lie behind your values (again think about the shopping examples in chapter one).