

# Preface

Ever since I realized the limited span of my own self, I have contemplated what life is about. In an attempt to answer this question, I took up science as a career, as I believe the scientific method is the most reliable way to acquire knowledge. While doing science, I never hesitated to pause for a moment to ponder how my own work, and that of the entire scientific community, add to the understanding of ourselves and the universe.

Philosophy started as a discipline to acquire knowledge and wisdom, and science is an offshoot of philosophy when the subject matter turns to natural phenomena. Ever since the invention of the scientific method, many philosophical issues were solved or rendered irrelevant. But powerful as it is, science has its limitations in the pursuit of global knowledge and wisdom. Where science hits a limit, philosophy steps in. Compared to science, philosophy is intuitive, subjective, and to hardcore scientists, not very reliable. But without it, life is incomplete and unfulfilling, at least to some people including myself.

Some years ago, C. P. Snow pointed out the gap between our two cultures — the sciences and the humanities. I believe the gap cannot be filled by either a purely scientific approach or a purely philosophical approach. A viewpoint that encompasses both is necessary. By standing on the vantage point of “self”, defined in this book as a natural system that auto-perpetuates, I hope I have found a common ground between our two cultures. My approach is rigorously scientific, yet in the end it is also philosophical.

Once I retired from a career in scientific research, writing a book on what life is about became my passion. This is not because I have an answer, but because I believe I have enough information to layout an honest perspective of life that includes what is known, what likely will be known, and perhaps what can never be known. Readers who are college graduates with a background in biology and some knowledge in chemistry and a propensity for philosophical issues will most benefit from this book, which is written in a language understandable to both experts and outsiders. Professional jargon, when used, is explained or elaborated in the endnotes, appendices, and glossary.

I would like to thank my three children, Prof. Jennifer Lim-Dunham, M.D., Prof. Wendell Alan Lim, Ph. D., and Caroline Lim Starbird, J.D., for inspiration and encouragement; and my beloved wife of fifty-five years, Prof. Victoria Sy Lim, M.D., for unwavering support and dedication to my lifework and career, frequently at the expense of her own. Their involvement is indispensable in the making of this book.

Lastly, I hope my book will be judged not by how well it sells, but by whether it will be remembered a hundred years hence.

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