

# THE BEST THINGS IN LIFE

A CONTEMPORARY SOCRATES  
LOOKS AT POWER, PLEASURE,  
TRUTH & THE GOOD LIFE



PETER  
KREEFT

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For Jim Sire,  
Socrates to my Socrates

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## Preface

What is the old Greek philosopher Socrates doing on the campus of Desperate State University? you may ask. And how did he get there? And is this the real Socrates or only an imitation?

The answer to the first question is clear: Socrates is doing at Desperate State just what he did in Athens: being Socratic. Even death did not change Socrates; his philosophizing was indeed, as he hoped, "a rehearsal for dying." How many of us have such job security even after death? In his *Apology* Socrates expressed his hope that he would be allowed to go on cross-examining people even after death. Here he gets his wish.

As to the second question, how he got here, I have no idea. I awoke one morning with my head full of Socrates and I cannot shake him loose from any place I go, especially my place of work. You see, I am a college philosophy teacher. Socrates would probably call me an intellectual prostitute, a Sophist, since I get paid for it. Imagine selling wisdom for a fee!

Finally, as to the third question, is this the real Socrates or only an imitation? Only you, the reader, can judge that.

However he got here, here he is, the wonderful troublemaker, the gadfly of Athens who makes difficulties everywhere, especially where life is too easy for thought or thought too easy for honesty. Here he is, the philosopher without a system, the question-wielding swordsman of the mind, the one infected by the oracle's puzzle, spreading his good infection, questioning, under the conviction that "the unexamined life is not worth living."

Peter Kreeft

Boston College

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## Foreword

by Anytus of Athens

I don't know why they let me write this foreword, because I'm going to tell you why *not* to read this book. This is a warning. If you know what's good for your society, you will throw this book into the fire and bomb the publishing plant.

I know this fellow Socrates. I have had dealings with him before. I was one of the three who tried to save our beloved Athens by getting Socrates executed. But it was too late.

This man may seem to you a harmless crank, even a wise man, perhaps; but he can tear down a whole society, I assure you. He did it to ours. He taught us to question our old gods, the foundation of our state. He will pull down yours, too, if you listen to him. This very book dethrones the two great gods of your society, Power and Pleasure, and puts in their place only a vague, invisible deity Socrates will not even name.

I remember he used to speak of this "unknown god" in Athens. We worshiped many gods, but not Socrates. We named many gods, but not Socrates. We accepted our traditions unquestioningly, but not Socrates. He even once sculpted a pedestal without a statue and cut the inscription "to the unknown god." (He was a stone-cutter.) It was the very inscription that

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rabble-rouser Paul of Tarsus referred to when he preached to the philosophers on Mars Hill, where the statues of the gods stood.

You may have read that story in your Scriptures—Acts 17. Paul connected his God and Socrates' god this way: he said, "the god you worship in ignorance I now declare to you." It was the same God, the destroyer of secular utopias—yours as well as ours. Paul's was the final step in tearing down our state—the Christian infection—but Socrates prepared the downfall with his first step. Socrates questioned the old gods; Paul introduced the new God. If Socrates had not dethroned the old, there would have been no searching, no room for the new. I warn you, he will do the same thing to you.

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I.  
SOCRATES  
AND PETER PRAGMA

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# 1 On Education and E.T.

*Socrates:* Excuse me for bothering you, but what are you doing?

*Peter Pragma:* What kind of silly question is that? I'm reading a book. Or was, until you interrupted me. Can't you see that?

*Socrates:* Alas, I often fail to see what others see, and see things others cannot see.

*Peter:* I don't get it.

*Socrates:* I saw you holding the book, yes, but I did not see you reading it.

*Peter:* What in the world are you talking about?

*Socrates:* You are holding the book in your hands, aren't you?

*Peter:* Of course.

*Socrates:* And I can see your hands.

*Peter:* So?

*Socrates:* But do you read the book with your hands?

*Peter:* Of course not.

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*Socrates:* With what, then?

*Peter:* With my eyes, of course.

*Socrates:* Oh, I don't think so.

*Peter:* I think you're crazy.

*Socrates:* Perhaps, but I speak the truth, and I think I can show you that. Tell me, can a corpse read?

*Peter:* No...

*Socrates:* But a corpse can have eyes, can't it?

*Peter:* Yes.

*Socrates:* Then it is not just the eyes that read.

*Peter:* Oh. The mind then. Are you satisfied now?

*Socrates:* No.

*Peter:* Somehow I thought you'd say that.

*Socrates:* I cannot see your mind, can I?

*Peter:* No.

*Socrates:* Then I cannot see you reading.

*Peter:* I guess you can't. But what a strange thing to say!

*Socrates:* Strange but true. Truth is often stranger than fiction, you know. Which do you prefer?

*Peter:* You know, you're stranger than fiction too, little man.

*Socrates:* That's because I'm true too.

*Peter:* Who are you, anyway?

*Socrates:* I am Socrates.

*Peter:* Sure you are. And I'm E.T.

*Socrates:* I'm pleased to meet you, E.T.

*Peter:* My name is Peter Pragma.

*Socrates:* Do you have two names?

*Peter:* What do you mean?

*Socrates:* You said your name was E.T.

*Peter:* And you said your name was Socrates.

*Socrates:* Because it is. I have this strange habit of saying what is.

*Peter:* What do you want from me?

*Socrates:* Would you let me pursue my silly question just a

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moment longer?

*Peter:* I thought you got your answer.

*Socrates:* Not to my real question. You see, when I asked you what you were doing, I really meant, *Why* are you doing it?

*Peter:* I'm studying for my exam tomorrow.

*Socrates:* And why are you doing *that*?

*Peter:* You know, you sound like a little child.

*Socrates:* Thank you.

*Peter:* I didn't mean it as a compliment.

*Socrates:* I don't care. Only answer the question, please.

*Peter:* I'm studying to pass my course, of course.

*Socrates:* And why do you want to do that?

*Peter:* Another silly question! Don't you ever grow up?

*Socrates:* Let me tell you a secret, Peter: there *are* no grown-ups. But you still haven't answered my "silly question."

*Peter:* To get a degree, of course.

*Socrates:* You mean all the time and effort and money you put into your education here at Desperate State is to purchase that little piece of paper?

*Peter:* That's the way it is.

*Socrates:* I think you may be able to guess what my next question is going to be.

*Peter:* I'm catching on. I think it's an infection.

*Socrates:* What is the next question, then?

*Peter:* You're going to ask me why I want a degree.

*Socrates:* And you're going to answer.

*Peter:* But it's another silly question. Everyone knows what a degree is for.

*Socrates:* But I am not "everyone." So would you please tell me?

*Peter:* A college degree is the entrance ticket to a good job. Do you know how difficult the job market is today? Where have you been for the last few years?

*Socrates:* You wouldn't believe me if I told you. But we must ask just one more question, or rather two: What is "a good job"

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and why do you want one?

*Peter:* Money, of course. That's the answer to both questions. To all questions, maybe.

*Socrates:* I see. And what do you want to do with all the money you make?

*Peter:* You said your last two questions were your last.

*Socrates:* If you want to go away, I cannot keep you here. But if we pursue our explorations one little step further, we may discover something new.

*Peter:* What do you think you'll find? A new world?

*Socrates:* Quite possibly. A new world of thought. Will you come with me? Shall we trudge ahead through the swamps of our uncertainties? Or shall we sit comfortably at home in our little cave?

*Peter:* Why should I torture myself with all these silly questions from a strange little man? I'm supposed to be studying for my exam.

*Socrates:* Because it would be profitable for you. The unexamined life is not worth living, you know.

*Peter:* I heard that somewhere . . . Good grief! That's one of the quotations that might be on my exam tomorrow. Who said that, anyway?

*Socrates:* I did. Didn't you hear me?

*Peter:* No, I mean who said it originally?

*Socrates:* It was I, I assure you. Now shall we continue our journey?

*Peter:* What are you getting at, anyway, Socrates?

*Socrates:* No, Peter, the question is what *you* are getting at. That is the topic we were exploring. Now shall we continue to make your life a little less unexamined and a little more worth living?

*Peter:* All right. For a little while, anyway.

*Socrates:* Then you will answer my last question?

*Peter:* I forgot what it was.

*Socrates:* What do you need money for?

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*Peter:* Everything! Everything I want costs money.

*Socrates:* For instance?

*Peter:* Do you know how much it costs to raise a family nowadays?

*Socrates:* And what would you say is the largest expense in raising a family nowadays?

*Peter:* Probably sending the kids to college.

*Socrates:* I see. Let's review what you have said. You are reading this book to study for your exam, so that you can pass it and your course, to graduate and get a degree, to get a good job, to make a lot of money, to raise a family and send your children to college.

*Peter:* Right.

*Socrates:* And why will they go to college?

*Peter:* Same reason I'm here. To get good jobs, of course.

*Socrates:* So they can send their children to college?

*Peter:* Yes.

*Socrates:* Have you ever heard the expression "arguing in a circle"?

*Peter:* No, I never took logic.

*Socrates:* Really? I would never have guessed it.

*Peter:* You're teasing me.

*Socrates:* Really?

*Peter:* I'm a practical man. I don't care about logic, just life.

*Socrates:* Then perhaps we should call what you are doing "living in a circle." Have you ever asked yourself a terrifying, threatening question? What is the whole circle there for?

*Peter:* Hmmm . . . nobody ever bothered me with that question before.

*Socrates:* I know. That is why I was sent to you.

*Peter:* Well, sending kids to college isn't the only thing I'm working for. I'm working for my own good too. That's not a circle, is it?

*Socrates:* We don't know until we look, do we? Tell me, what

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is "your own good"?

*Peter:* What do you mean?

*Socrates:* What benefit to yourself do you hope the money from a well-paying job will bring you?

*Peter:* All sorts of things. The good life. Fun and games. Leisure.

*Socrates:* I see. And you are now giving up fun and games for some serious studying so that you can pass your exams and your courses and get your degree.

*Peter:* Right. It's called "delayed gratification." I could be watching the football game right now, or playing poker. But I'm putting my time in the bank. It's an investment for the future. You see, when I'm set up in a good job, I'll be able to call my own shots.

*Socrates:* You mean you will then have leisure and be able to watch football games or play poker whenever you wish.

*Peter:* Right.

*Socrates:* Why don't you just do those things right now?

*Peter:* What?

*Socrates:* Why do you work instead of play if all you want to do is play? You're working now so that years from now you can have enough money to afford leisure to play. But you can play now. So why take the long, hard road if you're already home? It seems to be another circle back to where you started from, where you are now.

*Peter:* Are you telling me I should just drop out of school and goof off?

*Socrates:* No, I am telling you that you should find a good reason to be here. I don't think you have found that yet. Shall we keep searching?

*Peter:* All right, wise man, or wise guy, whichever you are. You tell me. Why should I be here? What's the value of college? You've got a sermon up your sleeve, haven't you?

*Socrates:* Is that what you expect me to do?

*Peter:* Sure. Didn't you just tear down my answers so that you

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could sell me yours?

*Socrates:* Indeed not. I am not a wise man, only a philosopher, a lover and pursuer of wisdom, that divine but elusive goal.

*Peter:* What do you want with me then?

*Socrates:* To spread the infection of philosophizing.

*Peter:* So you're not going to teach me the answers?

*Socrates:* No. I think the most valuable lesson I could teach you is to become your own teacher. Isn't that one of the things you are here to learn? Isn't that one of the greatest values of a college education? Have none of your teachers taught you that? What has become of my great invention, anyway?

*Peter:* I guess I never looked at education that way.

*Socrates:* It's not too late to begin.

*Peter:* It is today, Socrates—or whoever you are. I'm really too busy today.

*Socrates:* Too busy to know why you're so busy? Too busy doing to know what you're doing?

*Peter:* Look, maybe we could continue this conversation some other time. I have more important things to do than this stuff . . .

*Socrates:* Philosophy. This stuff is philosophy. What exam are you studying for, by the way?

*Peter:* Well, actually, it's a philosophy exam.

*Socrates:* I see. I think you may be in trouble there.

*Peter:* No way. I memorized the professor's notes. I've got all the answers.

*Socrates:* And none of the questions. What is the value of your answers then?

*Peter:* I just can't waste time on questions like that.

*Socrates:* Because you have to study philosophy?

*Peter:* Yes. Good-by, strange little man.

*Socrates:* Good-by, E.T. I hope some day you escape your circular wanderings and find your way home.

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## 2 On Liberal Education and Careers

*Socrates:* Hello, Peter.

*Peter:* You again! I thought I had escaped you.

*Socrates:* You were mistaken! You cannot escape yourself.

*Peter:* You mean you are a part of me, somehow?

*Socrates:* Yes, somehow. How did you do on your exam yesterday?

*Peter:* Terrible! I kept getting confused—by my memory of you.

*Socrates:* That often happens; philosophizing can play havoc with philosophy. What are you doing now with all those papers and catalogs?

*Peter:* Planning next semester's courses. It's registration time.

*Socrates:* You look perplexed.

*Peter:* I've got to do some serious thinking before I choose my major.

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*Socrates:* Perhaps I can help. Thinking's my thing, you might say.

*Peter:* Perhaps you can. You see, I'm at a turning point in my education, and maybe in my life. I can't decide between Business and Science as my major. But how could you help me to make that choice? It's not *your* choice.

*Socrates:* No, but I might help you apply the world's most practical tool for making choices.

*Peter:* Sounds good. What's that?

*Socrates:* Logic.

*Peter:* Already it's sounding worse. How is logic practical? How would it help me choose?

*Socrates:* It would tell us first to examine the nature of choice in general, then apply the principles of choosing to your particular choice. Shall we look?

*Peter:* I guess I need all the help I can get. So I'll endure your silly questions again, even though they left me with all questions and no answers last time. Maybe this time we'll make some progress.

*Socrates:* Oh, but we made enormous progress last time. Lesson One is usually much harder to learn than Lesson Two.

*Peter:* What do you mean?

*Socrates:* I think you know.

*Peter:* You mean Lesson One is questions and Lesson Two is answers?

*Socrates:* Yes. See what a quick learner you are? A quick starter, at least. It took me a lifetime to fully realize Lesson One.

*Peter:* So let's get started on Lesson Two.

*Socrates:* Hmm. Perhaps you are not such a quick learner after all. Do you really think you have already learned in one day what took me a lifetime?

*Peter:* Well, no, I don't have all your answers yet...

*Socrates:* You don't have my *questions* yet.

*Peter:* Oh, all right. Let's look at the questions first.

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*Socrates:* A reasonable thing for one in search of answers, don't you think? They are the road, and only those who use the road find their way home. Well, then, let us ask about choosing. Would you agree that whenever we have to choose between two good things—whether really or apparently good—both must seem attractive?

*Peter:* Yes.

*Socrates:* So we should look at the different ways things are attractive.

*Peter:* But aren't there thousands?

*Socrates:* I think they can be reduced to two. A thing may be or seem good for something else, like a tool, or good for itself: a means or an end. Do you agree?

*Peter:* No. What's good for itself?

*Socrates:* What about happiness? Do we choose happiness as a means to anything else—riches, or pleasure, or reputation? Don't we choose all those things as means to happiness?

*Peter:* I guess we do. But how does that help me choose between business and science?

*Socrates:* How impatient you are! Do you seek these two things as means or ends?

*Peter:* Means, I guess.

*Socrates:* Then we must consider two questions: what ends they serve and how well they serve those ends. If one of them helps you to a better end, or better helps you to the same end, it would be the better thing to choose, wouldn't it?

*Peter:* Oh. Yes indeed. How obvious. Why didn't I think of that?

*Socrates:* Perhaps because you were so busy looking at science and business that you neglected philosophy.

*Peter:* Philosophy! That's not my thing. That liberal arts stuff is for the snobs.

*Socrates:* Snobs?

*Peter:* Sure. Rich people with leisure. I've got no time for that.

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I have to plan to get a good job when I graduate. What good can philosophy help me to do?

*Socrates:* Define "good."

*Peter:* You mean . . . philosophy can help me define "good"?

*Socrates:* Exactly. And unless you know what "good" is you can't tell what "a good job" is, can you? And if you can't tell what a good job is, how do you expect to find one?

*Peter:* I know what a good job is. It's one that makes a lot of money.

*Socrates:* One that would enable you to become rich and leisured?

*Peter:* Right.

*Socrates:* Would you then be a snob?

*Peter:* No.

*Socrates:* Then you were wrong to define a snob as someone with riches and leisure.

*Peter:* Look here, are you out to help me or to insult me?

*Socrates:* Are you sure those two things are "either/or"?

*Peter:* Socrates, I can't take any more of this cleverness. I'm a practical person, and I'm concerned with practical things like making money. Now if you really want to help me, just accept me as I am and let's talk about careers.

*Socrates:* All right, let's talk about practical things. Take money, for instance. . . .

*Peter:* Gladly. Now you're talking.

*Socrates:* If you couldn't buy anything with it—if all your money were counterfeit or out of date—then it would be good for nothing, wouldn't it?

*Peter:* Of course.

*Socrates:* So money is good only as a means, not as an end.

*Peter:* It's good for whatever money can buy. And that's a pretty big piece of the pie.

*Socrates:* So you are interested in these courses, in science or business, as means to getting a good job, and the job as a means

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to making money, and the money as a means to buying "a piece of the pie," right?

*Peter:* Right on target.

*Socrates:* So you see what question logic leads us to ask next?

*Peter:* The pie?

*Socrates:* Now you are on target too. Yes. Those things you hope to buy with your money—is any one of them an end in itself? A car, for instance? Or a house?

*Peter:* I don't know. I never thought of that.

*Socrates:* That is precisely what I am here to remedy. Isn't a car called a "means of transportation"?

*Peter:* Yes.

*Socrates:* And isn't a house a means to shelter you and your family and your possessions?

*Peter:* Yes.

*Socrates:* Then we must ask: transportation for what end? Shelter for what end?

*Peter:* Oh, I don't know. It's too complicated. One thing I do know, though. Liberal arts aren't going to help me get what I want.

*Socrates:* How do you know that if you don't know what you want? And might not liberal arts help you to know what you want?

*Peter:* I don't know.

*Socrates:* Good. You are learning Lesson One. Shall we proceed to Lesson Two and try to find out what you do want?

*Peter:* Please!

*Socrates:* Well, then, to begin with, do you think it is in any way the same as what everyone wants? Do you think there is any common or universal end sought by everyone? Or do you think each one seeks a totally different end?

*Peter:* Different strokes for different folks, they say.

*Socrates:* Do you see nothing common to all these "different strokes"?

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*Peter:* No. Do you?

*Socrates:* Don't we all seek happiness, and pleasure, and joy?

*Peter:* Oh, of course. But that's abstract. Nothing concrete is universal.

*Socrates:* What about food and drink and health and the preservation of life?

*Peter:* Oh, of course. Our *bodies* all need the same things. But that's all.

*Socrates:* What about love and friendship and companionship and escape from loneliness?

*Peter:* All right, so we share some common ends. So what? How does that help me choose between business and science?

*Socrates:* Are you concerned mainly with what will benefit yourself?

*Peter:* Yes. I look out for Number One. Anything wrong with that?

*Socrates:* I did not say there was. But from the sharp tone of your answer, I suspect you think there is. Perhaps we could investigate that question some other day. But for now, I think I can show you that a liberal education can bring you great benefit—perhaps even more than science or business.

*Peter:* No way.

*Socrates:* You know that for certain, do you?

*Peter:* Yep.

*Socrates:* Perhaps Lesson One has not been learned after all. Shall we look at this thing that you know for certain, just to be sure we do not miss something?

*Peter:* I've looked already. Forget it.

*Socrates:* But even when we look, do we not sometimes overlook? Isn't it worth taking a few more minutes to look one more time, just to be sure you didn't miss something that might be of great benefit to you?

*Peter:* Oh, all right. What do you want to look at?

*Socrates:* At the benefits science and business can bring you,

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and then at the benefits of the liberal arts, and then at a comparison between them.

*Peter:* We already looked at business. It would teach me to make a mint.

*Socrates:* And that road led to a dead end, remember? Unless you have an answer now to the question about means and ends—a live end, so to speak.

*Peter:* No. Let's look at science.

*Socrates:* All right. What attracts you there?

*Peter:* Same thing. Money. Science is where the big bucks are. The dough.

*Socrates:* Hmmm. And the bucks mate with the doe and make more bucks and doe? A deer park.

*Peter:* It's dear, all right. It's hire education.

*Socrates:* I see you're catching my appundicitis as well as my good infection of philosophizing. Well, then, it seems pretty straightforward: if your only end is money and you won't consider any further end, then whatever means is more likely to attain this monetary end is what you want. It is a mere calculation of probabilities. Are you sure that's all you care about?

*Peter:* Well . . . I'd kinda like to do something worthwhile while I'm worth millions. You know, helping humanity and all that. I don't see why I can't do well and do good at the same time, do you?

*Socrates:* No indeed. But that factor complicates your calculation a bit. It means you must ask a second question about science and business: which helps humanity more?

*Peter:* That's why I'm hesitating. Business will make me rich faster, I think, but science seems better in the other way. A sort of higher calling. I thought of medicine or psychology or social work, too, but they don't turn me on like science.

*Socrates:* And what is the value to humanity you see in science? Is it the search for truth?

*Peter:* Come on, now. What century are you from?

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*Socrates:* You would not believe me if I told you. But what does the century have to do with the truth? Do you tell truth with a calendar?

*Peter:* Socrates, in the twentieth century the point of science is not some abstract "truth" but power, control of the forces of nature. Our time doesn't think about "truth" anymore.

*Socrates:* I wonder how time can think. I thought only people did that.

*Peter:* The people of our century, then.

*Socrates:* All of them?

*Peter:* Almost.

*Socrates:* What about the scientists? Do they think science is for power rather than truth?

*Peter:* I don't know. Some do and some don't. I don't care about that. I think so. That would be my motive for going into Science, and we're supposed to be helping me decide, aren't we?

*Socrates:* Yes.

*Peter:* Well, that's what I'd go into: practical science, not theoretical science. Technology.

*Socrates:* All right. So far we have mentioned three areas of study for you: business, practical science, or technology, and liberal arts. Do you see what each can give you?

*Peter:* Sure. Business gives me money, technology gives me power, and liberal arts give me a pain.

*Socrates:* Let us look at power for a minute. I wonder whether it will be a dead end, too, like money. Power is a means, isn't it?

*Peter:* Yes.

*Socrates:* Then what is the end to which the powers of technology are means?

*Peter:* Making the world a better place to live in. Cars and rockets and bridges and artificial organs and Pac-Man.

*Socrates:* So technology improves material things in the world.

*Peter:* Yes. Including our own bodies. Pretty important, don't you think?

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*Socrates:* Oh, yes. But I wonder whether there might not be something even more important to us. If we could improve our own lives, our own actions, our own behavior—wouldn't this concern us even more intimately than improving the world outside us?

*Peter:* Why?

*Socrates:* Because its benefit would be closer to home, so to speak.

*Peter:* I see. Yes. I guess that's why I'm attracted to business. Making my life a little better is more practical to me than making bridges or rockets. So business is better than technology, right?

*Socrates:* Well, not necessarily "better" in an absolute and unqualified way, especially if we use "good" and "better" without defining them. But from your point of view, business seems to improve something closer to you than technology does: an aspect of your own life. Politics and ethics would do the same, in a much more fundamental way.

*Peter:* Politics and ethics? No way. I want something practical.

*Socrates:* Oh, politics and ethics are quite practical. They teach us how to practice, how to act. Aristotle called them "practical sciences" and technology "productive science." Practical sciences improve our practice; productive sciences improve our products. Economics is a practical science.

*Peter:* Then I guess it's economics and business for me.

*Socrates:* For that reason? That it improves something closer to yourself?

*Peter:* Yes. I look out for Number One.

*Socrates:* Then you should choose Liberal Arts, for the same reason.

*Peter:* What?

*Socrates:* I said . . .

*Peter:* I heard what you said. I just couldn't believe it. It's silly.

*Socrates:* "Silly" may be in the eye of the beholder. Look here, if you could find some study that improved something even

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closer to yourself than the practical sciences, you should prefer that, shouldn't you?

*Peter:* Yes, but you said liberal arts. That's way out in left field.

*Socrates:* Let's see. What is the purpose of the liberal arts?

*Peter:* Who knows?

*Socrates:* You, I hope. If not, let's remedy that.

*Peter:* I guess they're for culture. A veneer of upper-class respectability. For snobs, not slobs.

*Socrates:* You are so wrong that for once I will simply tell you the right answer. The liberal arts seek knowledge for its own sake.

*Peter:* That's even farther out. Out of my ballpark. That "knowledge for its own sake" stuff may be a turn-on for you philosophers, but not for me.

*Socrates:* Are you quite sure? Look at your own standard again. How did you rank the sciences?

*Peter:* By how close to home they came. And liberal arts is out by the left-field foul pole.

*Socrates:* Let's see. Productive sciences improve what?

*Peter:* Things in the world.

*Socrates:* And practical sciences improve what?

*Peter:* My practice.

*Socrates:* And knowledge for the sake of knowledge improves what?

*Peter:* Nothing.

*Socrates:* Don't you see that it improves something closer to you than your practice?

*Peter:* No. What?

*Socrates:* What is the closest thing to yourself?

*Peter:* My underwear, I guess.

*Socrates:* Your self, is it not? Your *you*, your identity, your personality, your psyche, your soul, your consciousness, your mind. Do you have any idea what I'm referring to? You look puzzled.

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*Peter:* I think you're talking about something more than my good looks, but I have trouble seeing that far inside. I guess you mean the liberal arts are supposed to give me some sort of "expansion of consciousness," right?

*Socrates:* You could call it that, yes. I called it a liberation from the cave of ignorance. Almost like birth, or waking up: popping your mind out of its womblike dreams into the light of reality.

*Peter:* My liberal arts courses never gave me that.

*Socrates:* Then the fault was either with the teacher or with the student, but not with the subject.

*Peter:* But what could I do with liberal arts?

*Socrates:* The question is rather what they could do with you?

*Peter:* No, I want business or science. Forget it.

*Socrates:* You can take both.

*Peter:* I'm forced to. The college has those silly required courses.

*Socrates:* For a good reason, as we have just seen. And here is a second one: whatever career you choose—science or business or anything else—you also have a second career as well, and liberal arts help you in that.

*Peter:* You mean I'll have to moonlight?

*Socrates:* No, I mean you can't just be a businessman or a scientist or a technician. You must also be something else. Do you see what?

*Peter:* No.

*Socrates:* All the more need then. A human being, is what. That is our common career. And the liberal arts help you to *that* end.

*Peter:* How?

*Socrates:* They investigate the question I devoted my whole life to: "know thyself." Was it not your concern with yourself that you were using as your standard in choosing what courses were most important?

*Peter:* Well, yes, but . . .

*Socrates:* But?

*Peter:* "Know thyself" is fine for philosophers, but we slobs

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need diversions.

*Socrates:* Don't we also need truth?

*Peter:* Pac-Man's more fun, you know.

*Socrates:* It isn't, you know. I've tried both. Have you?

*Peter:* You question everything, don't you?

*Socrates:* Yes, especially the most important thing. Long ago I said "the unexamined life is not worth living." You seem to be saying now that the examined life is not worth living. Is that what you think?

*Peter:* I don't know what I think.

*Socrates:* Well, that's Lesson One, anyway.

*Peter:* I guess I haven't gotten far into Lesson Two yet. Somehow I know I'm not finished with you, Socrates.

*Socrates:* Or with yourself, I hope.

*Peter:* Let me go get a cup of coffee to clear my head of all these cobwebs . . .

*Socrates:* You mean these logical thoughts.

*Peter:* I'll be back in a little while, O.K.?

*Socrates:* I won't be far away.

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## 3 On Technology and Inchworms

*Peter:* Socrates, I'm back.

*Socrates:* Without your coffee, I see.

*Peter:* The darn machine was broken. And I want to know how to fix it. I'm going to be a technician.

*Socrates:* You've decided, then.

*Peter:* Yes.

*Socrates:* Why have you come to me, then? You know I like to upset your little applecarts with my bothersome questions. Might it be that you're not quite certain yet? One broken coffee machine isn't quite an adequate reason for choosing a career, is it?

*Peter:* You're right. But I can't stand any more quizzing today. Is there any other way you can help me look at technology without quizzing me?

*Socrates:* Hmmmm... perhaps there is a way.

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*Peter:* You mean you're actually going to give me answers instead of questions, finally? I don't believe it!

*Socrates:* Oh, no. I know of no way to answers except through questions.

*Peter:* I thought it sounded too good to be true.

*Socrates:* But you might listen as I ask someone else, someone already in the career you want to explore. How about that?

*Peter:* A great idea. Let's visit the science labs. They're right over here. The university is doing some research for the government—on genetics, I think. Here—look at all these people at work. Maybe you can find one to be your guinea pig.

*Socrates:* How about the lady over there by the window?

*Peter:* You mean the one working with the guinea pigs?

*Socrates:* Yes. . . . Pardon me, Miss. Do you have a moment to talk with us?

*Marigold Measurer:* Sure thing. My name is Marigold. Who are you and what do you want to know?

*Socrates:* I'm Socrates, and this is my friend Peter Pragma, and we'd like to know what you're doing here.

*Marigold:* My daily work, of course. What are *you* doing here asking such a silly question?

*Socrates:* My daily work.

*Marigold:* I don't understand.

*Peter:* I'm thinking of a career in technology, and I thought I could sort of interview you, if you don't mind. But my friend Socrates asks questions better than I do, so I'd rather listen and let him talk.

*Marigold:* I'll be glad to help you if I can, Peter. But what are you, Socrates, some kind of head shrinker?

*Socrates:* Some kind of head expander, you might say. I am a philosopher.

*Marigold:* Oh, one of those. Why aren't you over in the philosophy department, then, where you belong?

*Socrates:* Because there is no "philosophy department."

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