

Readers may redistribute this article to other individuals for noncommercial use, provided that the text and this note remain intact. This article may not be reprinted or redistributed for commercial use without prior written permission from the author. If you have any questions about permissions, please contact Klaus Nellen at IWM, Spittelauer Laende 3, 1090 Vienna, Austria, e-mail <nellen@iwm.at>.

Preferred Citation: Wood, James L. 2004. The Measure of the Good Life. Reflections on Philosophy as a Practical Affair. In *Thinking Together. Proceedings of the IWM Junior Fellows' Conference, Winter 2003*, ed. A. Cashin and J. Jirsa, Vienna: IWM Junior Visiting Fellows' Conferences, Vol. 16.



The Measure of the Good Life. Reflections on Philosophy as a Practical Affair

James L. Wood

The tension or even opposition between the theoretical and practical, between words and deeds, is nothing new; the ancients were fully aware of it, and indeed, were obsessed by it. For them, as we see vividly in Homer, deeds are by far the more important of the two; the Homeric hero is defined, condemned, and redeemed by his deeds: they are his virtue, his honor, his fate, his life, and his death. Courage is the central virtue of the hero; and just as the hero is the most action-oriented of men, courage is the most action-oriented of the virtues. But at the same time, the hero is dependent on the bard and poet, on the speaker and singer of words, for his fame, and his fame is an essential part of his fate; thus words, too, are an essential part of his very identity. Through his words, the Homeric poet not only measures the extent of the hero's fame, but even its worth, through praise or condemnation of his deeds. The poetic word becomes, in short, the *measure* of the deed, and is, as such, itself activity, creative force, a deed.

There is, however, a deeply rooted problem in epic poetry, with the synthesis of word and deed seen in the creative encounter of poet and hero, which is simply this: the measure of the good and bad of human life cannot come merely from the deeds of the exemplary human being, the hero, for the hero is a hero precisely by

rising to a standard beyond himself, which the poet expresses through his creative word. But at the same time, this standard cannot come just from the poet, for his exemplification of the hero depends crucially on the extraordinary nature of his deeds. Nor can we simply accept the easy answer that “society” or “culture” furnishes the standard, because both hero and poet are shapers of society, and only through the poetic expression of the heroic deed is the measure of human excellence first captured and expressed. There is a mysterious interdependence among all three of these elements, and the mystery of this connection is intensified when we realize that their synthesis in the heroic standard is already undermined by the poetic act which synthesizes them, because it reveals the inadequacy of the deed itself, taken independently of the word, to serve as the complete expression of the excellence and end of mankind.

But this problem only becomes apparent when we come to reflect on the poetic deed, and this reflection is not itself a poetic act. It is the encounter of the poetic word with the critical word, the rational word, the theoretical word. It is the transformation of the word itself, in which we see the concept of *logos* emerge in its fullness, and with it, philosophy. The tension between word and deed arises again in a new form in the encounter between poetry and philosophy; and the central figure in this encounter, who indeed brings about this encounter, is Plato. In this encounter the nature of the deed, too, is transformed, just as it was by the poets, and a new synthesis between word and deed is forged. What is this synthesis? What is the philosophical deed? And what is the nature of the standard, the *measure* which emerges when the philosophical word, *logos*, encounters the poetic word, *poiesis*?

The nature of the philosophical deed will reveal to us how philosophy can be a practical affair, but it will not do so by distinguishing the theoretical from the practical and holding them separate from each other, and it will not do so by borrowing the notion of practicality from some external source and conforming itself to it. Rather, philosophy itself will reveal to us the nature of practicality, and it will do so through the measure which emerges from the new synthesis of word and deed, theory and practice which it forges, or which, more specifically, *Plato* forges. I focus specifically on Plato here, though with Plato I include Socrates as well, and will for my purposes here ignore the distinction between the two. I focus on Plato not only because he created this synthesis, but more importantly because it exists in its purest form in his philosophy, and was very quickly neglected, distorted, or rejected by later thinkers. And since it is impossible to treat adequately such a considerable topic in such a short space, I will confine myself to a few remarks about a single dialogue, the *Philebus*, which presents both the opposition and the synthesis between

theoretical and practical in a stark, provocative, and often bewildering fashion, but which also allows us to see the core of the Platonic philosophy in a powerful and illuminating way. I will attempt to present the conception of philosophy as a practical affair through the notion of the measure of the good life, the life which itself is a synthesis between theory and practice, *logos* and *poiesis*, thought and sensuality: the life which Socrates in the *Philebus* calls the “mixed life.”

The stated theme of the dialogue is an inquiry into the nature of the good life for human beings – an eminently Socratic and Platonic theme. The mere asking of this question already reveals something crucial about philosophy: philosophy is an activity which *questions*. And *what* it questions reveals something else about philosophy: philosophy is concerned above all with what *matters* most of all to us, what gives worth and meaning to human life. Philosophy is the questioning of that which the heroes embodied and which the poets expressed in an unquestioning way: the nature of human excellence and perfection. But *whom* does it question? The very way in which Plato presents his philosophy suggests an answer here: philosophy is the questioning of ourselves; it is a dialogue of human beings with each other, a dialogue of searching and inquiry, which concerns both human beings and the world in which we live – for human life is always lived within the world, or rather, *our* world.

Philosophical activity is questioning, which is in the first place something theoretical, but it is also an activity, a pursuit, something practical. We have not yet arrived at the philosophical deed, however, the Platonic synthesis which we are seeking. First we must probe more deeply into this activity and that with which it is engaged. We are questioning the nature of the goodness of human life, or to put that in Platonic shorthand, “the good.” Two answers are initially suggested in this dialogue: *pleasure*, on the one hand, and *intellect* on the other. Or in other words, the source of worth and value in human life is posited to be either pleasure, enjoyment, and delight of every sort, or intellect, wisdom, knowledge, and other things of that nature. These in turn must then be questioned, and this questioning reveals the matter to be a bit more complicated; for it may well not be the case that every kind of pleasure is good, or that every kind of intellectual activity is desirable. A proper inquiry requires us to investigate how these different kinds can all satisfy our understanding of what is good. One cannot simply talk about “pleasure” as such, but must understand how the different kinds of pleasure are all different and at the same time are all pleasure, and how they are then related to what we understand as good.

These considerations lead Socrates into an investigation of investigation itself, a questioning of questioning, in order to discover a mode of questioning suitable for

this perplexing situation of unity and diversity in that which is questioned. This is the mode of questioning which Socrates calls dialectic. Dialectic questions every unity to find the diversity it contains, and every diversity to find the unity which contains it, and through this process it seeks to find the bond which holds unity and diversity together in a systematic whole. Only when one has taken this process of investigation to its end can one claim to have arrived at a full understanding of the nature of something.

This method of intellectual inquiry might very well be an apt, if extremely abstract, description of what goes on in any scientific investigation. As Socrates puts it, “Everything ever yet discovered which pertains to science (*techne*) has come to light through this” (16c2-3). *Techne* can be translated as “science” or “art” or “craft,” but we can perhaps best understand its meaning here as “applied science.” Scientific application of course implies purpose, and it implies production, neither of which are very apparent aspects of the mode of questioning just described. Dialectic seems to be abstract and theoretical to a fault, and in the dialogue itself the question of its relevance is raised, and thus also, the question of its practicality.

But three observations should be made at this point. First, dialectic does point to the nature of the connection between questioning and what is questioned which we call knowledge and truth. Reality is permeated both by unity and diversity, and we must grasp both aspects in their connection in order to obtain truth. The process of questioning is not fruitless; it seeks answers, and at every stage of an investigation gains them more adequately. Secondly, no investigation ever is merely abstract; one questions and seeks something *specific*, to which dialectic applies in the manner of a methodological blueprint. The specificity of a questioning means that one is guided both by the nature of what is questioned *and* by the nature of the particular questioning – the particular *techne* – which questions. And every *techne* has a focus, an end, a purpose, which guides its theoretical inquiries. Thirdly, we must recall the focus of *this* particular questioning. We are questioning the nature of the good for human beings. When we apply the dialectical mode of questioning to this question, something very peculiar happens: the nature of that which dialectic seeks, truth and knowledge, is transformed, and so too then is dialectic itself.

To understand why, we must focus specifically on the nature of the good. As I suggested a moment ago, the initial discussion of pleasure and intellect in this dialogue is guided by our “understanding” of what is good, and it is this understanding which first raises questions about the diversity contained within each of these. But what is the nature of this understanding? Socrates gives three fundamental criteria to identify what we understand as good: perfection, sufficiency, and desirabil-

ity. That which we would call good in an unqualified sense should contain all three of these. Perfection is a translation of *teleon*, whose root is *telos*, or end. For something to be perfect is for it to have reached its end, its goal, for it to be the sort of thing that it is most completely. Or to put it another way, for something to be perfect is for it to express most fully its *truth*. The notions of sufficiency and desirability are quite closely connected to perfection: for something to be perfect is for it to lack nothing, and the fulfillment of all lack is sufficiency; the state of lacking nothing, in turn, is for all things the most desirable, and is the source of all desire. Lack is the basis for desire, which leads us towards our end, our truth, and our good.

The dialectical questioning of the good is thus a seeking of the *telos* of human beings, of what we lack, and of what we desire. Truth, good, and desire can no longer be easily or coherently separated from one another. And that means also that dialectic can no longer remain a purely abstract questioning. When we recall that every *techne* has a particular purpose and end which determines the direction and outcome of its investigation, the exceptional and indeed unique nature of this investigation becomes even clearer: the dialectical investigation of the good is an inquiry into that which every specific *techne* simply applies unthinkingly and unquestioningly – human ends and purposes, that which human beings seek, or in a word, the good. It is just this reflexivity and reflectiveness which distinguishes philosophy as an enterprise, so we can see that the *techne* whose domain is the human good is nothing other than philosophy. Philosophy is the questioning of the nature and thus the truth of human beings, the truth which is their end, and the end which is by no means something detached from us and objectively present before us, but is a matter of intimate concern to us, whose importance is far more existential than epistemological – and indeed, is something fully *known* only in its *being*: specifically, its being desired and its being obtained.

This investigation cannot remain abstract and indifferent to us, because it seeks to *bring about* the very object of its investigation. This indicates, in the first place, that like every other *techne*, philosophy inquires theoretically to further its practical ends: it seeks to know the nature of the good so that it might more easily obtain it. But as our reflections just now suggest, the connection between inquiry and attainment, investigation and production, theory and practice, is even closer and more intimate than that. The questioning of the good for human beings is a drawing near to it, an unfolding of its nature, a progressive bringing forth of answers, truth, and knowledge. But this means it is a progressive unfolding of *us*, of *our* nature, of *our* truth – and thus of our good, for *we* are the object of our own questioning. This is only the case, however, if questioning does not remain something

merely intellectual, but becomes, rather, a *seeking* that is both intellectual and sensual in nature. Pleasure and intellect must be *combined*, and the life which is their integration is both a seeking of and obtaining of the good as something *mixed*: the mixed life. This life is a seeking not just of knowledge in general, but the knowledge of oneself, the “*gnothi sauton*” which Socrates took as the grounding principle of his life, the knowledge which uncovers and brings about the human *telos*. This is the knowledge which is *wisdom* and the pursuit which is *love*. Philosophy as the love of wisdom is thus revealed as an erotic quest for the highest possibilities of human excellence and worth, which seeks to bring these possibilities into reality, to *create* them as the truth of one’s own nature, and thus to bring the good into concrete existence in oneself.

Is philosophy not then the most practical of affairs? Perhaps, we might answer, but how is this synthesis of the intellectual and sensual to be understood and undertaken? How is the mixed life to be mixed? How is the good life to be lived? These questions redirect us to pleasure and the intellect as components of the mixed life, to a further questioning in the light of the understanding of the good which first revealed to us the necessary synthesis of these aspects of human living. But here we are presented with a serious problem, which we can see clearly when we reflect once again on the notion of the good as a *measure*. The good is supposed to be a standard of human worth and excellence, something by which we are measured, by which we are obligated, and as such it seems to be above and beyond us; but at the same time, it is supposed to be pleasant and sensual, something subject to our desires, and it is thus something very much a part of us. The good seems to be both objective and subjective, with its objectivity manifested most clearly in its role as an object of knowledge and inquiry, and its subjectivity in its desirability and sensuality. How, we ask, can it possibly be both?

This question is bound up with the question of how or in what way pleasure and intellect are combined in the mixed life. In this questioning, which is simultaneously a questioning of pleasure and intellect, of the good as a measure, and of ourselves as good, an additional dimension of what is being questioned arises: we are questioning ourselves dialectically, as a diversity within a unity, and in two senses. We are each, as a unified person, nonetheless composed of different and diverse elements, most strikingly an intellectual and a sensual aspect. But we are also subject to the unifying measure of the good, which is supposed to apply to all of us as human in spite of our differences; we are a diversity within that unity. When we reflect on these two senses in which we are both a unity and a diversity, one and many, in the light of the dialectical way of questioning, they come together; and the

notion of measure, which presented us with the problem of how the good can be both objective and subjective, intellectual and sensual, is itself transformed, and points the way to the resolution of our problem.

For the dialectical method directs us to the synthesis between every unity and its diversity, the systematic whole which reflects both, and which allows for the productive activity of *techné*. *Techné* is made possible by the fact that unity and diversity are *not* separate from one another; and at the same time, it is the activity of *techné* itself which brings about their synthesis by the bringing forth of something concrete into existence. That which is brought forth is the living embodiment of intellect united with sensuality, the practice of theory. It reflects both the conception which motivates and guides the process of production and the material out of which it is formed; it is the *mixture* of both. Now *our techné*, the *techné* of philosophy, is self-reflexive in a unique way, as we noted; it is directed towards the one who practices it. Both the conception which guides and motivates and the product which it brings forth into existence are rooted in oneself: as both *ideal* and living *reality*. As ideal, one holds oneself up to the measure of human excellence and worth, the good life, and as living reality, one *creates* oneself in its light: one lives the good life. But this means that one *mixes* the measure of the good into oneself; one measures oneself with its measure. The synthesis of unity and diversity towards which dialectic directs us in both a theoretical and practical way is here a synthesis of the unity and diversity of *oneself* in the light of the synthetic unity and diversity of the good. As a standard or measure it is the measurement of ourselves, the measuring of ourselves as intellectual and sensual, the ordering of these elements in a measured way, the *symmetria* which is *symphonia*: symmetry and harmony.

The measure of the good thus reveals itself in the task of measuring ourselves; and the intellectual conception of this measure as an ideal is directly connected to and is an inseparable part of the creation of this ideal as a living reality in the practice of the *techné* of philosophy. Here, too, the bringing forth into living reality is made possible by the connection of unity and diversity in the conceived ideal; the measure and order of ourselves is made possible by the measure and order of the good – the mixed life is made possible by the mixture of the good. *We* are as a reflection of the good the very embodiment of its diversity; that diversity, the order of the good for human beings, is in turn our unity in the ordering of ourselves, the unifying of our diversity. We are thus led to ask, *what* is the order of the good in the light of which we are to order ourselves? What is the measure by which we are to measure ourselves? What is the mixture of the good?

Socrates raises this question, though not in these words, in connection with the question of which aspect of the good life, pleasure or intellect, is to be granted superiority over the other in the mixture of the two; he suggests that the answer to this question will come from determining which one serves as the *cause* of the mixed life. He then introduces four features of the order which will determine the order of the mixed life and thus the relative status of pleasure and intellect: they are *peras*, *apeiron*, *meiktos*, and *aitia* – limit, unlimited, mixture, and cause. Socrates calls these *gene*, kinds or families, or literally genera, but it would be misleading to think of them as genera in the traditional Aristotelian sense. They are rather cosmic principles, an expression of the order of all things which grounds and makes possible dialectical investigation, and they are thus an expression of or a deeper articulation of the connection between unity and diversity already discussed. In fact, it is in the discussion of the dialectical method that Socrates first introduces the concepts of *peras* and *apeiron*. These terms can alternately be translated as determinate and indeterminate, finite and infinite, bounded and boundless, and so on. The close connection between this pair of terms and the pair “one and many” and “unity and diversity” shows us that, properly understood, the relationship between every unity and diversity is of the nature of something unlimited or indeterminate being limited or rendered determinate. It is thus an *active* relationship, a bringing of unity to that which is dis-unified; and this bringing of unity is at the same time a bringing of determinacy, of boundaries, of form and identity. The relationship between *peras* and *apeiron* is not only active, it is fertile, productive, creative. It is, to use Socrates’ phrase, a *genesis eis ousian* (26d8), a “genesis into being.” It is the genesis of the third cosmic principle, mixture.

But there is something rather strange about the *genos* of mixture. It is on the one hand reflected in every generated thing, in everything which actually exists, but it is on the other hand something ideal, something *towards* which the process of unifying and limiting is directed. This two-fold nature of mixture was already seen in our previous discussion of the synthesis of unity and diversity, which is both something conceived, something potential, something ideal, and something brought about through the activity of a *techne* in concrete production. This synthesis, as we saw in considering the good, is captured in the notion of a measure, both as a governing ideal and as that which in the practice of the *techne* of philosophy is progressively brought forth in the being of the one who practices, questions, seeks in a philosophical way. Mixture therefore cannot be considered merely as *genos* or principle. It is bound up with concretely existing things in such a way that it is impossible to separate them coherently. But that means also that it is impossible to separate *peras*

and *apeiron* coherently, either from each other or from the mixture which they form. As three aspects of a process of creation always underway, they compose the cosmic order as both forming and formed, as both ideal and reality, as something both theoretically conceived and practically produced.

There is however a fourth aspect of the cosmic order still to be considered: the *cause* of the mixture: that which mixes, that which makes what is being made (26e7, 27a1), or as Socrates also calls it, that which *crafts* (27b1). There are certainly questions which might be asked at this point about the theological implications of these notions, especially in view of Socrates' later discussion of cosmic soul and intellect; but for the purposes of this essay I would prefer to bracket all such questions, and to note just this: cause as a cosmic principle is no different from the other three *gene* in its intimate and inseparable connection to the process of generation and thus both to the other *gene* and to the things of which they are in their dynamic togetherness the creators. Cause is that aspect of the creative process which can best be described as its power, its motivating force, or in Aristotelian terminology, its efficiency. It is that to which we first look in the assignment of responsibility for something's coming to be. But when we assign responsibility in some specific case of causation, we are assigning it to something considered as embodying the power of causality, not then to something considered in its particular identity as such. Causality is never static; it is constantly being embodied in different forms, all of which are in receiving it formed in some way, and in expressing it are forming. Cause can only be efficient then if it is also formal, material, and final; these are the *ways* in which it is causal, or it is the *activity* by which things are forming, formed, and brought to an end. These are just different ways of viewing an integrated process of creativity.

Nevertheless, cause holds a special position among the four aspects of cosmic order, as that which in each instance initiates and guides the genesis into being. When one traces back a chain of causes, one is in effect tracing the path which cosmic generation has taken in some particular case. These paths are not equal to each other, however. Causality is expressed both in the case of one billiard ball's striking another and in Homer's writing of the *Iliad*, but these are certainly not equivalent manifestations of causality. The superior status of cause is far more apparent in the latter case, because the creation here is far more significant. The ascribing of responsibility here points to a feature of causation simply not present there, namely, the power of conception, intention, and, in a word, rationality, which one finds in human activity and nowhere else – even divine creation would not have these features in the same way.

This is the power of human *logos*. It encompasses both conception and execution, and is thus both theoretical and practical. It is and only can be so because it has the unique capability of grasping and working towards an end in a sustained way. It is not just causal, it is *ordering*, and that means it can set the process of creation forward in a particular direction and bring it to a desired conclusion. We are ourselves the *master* of our own causal activity, which allows us to direct it even towards ourselves, giving us a power and a freedom which exceeds that of any other creature. That we are nevertheless still a creature shows that we are still only an *expression* of the cosmic order, however, *even* when we direct our creative activity towards ourselves. We can forge our world and ourselves in an astounding number of ways and to an astounding degree, but we do not and cannot create the *measure* of our creation. Creation is in all cases the revelation of something which to a greater or lesser degree approximates the highest possibilities of its nature – the standard of its truth. But only for us can that truth be set as the end of our own activity, something which we can consciously desire, strive for, and obtain, something for which we then have the *responsibility* of obtaining – or the blame for failing to obtain it. Only for us does truth have a *moral* quality, only for us does the good issue an *existential* imperative: the task of creating ourselves in the light of our own highest possibilities, of bringing about our own good.

What this inquiry into the order of all things, this cosmic questioning, has shown us, is that *creation* is the most fundamental feature of this world-order, that everywhere and at all times the process of *genesis eis ousian* is ongoing – the forming, limiting, unifying of things which is their emergence into their being. When we recognize the presence of this process in ourselves, we recognize our own inseparable connection to the order of creation, and at the same time the extraordinary nature of that connection. The question of how we are to live the mixed life, how we are to integrate ourselves as intellectual and sensual, which aspect of ourselves is to assume the leading role, the *causal* role in the mixed life, is answered by the way causality manifests itself in human beings – as *logos*, the power of intellect. Our sensuality in turn is a reflection of *apeiron*, the aspect of the cosmic order which, considered in itself, lacks determinacy and completion, and at the same time is, literally, the embodiment of determinacy, its concretion, in the process of generation. We experience the lack of completion as desire, and its obtainment as pleasure. The bringing of completion to that incompleteness requires the causal activity of the intellect, its recognition of the end we seek, our *telos*, our measure, and its bringing of that end to existence. It requires an orientation towards our mixture as both ideal and reality, and thus the acceptance of the task of bringing that ideal *to* reality.

Both the disjunction of ideal and reality and the task of bringing them to unity are present for us in our being, as reflective of the nature of the good for us, because we are beings for whom both the seeking and the obtaining of an end are possibilities, for whom desiring and knowing come together in purposeful activity, the unity of theory and practice, the seeking of wisdom, the *techné* of philosophy.

Nevertheless, the very fact that the generative order is manifest in us in this way indicates the possibility of *failing* to bring ideal and reality together, of failing to unite desiring and knowing, theory and practice, of failing to bring about our truth and our good. This failure can be seen chiefly in two different ways of relating the intellect and pleasure which do not reflect the measure of the cosmic order and thus do not bring measure into one's life and oneself: when the intellect *subjects* itself to sensuality, and when the intellect *rejects* sensuality – what we might call the life of pleasure and the life of knowledge, respectively.

The subjection of intellect to sensuality is also an expression of causality and activity on the part of the intellect, but it is intellect turning against itself, intellect lowering itself from master to servant by elevating pleasure to the ruling place in one's life. Since pleasure reflects our sensuality, and our sensuality is a reflection of the *apeiron*, the unformed, the disordered, the unlimited, to elevate it to the ruling place in one's life is to reject the task of ordering oneself, to allow the diversity of one's nature to rule at the expense of unity. One forfeits one's end as a human being in favor of the countless, literally the unlimited ends of individual desires, which rule in turn simply according to their relative strength at any given moment. Plato offers a vivid vision of this life in Book IX of the *Republic*, in his description of the tyrannical soul, which reduces itself to slavery and chaos by giving up control over its desires and allowing them to wage a civil war among themselves for mastery of the soul. Paradoxically, living for pleasure, when this life is taken to its logical extreme, results in endless pain and misery; whereas mastering one's desires allows their ultimate end to be realized – the obtainment of happiness, which is the obtainment of the good. Rejecting the governance of intellect destroys the possibility of action and accomplishment, reduces one to extreme passivity, and renders the extraordinary human manifestation of cosmic creativity null and void. The loss of the good and the loss of one's human possibilities are thus in effect the same thing, and result from the loss or rather the rejection of the practicality which comes only through the power of creative *logos*.

But what about the opposite life? Does its rejection of sensuality in favor of the intellect allow for the full expression of the power of *logos*? Is the life of knowledge the most practical life? Surely it is at any rate the most theoretical life. In fact, how-

ever, it is neither the most practical nor the most theoretical life. This life attempts to find the good in knowledge, in truth, in the objectivity of things, and it dismisses as far as possible the material, sensual, and subjective side of existence. Its thought is divorced from production, its life from action. It therefore rejects the greatest power of the intellect, namely, causality; and far from releasing *logos* from the bonds of sensuality to some higher realization of its nature, it rather stunts and distorts it, turning the intellect from the ordering power of the soul into a mere device for reflecting the reality beyond it – a mirror, to use Nietzsche’s metaphor for what he calls the “objective man.”¹

It is not difficult to see why happiness and the good will elude such a man, for his life seeks to eliminate one of the central components of the good, even *the* central component, as Socrates said: namely, desire. That he nevertheless does desire, and orients his life after the desire for knowledge, shows the basic falsity and hypocrisy of this life. In fact, this falsity and the distortion of *logos* just noted give rise to a paradox comparable to the inability of a life lived for pleasure to secure pleasure: the life of knowledge does not gain knowledge and truth; the theoretical life, if we want to call it that, is not even properly theoretical. For in attempting to reject sensuality and subjectivity, it ignores a crucial aspect of the nature of all existing things, and thus an aspect of their truth. It misconceives the basic structure of the cosmos, holding stasis and abstraction to be truth, rather than movement and change. And most importantly, because the “objective man” fails to see the fundamentally practical function of the intellect, he does not turn the quest for knowledge inward, does not seek to follow the advice of the oracle, does not seek to know *himself*. Knowledge, for him, does not find its end in wisdom; truth does not find its end in the good.

Here too the highest possibilities of human existence are lost, and for the same reason at bottom: the creative power of *logos* is lost, its highest function of integrating human existence and bringing the measure of the good into living reality in the mixed life. This power is lost, and these lives fail, because they both flee from the burden and the task posed by one’s own embodied existence. The one flees from it by seeking to blot out all sensuality, the other, by maximizing sensuality; but the end result, despite the appearance of extreme opposition, is much the same: the loss of one’s humanity and oneself. The intellect is shown by the negative possibilities of these lives to be fully intellectual or theoretical only in its practicality, and to be fully practical only in its grasp of the end of human nature and the measure to which hu-

¹ Cf. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Chapter Six, esp. Section 207.

man nature must conform to obtain the good. Once we accept the task of living the good life, our questioning of its nature can take place only within this context; theoretical inquiry need not be bad, and indeed can be good, but only if it is subordinated to the central task of questioning one's self, one's ends and possibilities; and in turn, practical activity is neither bad nor good except in the light of the existential imperative of the good: to create it in the measuring of one's own life.

Where then does this leave us? The practicality of philosophy, I have argued, lies in its simultaneous inquiry into the nature of the good, the measure of human excellence and worth, and its bringing of that measure into one's life. Its practical producing cannot be separated from its theoretical inquiring, a situation I have expressed by calling philosophy a *techne*, though of a very unusual sort. As our inquiry into the nature of the measure, the order in all things, has shown, this measure is revealed most fully in human beings; our outward inquiry is thus turned inward and becomes an inquiry into ourselves *as* embodiments of the measure of the good. This embodiment is our truth, but we find it only by bringing it into being, for the very nature of the good is the bringing into being of its measure, the *measuring* of things by unifying their diversity in harmonious mixture.

In pondering this situation, one might well wonder whether there is something circular about this whole process. The practicality of philosophy is explained in theoretical terms as a kind of inquiry, but its theoretical side, this inquiry, is supposed to be a sort of creative self-revelation, productive activity. We are never really told how to measure up to the measure by measuring ourselves; the whole process seems utterly self-referential. At least, one might protest, the heroes provided us with an example of the good, even if it was not to be emulated by anyone but the heroes themselves. At least the poets could be identified as the authority behind this measure of excellence and worth, even if we wish to reject it. But this *questioning* of the measure, which at once disperses its source and authority both outwards to the cosmos itself and inwards to one's own life, seems to remove any secure reference point by which one might justify or even clarify it. Certainly this is the case. But one cannot obtain an answer without questioning; one cannot know a life without experiencing it; and one cannot gain wisdom without loving it. The affair of philosophy, like a love affair, provides its own justification. The dialogue must eventually end and life begin – though indeed, for philosophy, to talk about the affair is also to engage in it.