

PRACTICING
PHILOSOPHY

Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life

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Introduction

THE PHILOSOPHICAL LIFE

A Renewed Poetics of Philosophy

I

Why undertake the practice of philosophy? Even readers already deeply engaged in this practice are not spared the question: the critical, self-reflective nature of philosophy demands it. Teachers seeking to convince their students of philosophy's value must repeatedly examine it themselves. Students deciding to devote their lives to philosophy should explore what exactly it offers and amounts to, particularly given its uncertainty as an academic career.

“There are nowadays professors of philosophy, but not philosophers. Yet it is admirable to profess because it was once admirable to live.” These words from Thoreau's *Walden* pose as much a question as a reproach.¹ What does it mean to be a philosopher? Is it not enough to study, write, and teach this subject in some academic institution, or does being a philosopher require something else, perhaps a special way of living? Defining the philosopher as one who practices philosophy only returns us to the questions of what that practice entails and what is its value. This book is an exploration of these questions, though it can illuminate only a small fraction of their immense scope.

Philosophy resists conclusive definition not only because of its historical diversity and open future, but because its precise nature, limits, and best exemplars are continuously debated. While some claim philosophy as science and others as poetry, it has also been identified with ideology,

