Practicing Philosophy

Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life

Richard Shusterman

Routledge
New York and London
# CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

Introduction  The Philosophical Life  
*A Renewed Poetics of Philosophy*  1

1 Profiles of the Philosophical Life  
*Dewey, Wittgenstein, Foucault*  17

## Part I  Ethics and Politics

2 Pragmatism and Liberalism between  
Dewey and Rorty  67

3 Putnam and Cavell on the Ethics of Democracy  89

## Part II  Art, Knowledge, Praxis

4 Reason and Aesthetics between Modernity  
and Postmodernity  
*Habermas and Rorty*  113

5 Art in Action, Art Infraction  
*Goodman, Rap, Pragmatism*  
(New Reality Mix)  131

## Part III  Embodiment and Ethnicity

6 Somatic Experience  
*Foundation or Reconstruction?*  157

7 Next Year in Jerusalem?  
*Jewish Identity and the Myth of Return*  179

Notes  197

Index  241
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. 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,
therapy, and even autobiography (as the systematic articulation of one's own experience and/or wishes of the world). Most of the best philosophy seems to have most of these elements.

Since the productive richness of its complex, contested nature more than compensates for its definitional frustrations, it seems wrong to force philosophy into a single form or function. Two is not much better. So without claiming they exhaust the field, let me distinguish two basic philosophical forms that seem salient in philosophy's tradition and can introduce the argument of this book. One practice, call it "theory," concerns the formulation or criticism of general, systematic views about the world—including human nature, knowledge, and the institutions of human society. Anyone who treats the standard topics of academic philosophy (e.g. theories of meaning, being, truth, knowledge, value, justice, art, and the like) is practicing philosophy in this theoretical sense—no matter whether the vision formulated is scientific, poetic, or ideological, or whether it expresses autobiographical or therapeutic interests.

Thoreau's complaint evokes, in contrast, another way of practicing philosophy: as an art of living. His experiment of living at Walden Pond can best be appreciated in such terms. More than an eccentric flight of romantic primitivism, it is a radical effort to recover the ancient idea of practicing philosophy as a concrete way of life that is as rewarding as it is demanding. His reproachful contrast of false academic philosophy to the true practice of living philosophy builds on a long tradition that was extremely powerful before modernity's academic professionalization of philosophy, and it still echoes in moderns like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

In this tradition, philosophers like Cicero, Epictetus, Seneca, and Montaigne disapprove pure theorists as mere "grammarians" and "mathematicians" who, devoting more "care and attention to their speech ... than to their lives," "teach us how to argue instead of how to live." Philosophy, in this tradition, derives her value and "authority over other arts" because she is "the mistress of the art of life itself." Consequently, "this most valuable of all arts, the art of living well," is tested more in the quality of one's concrete life than in that of one's theoretical writings. "Philosophy," says Seneca, "takes as her aim the state of happiness" not of book learning, whose zealous pursuit can be not merely useless but harmful. Some eminent philosophers, Diogenes Laertius reports, "wrote nothing at all," and, like Socrates, conveyed their teaching primarily through the conduct of their exemplary lives rather than by formulated doctrines. As Montaigne writes: "To compose our character is our duty, not to compose books ... Our great and glorious masterpiece is to live appropriately."

Since Thoreau's time, this alternative tradition of philosophy as an art of living has become even further eclipsed, suppressed by the institutions of professional philosophy. The idea of philosophy as a deliberative life-practice that brings lives of beauty and happiness to its practitioners is as foreign to professional philosophy today as astrology is to astrophysics. This is not good for professional philosophy, increasingly marginalized in our pragmatic society by its apparent irrelevance to our lives and by growing doubts about its scientific value. Nor is it good for the millions of intelligent people who must look to far less thoughtful sources than philosophy in trying to develop what the vernacular terms "a philosophy of life." The idea of philosophy as "self-help" in the art of living may bring a scornful smirk from most professional philosophers. But self-help was once philosophy's prime goal, and it remains a worthy one, whose attraction and utility go far beyond the narrow circle who hope to earn their living in the academy. In reviving this idea of philosophy's art of living, this book hopes to broaden the meaning and appeal of practicing philosophy.

Though one may usefully distinguish between philosophy as theory and as artful living—between books and life—one must not erect this into a false dichotomy. First, writing is not only a mode of living, but, already by the Hellenistic age, an important tool for artfully working on oneself—both as a medium of self-knowledge and of self-transformation. Hence the very advocates of philosophy as an art of living made writing (in such diverse forms as letters, diaries, confessions, essays, treatises, handbooks, poems) a central part of that art. Moreover, writing provides a means of recording, communicating, and thus preserving the philosopher's model of life far beyond the immediate circle of his living presence. What would Socrates be for us without the writings of Plato and Xenophon?

Secondly, philosophical theories of the world typically serve as logical grounds or guiding orientations through which philosophical arts of living are developed and defended. Epicureanism is a case in point. Holding that philosophy's prime aim was to achieve a life of happiness (conceived
in terms of unmixed tranquil pleasures and best achieved through a simple, retiring life), Epicurus produced a complex theory of nature and human reality that both justified and facilitated his art of living.

Since the greatest obstacles to Epicurean happiness were anxieties caused by beliefs concerning the gods' interference in our affairs and concerning the soul's life after death, Epicurean theory tried to remove these fears by arguing that all there is are only atoms and the void. Nature is thus governed not by divine volitions but by mere mechanical causes of atoms and space. Moreover, by claiming that even the soul is corporeal, Epicurus could argue that there is no sentience, hence nothing to fear, after its dissolution in death. Again, since we often worry how hard it is to get pleasure or endure certain pains, Epicurean natural theory—by indicating the nature and limits of human pains and pleasures—shows how a pleasurable life may be attained through simple measures. Thus even if theory had "no other end in view than peace of mind," Epicurus still held it necessary for the art of living, for without its "study of nature there was no enjoyment of unmixed pleasures."5

Stoic ethics, which emphasized living in simple consistency with nature and in tranquil acceptance of its providence, were likewise supported by a philosophical theory (far more extensive than the Epicurean) that viewed the whole natural world as a perfect, living organic unity, whose parts, as necessary to the whole, must be accepted. Similarly, it would be hard to detach Aristotle's ethical ideal of *thoria* from the metaphysics which provided its divine object; and how could Plato urge a life for quest for a vision of the Forms, without presenting a philosophical theory that showed their supreme existence and value?

The point I am making is that there is no essential opposition compelling us to choose between philosophy as theory and as artful life-practice. Indeed, we must not choose between them. For even if we doubt that every art of living entails a full-blown philosophical theory and every theory expresses a way of life, we surely should build our art of living on our knowledge and vision of the world, and reciprocally seek the knowledge that serves our art of living. Philosophy is strongest when both its modes of practice are combined to reinforce each other as they did in ancient philosophy.

One great difference between us and the ancients is that philosophical theory no longer seems a major source of knowledge of the world. The various natural and human sciences that emerged from philosophy have assumed this function, while its role as an art of living has been forgotten and repressed through academic philosophy's anxious insistence on its scientific, theoretical status (even while often claiming its autonomy from "ordinary" science).7 To make its case, academic philosophy typically stresses the purity of its theoretical stance. Knowledge of truth is the highest end and is sought for its own sake; hence "applied" philosophy is regarded as inferior.

Questioning the thirst for knowledge for its own sake, Hellenistic philosophers like Epicurus or Seneca were more appreciative of philosophy's practical utility. Knowledge was often regarded as having mainly instrumental value for something higher—such as happiness or virtue—that was not reducible to truth and could override the quest for truth when they conflicted. Nonetheless, precisely because (and to the extent) it was instrumental to the good life, knowledge was highly prized and sought. Montaigne displays the same respectful subordination of knowledge to utility for self-care and good living, and he judged the ancient philosophical schools accordingly: "some sects have rather followed truth, others utility, whereby the latter have gained credit."8

II

Pragmatism, as I see it, represents a return to this practical perspective and thus deserves its Jamesian description as "a new name for old ways of thinking." It is no "evasion of philosophy," but the revival of a tradition that saw theory as a useful instrument to a higher philosophical practice: the art of living wisely and well. This is evident in the way Dewey champions science while claiming that it, like all knowledge, is but a "handmaiden" to art—conceived widely as the experiential enrichment of life. Pragmatism therefore forms the focus of this book and its guiding orientation in combining philosophical theory with a plea for the reconstruction of philosophy as an art of living. Though its value is best measured by the book's results, I can offer some introductory reasons for my pragmatist focus—apart, of course, from the intrinsic interest in pragmatism itself as an increasingly vital, influential philosophy.

Since the art of living must be a practical art, pragmatism's emphasis on the practical seems particularly suitable. Moreover, it was through
my work on *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* that philosophy as an art of living first emerged for me as a crucial, contemporary theme. Noting our culture’s current concern for lifestyles rather than moralities, my book charted the aestheticization of ethics in recent Anglo-American and continental theory. Philosophers showed growing recognition that ethical decisions of how to live could not be logically derived from man’s essence or from uncontestable principles, but instead require, like aesthetic judgments, creative and critical imagination. Michel Foucault and Richard Rorty, however, urged a far stronger claim: the aesthetic life as an ethical ideal. Adopting Nietzsche’s injunction to make oneself a work of art, they advocated philosophical life as radically original aesthetic self-creation.

But why should something clearly practical like an art of living (techné tou bion) be specifically aesthetic? Doesn’t the term “art” here (as in the terms “martial arts” or “medical arts”) mean a useful skill, technique, or knowledge rather than the aesthetic creation of fine art (which the Greeks called poiesis)? Shouldn’t philosophy as an art of living be therefore assimilated to a more “technical” model like the medical model of healing souls (as indeed it often was), rather than to an aesthetic-poetic one? Indeed, how can one recommend that the practical art of living be pursued as an aesthetic life when philosophy generally defines the aesthetic precisely by opposition to the practical, just as it defines art by its oppositional contrast with real life? Is the aesthetic life, then, not a withdrawal from social reality and praxis? And is the private beauty of one’s self the best a philosopher can hope or strive for? Moreover, why must radical originality be required for stylizing the self aesthetically? Since very few people can meet this demand, must philosophical living be limited to a very narrow elite?

Pragmatism, as I conceive it after Dewey, offers a distinctive way of defending the aesthetic model of philosophical life against these troubling questions by undermining the traditional, stifling oppositions on which they are based. Recognizing art’s deep roots in life’s needs and interests—both natural and societal—pragmatism incorporates the practical and cognitive, along with the somatic and social, as contributing elements in aesthetic experience. Urging the greater integration of life and art for their mutual improvement, pragmatism’s natural direction is the art of living. Moreover, by locating aesthetic value in the coherent richness of lived experience, not in radical originality or elite refinement, pragmatism suggests a way of making this living art more accessible and democratic than either Rorty or Foucault construes it.

Whether these suggestions amount to anything more than naive optimism and vague slogans can be seen only by pursuing the detailed working out and application of the arguments found in this book. The pragmatist vision sketched here is not, of course, shared by all pragmatists. Far from a uniform school, pragmatism has always displayed different views and interests, while regarding plurality as an advantage more than a weakness. My comparative analysis of different pragmatist thinkers on topics relating to the philosophical life displays this productive variety and, by playing their different views against each other, hopes to forge still more useful strategies.

This melioristic impulse is central to pragmatism and provides another reason for treating the philosophical life through a pragmatist perspective. If we are truly interested in practicing philosophy as an art of living, we should not simply want to know what that practice is or was. We should be especially interested in making it better. This does not imply that pragmatism has or needs a pregiven, univocal answer to what exactly “better” means. “Better for whom?” is always a valid question, and differing characters and life-conditions may favor different directions for philosophical living, as well as different levels of advancement in a given direction. Acknowledging this pluralism, pragmatism should urge that philosophy’s art of better living not be construed so as to confine it in principle to a small elite. For pragmatism’s democratic faith is part and parcel of its meliorism.

Pragmatic meliorism also explains my narrow focus on a handful of twentieth-century philosophers. Of course, the long tradition of philosophical life must be more thoroughly explored. Earlier ages, particularly ancient times, deserve special study. For then the idea of philosophy as an art of living was developed with greater care and detail, because it was far more central to philosophical practice. Through the path-breaking research of Foucault and Pierre Hadot, and the more recent scholarship of Peter Brown, Martha Nussbaum, and Arnold Davidson, such study is fortunately well under way.

But for all its helpful reorientation, ancient thought is far too dated to provide real options for today’s pursuit of philosophical life. As Fou-
In a philosophical life must be pursued under certain life-conditions, those philosophical lives practiced closer to our present conditions are more likely to be useful in fashioning our own. This does not, of course, mean that the latest philosophy is necessarily the best. Preoccupation with new pressures and methods may blind us to other important values. The philosophical life involves so many dimensions and philosophical issues, and has been practiced or preached by many philosophers of diverse traditions, that the following seven essays can only scratch particular bits of a wide surface whose deeper exploration would demand several books. Together these essays raise (but cannot adequately answer) a series of complex questions that I list as a guide to reading and a spur to more systematic treatment.

1. What is the connection between the views of a philosopher and his or her life? To what extent are one's positions a product, justification, or instead a contrasting compensation for one's life? Long before Nietzsche claimed philosophy as disguised autobiography (a vision that justified one's life), Diogenes Laertius had explained philosophical views in terms of the philosopher's life-experience: the pre-Socratic Pittacus's advocacy of humility, for example, as the product of his marrying above his social rank. Was Pittacus justifying the humility his wife made him practice or instead advocating a humility that compensated for his initial pride in taking her on? Philosophy's reflection of life can take the form of inverted images. To what extent, then, do philosophical ideals of unity and tranquility serve as a compensation for lives of trouble and division? Do they ever function as a disguise or balance for lives that secretly sought variety and excitement? Such questions call for empirical study of the lives of philosophers, and so, in the first chapter, I consider three different exemplary philosophical lives: those of John Dewey, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Michel Foucault.

Advocacy of my pragmatist perspective must thus be tempered with recognition of its severe limitations. The philosophical life involves so many dimensions and philosophical issues, and has been practiced or preached by so many philosophers of diverse traditions, that the following seven essays can only scratch particular bits of a wide surface whose deeper exploration would demand several books. Together these essays raise (but cannot adequately answer) a series of complex questions that I list as a guide to reading and a spur to more systematic treatment.

II

Advocacy of my pragmatist perspective must thus be tempered with recognition of its severe limitations. The philosophical life involves so many dimensions and philosophical issues, and has been practiced or preached by so many philosophers of diverse traditions, that the following seven essays can only scratch particular bits of a wide surface whose deeper exploration would demand several books. Together these essays raise (but cannot adequately answer) a series of complex questions that I list as a guide to reading and a spur to more systematic treatment.

1. What is the connection between the views of a philosopher and his or her life? To what extent are one's positions a product, justification, or instead a contrasting compensation for one's life? Long before Nietzsche claimed philosophy as disguised autobiography (a vision that justified one's life), Diogenes Laertius had explained philosophical views in terms of the philosopher's life-experience: the pre-Socratic Pittacus's advocacy of humility, for example, as the product of his marrying above his social rank. Was Pittacus justifying the humility his wife made him practice or instead advocating a humility that compensated for his initial pride in taking her on? Philosophy's reflection of life can take the form of inverted images. To what extent, then, do philosophical ideals of unity and tranquility serve as a compensation for lives of trouble and division? Do they ever function as a disguise or balance for lives that secretly sought variety and excitement? Such questions call for empirical study of the lives of philosophers, and so, in the first chapter, I consider three different exemplary philosophical lives: those of John Dewey, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Michel Foucault.

2. In what measure can one's philosophy be refuted or validated by one's life? Argumentum ad hominem is today considered a glaring logical fallacy and is surely irrelevant to philosophy's more formal, abstract issues. But in premodern times it was common to test a philosophy's practiced value by the philosopher's life, often with particular emphasis on his way of facing death—life's ultimate test. As Montaigne praises Socrates, Cleanthes, and Seneca for how they managed and ended their lives, so he condemns Cicero for the wretched, cowardly way he concluded his. If we should practice what we preach, and if, pragmatically, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, then how can we exclude arguments that relate a philosophy of life to the concrete life lived?
Yet we cannot simply equate the philosophy with the life. For concrete life involves many irrelevancies as well as important contingencies that, as uncontrollable (hence often unrepeatable), cannot be advocated as part of a philosophy that another could adopt. To identify life and thought completely would mean that two individuals could not share a philosophy. Moreover, fortune’s overwhelming power seems to make the quality of a life more than a mere matter of having the right philosophy.

But if we can’t strictly equate a philosophy of life with the philosopher’s concrete life, to what extent can we judge the philosophy by the life? Finally, if we try to answer this question by distinguishing between essential and irrelevant features of a philosopher’s life, we face the further question of how to distinguish between them. Though some features (like education) seem always pertinent, even apparently inessential ones (e.g., physical size or birthday or taste for wine) may be proved significant by a convincing interpretation of the life that so portrays them. Here, as elsewhere in philosophy, empirical facts and general rules do not suffice for decisive answers.

3. If being a student or professor of philosophical theory does not entail leading a truly philosophical life, what more is needed? Though not a sufficient condition, is being a theorist at least necessary? Or is it possible to live a philosophical life in (and not merely while) doing the work of a poet, priest, or painter, a physicist or politician, or even a plumber or pimp? If limited to only philosophical theorists, is it further limited to great, original theorists? And if practicing theory is not a necessary condition, perhaps greatness or originality is? For Montaigne (echoing the ancients), a life without eminence or novelty could count as philosophical if its careful pursuit of self-knowledge and self-improvement leads to a life of order, beauty, and tranquillity. But is actually reaching these (or other) goals a necessary condition, or does the proper pursuit of them in itself suffice? Such issues determine whether we can advocate philosophy for everyone, as Socrates did when urging that the unexamined life was not worth living.

4. They also amount to asking “what exactly is the philosophical life?” Among the vast variety of individual philosophical lives, can we discern a coherent tradition or genre, perhaps with different subgenres or models (e.g., Epicurean, Stoic, aesthetic dandy)? Or must every truly philosophical life determine its own genre by its originality? What are this life’s defining features or highest values? While truth and self-knowledge are philosophy’s standard ideals, other values of ameliorative self-care have been advocated as equally (and sometimes even more) essential: health and tranquillity, beauty and pleasure, heroic virtue and novelty. Philosophy has often been described as the life of the mind, but to what extent can bodily practices (e.g., diet and exercises of somatic fitness and awareness) form part of the philosophical life?

5. Finally, what are the roots of our notion of the philosophical life, and how has it evolved from ancient to contemporary times? Socrates’ heroic life is typically regarded as establishing its paradigm, but one can explore earlier exemplars that may have guided him as they have inspired later philosophers. Such exemplars might include not only earlier philosophers (Pythagoras, Heraclitus), but also priests, poets, and mythological heroes, not all perhaps of Western origin. In what ways do contemporary models of philosophical life depart from the ancient? The ancients, for example, seem more focused on tranquillity, while today there is far greater emphasis on radical originality.

What are the major internal and external pressures that directed the evolution of philosophical life and its significant suppression in recent Western philosophy? Two likely explanations of the latter are the depersonalization of knowledge by modern science and Christianity’s appropriation of the central functions of self-examination, self-redemption, and direction of life. But such historical transformations demand far more exploration, coupled with a comparative analysis of the philosophical life’s different evolution in non-Western traditions.

The complex research program sketched above guides (though clearly exceeds) the efforts of this book, which has three primary aims. To reanimate interest in the philosophical life—not only for theoretical study but for actual practice. To demonstrate the merits of the aesthetic model of such life. To explore and develop the value of contemporary pragmatism both for showing the importance of philosophy as an art of living and for providing strategies to practice it better.

These aims explain the book’s structure. The long first chapter provides my initial case for the aesthetic model of philosophical life. After
tracing this model back to Socrates, where it exists alongside a rival medical model of therapy, I analyze its contemporary elaboration in the life-philosophies and actual lives of three great philosophers: Dewey, Wittgenstein, and Foucault. Together they represent the three major currents of twentieth-century Western philosophy (pragmatism, analysis, and continental theory) as well as three different but overlapping generations of it.

These philosophers display not only divergent versions of aesthetic life that stem from differing views of art, but also a common core of values (growth, integrity, courage, as well as truth and beauty). These values are differently expressed in the multiple, interrelated dimensions in which philosophical life is pursued: the cognitive and aesthetic, the ethical, social, and political, and also the somatic. Recurrent problems in (and often between) these dimensions are shown to challenge, in life as well as theory, the viability of the aesthetic model of philosophy. The book then tackles such problems in individual chapters by focusing on their treatment by particular philosophers.

That the dimensions of philosophical life should not be sharply separated is a central theme of this book. But for the linear demands of exposition, I divide them as follows. The section “Ethics and Politics” concerns the tension between philosophy’s devotion to care for the self and its need to care for others. The section’s two chapters treat this dialectic of self and society by examining the topics of liberalism, community, and democracy in the theories of Dewey, Rorty, Putnam, and Cavell. Offering a variety of arguments (including aesthetic ones) for participatory democracy, I try to combine the Deweyean faith in self-fulfillment through public engagement together with a recognition both of today’s fragmented public sphere and of the other-directed dimension of ameliorative work on oneself: the Emersonian idea that the quest for a higher self not only aims at an “other” self but serves as an inspiring example to others.

The next chapter therefore considers a current cultural form that claims to combine embodied aesthetics, rational knowledge, and social praxis, while advocating itself explicitly as a life-philosophy. I refer to the hip-hop genre of “knowledge rap,” whose strong positive presence has been obscured by the overwhelming media hype over “gangsta rap.” As rap’s image as thoughtless, ruthless negativity becomes darker than ever, so Pragmatist Aesthetics’ case for rap continues to provoke polemical misunderstandings. Chapter five tries to bolster the pragmatist-rap alliance by showing the reciprocally reinforcing affinities between Nelson Goodman’s pragmatism and rap’s philosophical-aesthetic practice. As Goodman argues for art’s cognitive value and philosophy’s creative art of “world-making,” so knowledge rappers like KRS-One and Guru see their art as a practical form of philosophy devoted not only to aesthetic and cognitive transformation but also to ethical and political reform. For such rap philosophers, hip-hop becomes a comprehensive art of embodied living that embraces everything from metaphysics, politics, and economics to the ethics and aesthetics of ethnicity, fashion, sex, and diet.

In the book’s final section, I develop the crucial themes of somatics and ethnicity, long repressed by philosophy’s commitments to idealism and universalism. Much philosophical resistance to the body derives from its apparent nondiscursive aspects. But rather than taking the currently fashionable “textualist” line of asserting the body’s total discursivity, I instead defend the notion of nondiscursive somatic experience through a reconstructive critique of Dewey. After rescuing nondiscurr-
tracing this model back to Socrates, where it exists alongside a rival medical model of therapy, I analyze its contemporary elaboration in the life-philosophies and actual lives of three great philosophers: Dewey, Wittgenstein, and Foucault. Together they represent the three major currents of twentieth-century Western philosophy (pragmatism, analysis, and continental theory) as well as three different but overlapping generations of it.

These philosophers display not only divergent versions of aesthetic life that stem from differing views of art, but also a common core of values (growth, integrity, courage, as well as truth and beauty). These values are differently expressed in the multiple, interrelated dimensions in which philosophical life is pursued: the cognitive and aesthetic, the ethical, social, and political, and also the somatic. Recurrent problems in (and often between) these dimensions are shown to challenge, in life as well as theory, the viability of the aesthetic model of philosophy. The book then tackles such problems in individual chapters by focusing on their treatment by particular philosophers.

That the dimensions of philosophical life should not be sharply separated is a central theme of this book. But for the linear demands of exposition, I divide them as follows. The section “Ethics and Politics” concerns the tension between philosophy’s devotion to care for the self and its need to care for others. The section’s two chapters treat this dialectic of self and society by examining the topics of liberalism, community, and democracy in the theories of Dewey, Rorty, Putnam, and Cavell. Offering a variety of arguments (including aesthetic ones) for participatory democracy, I try to combine the Deweyean faith in self-fulfillment through public engagement together with a recognition both of today’s fragmented public sphere and of the other-directed dimension of ameliorative work on oneself: the Emersonian idea that the quest for a higher self not only aims at an “other” self but serves as an inspiring example to others.

The next part (“Art, Knowledge, Praxis”) attacks the traditional philosophical oppositions that divide the aesthetic from both the cognitive and practical, thus making the aesthetic practice of philosophy seem a double contradiction. Building on Pragmatist Aesthetics’ detailed critique of these dualisms, I elaborate its argument that pragmatism provides greater power to both art and philosophy, not only by emphasizing the practical and cognitive life-interests in art and defending the legitimacy of art’s popular forms, but also by reviving the idea of philosophy as an art of living.14

Recognizing that life’s aestheticization has been diagnosed as a postmodern danger, chapter four treats the modernity/postmodernity debate through a comparative critique of the theories of Habermas and Rorty. Their conflicting valuations of postmodernity project the idea of an essential opposition between reason and the aesthetic (which they contrastingly privilege). This implies a false choice for philosophy between Rorty’s privatist aestheticism and Habermas’s public-centered rationalism. But philosophy can be both aesthetic and rational, while embracing an essential dimension of life that Rorty and Habermas ignore—the somatic.

The next chapter therefore considers a current cultural form that claims to combine embodied aesthetics, rational knowledge, and social praxis, while advocating itself explicitly as a life-philosophy. I refer to the hip-hop genre of “knowledge rap,” whose strong positive presence has been obscured by the overwhelming media hype over “gangsta rap.” As rap’s image as thoughtless, ruthless negativity becomes darker than ever, so Pragmatist Aesthetics’ case for rap continues to provoke polemical misunderstandings. Chapter five tries to bolster the pragmatist-rap alliance by showing the reciprocally reinforcing affinities between Nelson Goodman’s pragmatism and rap’s philosophical-aesthetic practice. As Goodman argues for art’s cognitive value and philosophy’s creative art of “world-making,” so knowledge rappers like KRS-One and Guru see their art as a practical form of philosophy devoted not only to aesthetic and cognitive transformation but also to ethical and political reform. For such rap philosophers, hip-hop becomes a comprehensive art of embodied living that embraces everything from metaphysics, politics, and economics to the ethics and aesthetics of ethnicity, fashion, sex, and diet.

In the book’s final section, I develop the crucial themes of somatics and ethnicity, long repressed by philosophy’s commitments to idealism and universalism. Much philosophical resistance to the body derives from its apparent nondiscursive aspects. But rather than taking the currently fashionable “textualist” line of asserting the body’s total discursivity, I instead defend the notion of nondiscursive somatic experience through a reconstructive critique of Dewey. After rescuing nondiscur-
sive experience from its abuses in foundationalist epistemology, I suggest some ways that somatics can be usefully incorporated into philosophy both as a topic for critical theory and as a dimension for disciplined practice in philosophy's art of better living through self-examination and self-creation.

Self-examination is surely central to the book's final chapter, which treats the vexed issue of Jewish identity. While engaging the views of others, I also focus on my own Jewish experience. This is not merely because I know it best, or because it seems instructively multiform (including life as Israeli, as diaspora Jew, and, if it may count as a special category, as a Jewish American). I focus on my experience of the problem of Jewish identity because the prime philosophical interest of the problem is an existential one: what should one make, if anything, of one's Jewish identity in the construction of one's life? This means, in my case, my life and Jewishness.

After advocating philosophy as a self-critical art of living by studying the thought and lives of others, it seems appropriate to conclude by applying this philosophical vision, at long last, to a central, still unresolved problem of my own. To shirk this exercise would contradict the whole pragmatic thrust of the book.

If the final chapter seems a special exercise in the old philosophical genre of self-examining meditation, then the composition of this book as a totality stands as a symbol of the philosophical life's struggle to unite its particular interests and contingent occasions into a coherent whole. All the essays here, written over the last five years, were shaped by the general intuition that philosophy should be a tool for the better practice of life, where "better" was conceived in broad aesthetic terms. But, my idea of producing a book on pragmatism and the philosophical life took decisive form more recently, in 1993, when sympathetic critics urged that *Pragmatist Aesthetics* should have gone farther in fleshing out the model of aesthetic life it advocated against Foucault's and Rorty's.

By then, preliminary versions of four of the book's chapters had already been drafted for the special occasions that simultaneously structure, adorn, and harass the professional life of a philosopher. In preparing this book, I was urged by some colleagues to simply abandon these individual essays. Though cannibalizing their material, I should start writing the book again from scratch to produce a more seamlessly unified whole — what is still sometimes called, even after poststructuralism, a "real" book. But if philosophy is like life, you cannot really start again from scratch, even if you pretend to. Moreover, the points I wanted most to make remained closely tied to particular problems and thinkers I had either treated or wished later to treat in individual case studies of contemporary pragmatism.

Other friends recommended the standard practice of simply leaving one's essays as they were originally published (even if one has thought far past them) and then justifying this maneuver as being faithful to the history of one's thought while providing a handy documentation of it. Though this may seem the easiest alternative, it was too hard for me. Unable to flatter myself that readers would want such a history, I also felt that it would be unfaithful to my current thinking, which is naturally more important to me and should also be to my readers. For many of my earlier published views were significantly revised and updated through the recontextualizing process of considering them together as part of a book.

If philosophy, like life, is a continual exercise in reinterpreting the experience of one's self and surroundings, then the essays had to be revised as part of such reinterpretation. If the art of life involves appreciating particulars in their particularity while reshaping them so that they better contribute to a richer, coherent whole, then this book's composition is an analogue of life's art — even with its difficulties and failures.