Introduction

Philosophy is a theoretical discipline. It has few practical implications for everyday life. The various fields of "applied" philosophy that have emerged in recent years—medical or business ethics, for example—have been quickly absorbed by the professions they concern. To the extent that they really are practical, these fields belong more to medicine or business than to philosophy itself. Philosophy also has few implications for the life of those who practice it. What philosophers study makes no more claim to affecting their personal lives than the work of physicists, mathematicians, or economists is expected to affect theirs. And yet there is a lingering sense in most people as well as in a few philosophers that somehow that is not how matters should be, a sense of puzzlement and even of disappointment that the lives of philosophers do not reflect their convictions.

"Philosophy is a theoretical discipline." Like many general statements, this one too conceals a perfect tense in its apparently timeless "is." The truth is that philosophy *has become* a theoretical discipline over time and as a result of many complex historical developments. The "fact" that its "nature" is theoretical is nothing but the historically given reality that philosophy has mainly been practiced as a theoretical discipline for as long as the knowledge and memory of most philosophers extend. Since we generally tend to consider what is true near us to be true everywhere else as well and to identify the products of history with the facts of nature, we also believe that our current practice displays the unchanging essence of philosophy. Which is not to say that philosophy "really" is a practical discipline after all: that would simply be to confuse another one of its his-

torical phases with its nature; it would betray the same lack of historical sense.

During the period that began with classical Greece and ended in late pagan antiquity, philosophy was more than a merely theoretical discipline. Even when Aristotle identified philosophy with "theory," his purpose was to argue, as he does in the tenth and last book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that a *life* of theoretical activity, the life of philosophy, was the best life that human beings could lead. One could not lead such a life unless one acquired not only a number of philosophical views but also, over time and through serious effort, the very particular sort of character whose elements and presuppositions Aristotle described and justified in the previous nine books of the *Ethics*. The theoretical life, in turn, affects the character of those who lead it. Theory and practice, discourse and life, affect one another; people become philosophers because they are able and willing to be the best human type and to live as well as a human being possibly can.[1] What one believes and how one lives have a direct bearing on one another.

Since my own view is that no single mode of life exists that is best for all people and that the philosophical life is only one among many praiseworthy ways of living, I do not urge a "return" to a conception of philosophy as a way of life, or, as I shall often call it in this book, the art of living. But I do believe that we should recognize that such a conception exists, study how it survives in some major modern philosophers, and see that it is what some of us are still doing today. This book aims at opening a space for a way of doing philosophy that constitutes an alternative, though not necessarily a competitor, to the manner in which philosophy is generally practiced in our time. Some philosophers want to find the answers to general and important questions, including questions about ethics and the nature of the good life, without believing that their answers have much to do with the kind of person they themselves turn out to be. Others believe that general views, when organized in the right manner and adhered to in everyday life, create a right sort of person—perhaps really good, perhaps simply unforgettable and, to that extent, admirable. In the case of pure theory, the only issue that matters is whether the answers to one's questions are or are not correct. In the case of theory that affects life, the truth of one's views is still an issue, but what also matters is the kind of person, the sort of self, one manages to construct as a result of accepting them.

The sort of self one constructs as a result of adopting certain theories is not simply a biographical matter. It is, much more importantly, a lit-

erary and philosophical accomplishment. The self presented by the philosophers I discuss here is to be found in their writings. It can function as an example that others, depending on their own views and preferences, can either imitate or avoid. It is a sort of blueprint that others with a similar purpose can follow, ignore, or deny as they form their own selves. It is a philosophical accomplishment because the content and nature of the self created in the process I will try to describe in what follows depends on holding views on issues that have traditionally been considered philosophical and not on anything one pleases. It is literary because the connection between those philosophical views is not only a matter of systematic logical interrelations but also, more centrally, a matter of style. It is a question of putting those views together so that, even when the connections between them are not strictly logical, it makes psychological and interpretative sense to attribute them to a single, coherent character. It is reasonable to say that a single person can hold them all. That is another way of saying that holding such views creates a character in the way that literary characters are created by and consist of everything they say and do within the works in which they appear. Philosophers of the art of living, however, usually play a double and more complex role. With the notable exception of Socrates, with whom their tradition originates, and a few others (the skeptic Pyrrho comes immediately to mind)[2] who did not compose any works of their own, they are both the characters their writings generate and the authors of the writings in which their characters exist. They are creators and creatures in one.

We are therefore faced with at least two conceptions of philosophy. One avoids personal style and idiosyncrasy as much as possible. Its aim is to deface the particular personality that offers answers to philosophical questions, since all that matters is the quality of the answers and not the nature of the character who offers them. The other requires style and idiosyncrasy because its readers must never forget that the views that confront them are the views of a particular type of person and of no one else. That is why it is composed in a self-conscious literary manner; and that is one of the reasons the modern philosophers I consider in this book—Montaigne, Nietzsche, and Foucault—have by and large belonged to literature, history, or anthropology departments and not to the traditional canon of analytical philosophy as it has been practiced so far. To theoretical philosophers, the construction of character appears to be merely a literary enterprise. And if we think, as we do, of philosophy in impersonal terms, it will be, as it has been, difficult to think of such authors as philosophers at all. The same is true, I believe, of other figures whom I do not

discuss here: they include (this is a partial list) Pascal, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Emerson, Thoreau, and, on one reading at least, Wittgenstein as well.

For a long time, each side has been suspicious of the other. Systematic philosophers think of the philosophers of the art of living at best as "poets" or literary figures, at worst as charlatans writing for precocious teenagers or, what for many amounts to the same thing, for professors of literature. The philosophers of the art of living accuse systematic philosophy of being a misguided and self-deceived way of doing what they consider true philosophy to be. They think that its adherents are cowardly, dry pedants who desire scientific objectivity because they are unable to create a work that is truly their own and use disinterestedness and detachment to mask their own sterility. Both are wrong, for the same reason. They both overlook the fact that each approach is a legitimate historical development of philosophy as it began in classical Greece; neither of these approaches has an exclusive hold on the essence of philosophy (which does not, in any case, exist).

The philosophers of the art of living I discuss in this book all consider the self to be not a given but a constructed unity. The materials for that construction are supplied, at least in the beginning, by accident—by the views and events that are due to the particular circumstances in which one finds oneself and that, in the nature of the case, are different for each particular individual. One, as I will say, acquires or creates a self, one becomes an individual, by integrating those materials with others acquired and constructed on the way. When the work is finished (if it ever is) few "accidents" remain, since the elements that constitute the individual produced are all part of an orderly, organized whole. Each element makes a specific contribution to that whole, which would be different without it. Each element is therefore to that extent significant, essential to the whole of which it has become a part, and it is no longer accidental.

Expressions like "creating" or "fashioning" a self sound paradoxical. How can one not already have, or be, a self if one is to engage in any activity whatever? How can one not already have, or be, a self if one is even to be conscious of the experiences and views one is supposed to integrate? That paradox may be mitigated if we distinguish this notion of the self from the strict philosophical idea presupposed by the very fact that I am and must be conscious of my experiences as mine. It is not what Kant called the "transcendental unity of apperception," the "I think" that in principle accompanies all my experiences and is required for me to be an agent, a person, in the first place. It is a homelier notion. To create a self

is to succeed in becoming *someone*, in becoming a *character*, that is, someone unusual and distinctive. It is to become an individual, but again not in the strict sense in which an individual is anything we can point out and reidentify, anything that, like human beings and material things, exists independently in space and time. To become an individual is to acquire an uncommon and idiosyncratic character, a set of features and a mode of life that set one apart from the rest of the world and make one memorable not only for what one did or said but also for who one was.

It might seem that I am urging that we use philosophical terms in a nonphilosophical sense. Nietzsche has often been thought to do that: to place the philosophical sense of a term, which he generally rejects, within quotation marks and to continue using it in a nonphilosophical sense, without quotation marks, in his own thought and writing. So, for example, he is supposed to deny the existence of "truth" (which many philosophers understand as the "correspondence" of our views to the facts of the world) while he uses his own notion of truth (a nonphilosophical idea that has not been easy to explicate) without contradiction. I find the distinction between philosophical and nonphilosophical senses of terms, especially within the writing of philosophers themselves, very unclear. I prefer to think that in many such cases we are faced with two different, though equally "philosophical" uses of the same term. The distinction between them, especially in the case of terms like "self" or "individual," is a matter of generality. In the general, weaker sense of the term, every person has a self and is an individual, to begin with. In the narrower, stronger sense, which will occupy me in what follows, only some people create themselves or become individuals, over time.

These are people we remember for themselves, people we can admire even if we reject many of their views, much in the way that we accept, admire, and even love our friends despite their weaknesses and faults. As we say, we know our friends as individuals. We are interested in their character as a whole, not in each and every one of their features separately and in its own right. Even their weaknesses are essential to their being the people we are happy to be close to. However, it is hard to believe that we can really keep as a friend someone who never thinks anything true and never does anything right. Similarly, it is hard to believe that philosophers can practice the art of living successfully, that they can become individuals, if each and every one of their views, however artfully it is has been woven together with the rest, is obviously or trivially mistaken. In both cases, we must have some respect for the content of what is organized into the whole we love or admire. But just as we can be wrong in choos-

ing our friends, so we can admire the wrong philosophers. And just as our choice of friends shows something about our own character, so the philosophers we admire reveal something about our own personality as well. The study of philosophy as the art of living discloses our own ethical preferences and compels us to reveal part of ourselves. This personal type of philosophy reflects on our own person, and it is personal in that additional sense as well. To study it is also to practice it.

Not everyone who has constructed an unusual life has been a philosopher. Great literary authors, visual artists, scientists, public figures, and even generals have often left similar legacies. What distinguishes the philosophers from those others? To begin with, we must realize that the distinction is fluid: at its edges, the project of constructing a philosophical life is not easily separated from the activities or the goals of literary figures like Proust, Rimbaud, or Oscar Wilde. And that is as it should be. The boundaries of philosophy have never been absolutely clear: just as, at one end, philosophy comes close to mathematics, psychology, and even physics, it slides over into literature at the other. But differences still remain.

Those who practice philosophy as the art of living construct their personalities through the investigation, the criticism, and the production of philosophical views—views, that is, that belong to the repertoire of philosophy as we have come to understand it. The connection is historical: even though the philosophers of the art of living often introduce new questions, their inspiration always comes from the tradition that we already accept as the tradition of philosophy. More important, the philosophers of the art of living make the articulation of a mode of life their central topic: it is by reflecting on the problems of constructing a philosophical life that they construct the life their work constitutes. The body of work that reflects on the philosophical life is the very content of the life it composes. The project of establishing a philosophical life is largely self-referential. Philosophical lives differ from others, to the extent that they do, because they proceed from a concern with issues that have traditionally been considered philosophical and because those issues provide the material out of which they are fashioned.

Philosophy as the art of living began with Socrates. Two features separate Socrates from those who have followed in his footsteps, especially in modern times. One is the fact that, as we have already remarked, Socrates wrote nothing himself. The Socrates who first practiced living as an art is the figure we find in Plato's Socratic dialogues.[3] And though, for reasons I explain in chapter 3, we now find it difficult to believe that

Plato's Socrates is not the Socrates of history, the fact is that to all effects and purposes Plato's literary figure is a fictional character. Even if we could isolate those elements in Plato's representation that correspond to his historical original, it is the whole character who confronts us in those works, not some smaller cluster of his features, that has fired the imagination of the tradition he created. And that, of course, raises the question whether it was in fact Socrates and not Plato himself who originates that tradition: the Platonic Socrates is also the Socratic Plato. Goethe once wrote, "He who would explain to us when men like Plato spoke in earnest, when in jest or half-jest, what they wrote from conviction and what merely for the sake of the argument, would certainly render us an extraordinary service and contribute greatly to our education."[4] That is one case no one will ever explain.

The second feature that distinguishes Socrates from the rest of his followers is that we know much less about his life than we do about theirs. We know many of the views and events that Montaigne, Nietzsche, and Foucault had to face and arrange as they tried to combine their many tendencies into one. We can follow them, more or less, in their effort to create themselves. But when Socrates appears in Plato's dialogues, he appears ready-made: he is already one; he never makes an effort. His own unity is so extreme that he even believes that the human soul, the self, is itself in principle indivisible and that it is therefore impossible for us to do anything other than what we consider to be the good. Apart from our judgment that something is a good thing to do, Socrates believes that there is no other source of motivation, no conflicting set of values or desires, that can ever push us in a different direction: there is no room for multiplicity in his view of the soul. That is a view that Socrates consistently exemplifies in his own life as Plato depicts it: he always does only what he considers the right thing to do; he never wavers in the slightest way from the course of action he has chosen as best, even at the hour of his death. There is no Garden of Gethsemane, no Mount of Olives in his story.

Does the fact that our Socrates is a literary character distinguish him from philosophers like Montaigne, Nietzsche, and Foucault, whose biographies are available to us? The difference is less decisive than it appears. For the most important accomplishments of these modern thinkers are the self-portraits that confront us in their writings. Their biographers have been disputing even the most basic facts concerning their lives and personalities. Their readers, however, can find in their writings convincing models of how a unified, meaningful life can be constructed out of the chance events that constitute it. Perhaps these people succeeded in ap-

plying their models to themselves; perhaps they did not. Whether they did is a matter of biography, and it will most likely remain a matter of contention as well. But the image of life contained in their writings is a philosophical matter, and though it too will remain a matter of contention, the contention will be over whether that image is or is not coherent or admirable. That is a different question altogether. It concerns the nature of the character constructed in their writings, the question whether life can be lived, and whether it is worth living, as they claim. It is a question about us and not primarily about them. The same is true of Plato's Socrates. Is it possible and desirable that someone might live as Socrates is shown to have lived? Is it worth living that way? That is the question that matters, not the question whether Plato's character actually led the life Plato attributes to him, whether he corresponds to a historical figure whose life is now beyond our reach and who, if we learned a lot more about him than we now know, would probably become even more controversial than he already is.

The art of living, though a practical art, is therefore practiced in writing. The question whether its practitioners applied it successfully to themselves is secondary and in most cases impossible to answer. We want a philosophy that consists of views in harmony with the actions, with the mode of life of those who hold them. But the main question still is not whether, as a matter of historical fact, someone else succeeded in living that way but whether one can construct such a life oneself. That can be done in two ways. One can either try to apply someone else's conception to one's own life, and to that extent live well, perhaps, but derivatively; or one can formulate one's own art of living. But it is difficult to imagine that one can formulate one's own art of living without writing about it because it is difficult to imagine that the complex views that such an art requires can be expressed in any other way. Further, unless one writes about it, one's art will not be able to constitute a model for others in the longer run. And the moment one writes about the art of living, the question for others again becomes not whether its originator succeeded in practicing it but whether they can in turn practice it on their own. Socrates himself wrote nothing. But had not Plato created an art of living in his name—and in writing—there would be nothing for us to think about, no art and no model to accept, reject, manipulate, or even pass by indifferently. The same is true of Montaigne, Nietzsche, and Foucault. The purpose of philosophy as the art of living is, of course, living. But the life it requires is a life in great part devoted to writing. The monument one leaves behind is in the end the permanent work, not the transient life.

It is, then, Socrates' second peculiar feature that separates him from his followers: the fact that he appears ready-made, that we have no idea how he came to be who he was. One of the most vivid characters in world literature, Socrates is also the least understood. He is a mystery because of his irony, his persistent silence about himself, which has given rise to a swirl of voices surrounding it and trying to speak for him, to explain who he was and how he came to be that way. But no interpretation, no other voice, has filled the silence that remains Socrates' main legacy.

The first of these voices is Plato's own. In the works that follow his Socratic dialogues, Plato offers a hypothesis about what enabled Socrates to lead the good life his own early dialogues attribute to him. The Socratic dialogues reflect Socrates without reflecting on him. In his later works, Plato, followed by Montaigne, Nietzsche, and Foucault, offers further reflections of that reflection as well as reflections about it. The philosophers of the art of living keep returning to Plato's Socratic works because they contain both the most coherent and the least explicable model of a philosophical life that we possess. Like a blank sheet, Socrates invites us to write; like a vast stillness, he provokes us into shouting. But he remains untouched, staring back with an ironic gaze, both beyond his reflections and nothing above their sum total.

The art of living comes in three varieties, three genres. One is that of Socrates in Plato's early dialogues. Practicing his art in public, and to that extent committed to his interlocutors' welfare, Socrates still cannot show that his mode of life is right for all. Convinced that it is, Socrates has no arguments to persuade others that his conviction is correct. He urges people to join him in the examined life he considers the only life worth living for a human being, but he has nothing to say when someone like Euthyphro simply walks away from their confrontation. His ideal may be universalist, but he has no means by which to prove that is right. He remains tentative and protreptic.

A second genre is found in Plato's middle works, especially the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. There Plato claims that a mode of life inspired by (though not absolutely identical with) the life of Socrates, the life of philosophy as he defines it in detail in these works, is best for all, and he offers a series of controversial arguments in order to convince those who can do so to choose that life for themselves and those who can't to try to approximate it as closely as their abilities allow.[5] In other words, Plato (and in that he is followed by other great philosophers who, like Aristotle and perhaps Kant, also belong to this version of the tradition of the art of living) tries to prove that a single type of life is best for all people. Both his

ideal, which he shares with Socrates, and his method, which he does not, are universalist.

The third and final genre of the art of living is the subject of this book. It is the least universalist of all. According to it, human life takes many forms and no single mode of life is best for all. Philosophers like Montaigne, Nietzsche, and Foucault articulate a way of living that only they and perhaps a few others can follow. They do not insist that their life is a model for the world at large. They do not want to be imitated, at least not directly. That is, they believe that those who want to imitate them must develop their own art of living, their own self, perhaps to exhibit it for others but not so that others imitate them directly. Imitation, in this context, is to become someone on one's own; but the someone one becomes must be different from one's model.

This last genre of the art of living is aestheticist. As in the acknowledged arts, there are no rules for producing new and exciting works. As in the acknowledged arts, there is no best work—no best life—by which all others can be judged. As in the acknowledged arts, that does not imply that judgment is impossible, that every work is as good as every other. As in the acknowledged arts, the aim is to produce as many new and different types of works—as many different modes of life—as possible, since the proliferation of aesthetic difference and multiplicity, even though it is not often in the service of morality, enriches and improves human life.

It is within this third genre that the notion of the individual finds its central place. Those who practice the individualist art of living need to be unforgettable. Like great artists, they must avoid imitation, backward and forward. They must not imitate others: if they do, they are no longer original but derivative and forgettable, leaving the field to those they imitate. They must not be imitated by too many others: if they are, their own work will cease to be remembered as such and will appear as the normal way of doing things, as a fact of nature rather than as an individual accomplishment. We will see in chapter 5 how Nietzsche in particular was tyrannized by that problem.

This aestheticist genre of the art of living forbids the direct imitation of models. Why is it, then, that Montaigne, Nietzsche, and Foucault all have a model? And why is their model always Socrates? What makes him capable of playing that role? The answer is again provided by Socrates' irony, by the silence that envelops his life and character. The central participant in innumerable conversations, "a lover of talking" as he describes himself in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates remains persistently silent about himself throughout Plato's early works. In him we see a person who created

himself without ever showing anyone how he did it. These philosophers care more about the fact that Socrates made something new out of himself, that he constituted himself as an unprecedented type of person, than about the particular type of person he became. What they take from him is not the specific mode of life, the particular self, he fashioned for himself but his self-fashioning in general. Socrates is the prototypical artist of living because, by leaving the process he followed absolutely indeterminate, he also presents its final product as nonbinding: a different procedure, with different materials, can create another life and still be part of his project. To imitate Socrates is therefore to create oneself, as Socrates did; but it is also to make oneself different from anyone else so far, and since that includes Socrates himself, it is to make oneself different from Socrates as well. That is why he can function as the model for the individualist, aestheticist artists of living whose main purpose is to be like no one else, before them or after.

Since Socrates' irony is so important to my conception of the art of living, I devote the first half of this book to an examination of its various aspects. Chapter 1 begins abruptly with a discussion of a seemingly irrelevant subject—Thomas Mann's use of irony in *The Magic Mountain*. As Mann places his readers in the apparently superior situation of observing Hans Castorp, his young hero, deceive himself, he causes them to deceive themselves in exactly the same way. Plato, I argue, places the readers of his early dialogues in that situation as well. As Socrates demolishes his various opponents, we join him against them; but Plato forces us to occupy unwittingly the very position on account of which we feel such contempt for them and deprives us of any reason to think ourselves—as we do—superior to them. In addition, Hans Castorp is an essentially ambiguous figure; it is impossible to tell whether he is perfectly ordinary or totally extraordinary. That, too, is a feature of Plato's Socrates, who is fully part of his world and yet totally outside it. Both features—inducing self-deception in one's readers as one is depicting it in one's characters and constructing a hero whom it is impossible to understand once and for all—constitute a deeply ironical relationship between author and audience. Mann furnishes a clear contemporary case of a practice originating in Plato and an instance of the irony that surrounds Socrates, without once mentioning Socrates' name. That is the most distant Socratic reflection, the weakest echo, discussed in the book. From it, I turn, in the rest of the chapter, to one of the closest reflections and loudest echoes, in Plato's *Euthyphro*, and to the manner in which Plato's irony is directed toward his readers.

Plato is able to be ironic toward his readers because he beguiles them into identifying their point of view with Socrates' own. Since Socrates' attitude toward his interlocutors is ironic, so is ours. And our irony proves our undoing, since, although ironists always make an implicit claim to be superior to their victims, Plato shows us that we have no grounds for making it. Chapter 2, then, turns to the structure of Socrates' irony toward the other participants in Plato's dialogues. I argue—against the common view, exemplified in Gregory Vlastos' own reflection of Socrates—that irony does not consist in saying the contrary of, but only something different from, what one means. In the former case, if we know that we are faced with irony we also know what the ironist means: all we need to do is to negate the words we hear in order to understand what the ironist has in mind. In the latter, even when we know that we are confronted with irony, we have no sure way of knowing the ironist's meaning: all we know is that it is not quite what we have heard. Irony therefore does not allow us to peer into the ironist's mind, which remains concealed and inscrutable. Socratic irony is of that kind. It does not ever indicate what he thinks: it leaves us with his words, and a doubt that they express his meaning. That is why I think of Socratic irony as a form of silence.

In chapter 3, I argue that Socrates' goal was essentially individualist. He pursued the knowledge of "virtue," which he considered necessary for living well and happily, primarily for his own sake. Though he invited others to join him in his search, his ultimate purpose was his own improvement. That is another reason he has been able to function as a model for the artists of living whose own goal was equally individualist though not for that reason egoistic or oblivious of others. One can care for oneself without disregarding others: one can be a good human being without *devoting* oneself to them. I also claim that Socrates' silence is not limited to his interlocutors and to Plato's readers. I argue, not without realizing how strange that claim must sound, that he is also ironic—silent—toward Plato himself, despite the fact that he is the latter's creature. In one of the greatest literary feats of which I am aware, Plato implicitly admits (since he never appears in his dialogues, he could have done so in no other way) that he does not understand the character he has constructed. In his early dialogues, Plato presents Socrates as a paradoxical character in his own right: convinced that the knowledge of "virtue" is necessary for the good life, Socrates admits that he lacks it, and yet he leads as good a life as Plato has ever known. Plato does not resolve that paradox. His Socrates is completely opaque, and his opacity explains why, ever since Romanticism brought irony into the center of our literary con-

sciousness, Plato's early works and not, as before, Xenophon's writings have been our main source for the historical figure. Opacity, a character's being beyond the reach of his author and not subject to his will, has become one of the central grounds of verisimilitude. Verisimilitude, in turn, appears as a mark of the real.

Plato, however, did not long remain satisfied with his early portrait of Socrates. In his later works, he began a series of efforts to explain how Socrates became who he was. In the process, he also produced a reflection of Socrates that differed from what he had done before and initiated a whole tradition of such reflections. In chapter 4, I examine Montaigne's reliance on Socrates in his own effort to create himself as he composed the *Essays*, particularly in connection with the essay "Of physiognomy." Montaigne, who claimed to turn away from worldly affairs in order to think only of "Michel," appeals explicitly to Socrates as a model of what a nearly perfect human being can be. "Of physiognomy" contains the core of his confrontation with, and appropriation of, Socrates. Montaigne wants to emulate Socrates, but he claims that Socrates' ugly, sensual physical appearance, so different from his beautiful and self-controlled nature, is totally different from his own open and honest countenance, which perfectly reflects his inner self. I argue that in fact Montaigne denies that "the physiognomic principle," according to which a thing's external appearance should reflect its inner reality, applies to Socrates, to himself, or to his own writing, including "Of physiognomy" itself: none of them can be taken at face value. Montaigne's effort to emulate Socrates, when the essay is read with that point in mind, turns out to be his effort to displace him and to accomplish something that is truly his own. What Montaigne learns from Socrates is that to follow him is to be different from him. To practice the Socratic art of living turns out, once again, to be the creation of a self that is as different from Socrates as Socrates was different from the rest of his world.

No one tried to be more different from Socrates than Nietzsche, who fought consistently against everything Socrates represented, which, for him, often meant everything that was wrong with the world as he understood it. Chapter 5 examines Nietzsche's lifelong involvement with Socrates. I ask why Nietzsche, who was uncannily capable of seeing everything from many sides and who remained grateful even to Schopenhauer and Wagner after he denounced their views in the most poisonous terms, never showed the same generosity toward Socrates. Everything about Nietzsche suggests that he tried to fashion himself into a character who denied everything he took Socrates to have stood for, especially the view

that a single mode of life, the life of reason, was best for all. And yet his unmitigated hatred of Socrates, on closer inspection, turns out to be caused by the deep and not at all implausible suspicion that the two of them, despite the immense specific differences that separate them, were after all engaged in the very same project of self-fashioning. If so, Nietzsche was faced with two serious problems. First, he turned out to be less original than he wanted to think he was: he was more of an imitator than his view allowed him to be. Second, the fact that Socrates' private project of self-creation could have been taken as a universalist praise of the life of reason as best for all suggested that Nietzsche's own effort to "become who he was" might one day be taken in a similar way. Perhaps, then, the fate of successful efforts at self-creation is that they cease to appear as personal accomplishments. But in that case, Socrates and Nietzsche, despite the differences that separate them, might turn out to be allies after all. What would that say about Nietzsche's effort to escape the "dogmatist," universalist philosophy he believed Socrates to have originated? Escaping Socrates might prove for him as impossible as escaping himself.

Nietzsche's abhorrence of Socrates was not reflected in the attitude of his greatest twentieth-century disciple. In chapter 6, I examine Michel Foucault's final lectures at the Collège de France. Foucault refuses to accept Nietzsche's view that Socrates' final words in the *Phaedo* revealed that he had always thought of life as a disease and that he was relieved to be dying. On the contrary, Foucault claims that Socrates loved life, Athens, and the world and that he had devoted himself to the improvement of his fellow citizens. Foucault, who identifies with Socrates to the extent of mixing his own voice with his in a manner that seems designed to eliminate the distinction between them, insists on the usefulness of Socrates to Athens and to the world at large. I claim, on the basis of the argument that runs through the whole book, that Socrates' project was more private than Foucault allows. Socrates was primarily concerned with the care of his own self, and he urged his fellow citizens to undertake a similar private project for themselves. I offer an overview of Foucault's intellectual development, from the forbidding, detached historical thinker of his early works to the compassionate advocate of "an aesthetics of existence" of his late writings. And I argue that he insisted on Socrates' usefulness because he had come to believe that he himself could be of use to the people for whom he cared. Foucault took himself to have created a self and a life that could be important for others like him. And though he did not address himself to the broad audience, the whole state, as he believed Socrates had done, he was convinced that his project of self-creation, of

"the care of the self," could serve as a model for groups, particularly homosexuals and other oppressed minorities who, repressed in today's world, find themselves unable to speak with a voice of their own.

My overview of how Socrates was treated by various philosophers who were concerned more with establishing new modes of life than with answering independently given philosophical questions finally turns out to contain its own version of who Socrates was. The historical objectivity I took to be my aim when I first began thinking about the lectures from which this book emerged gradually gave way—only partially, I hope—to a more personal involvement with the figure who stands at the head of that tradition and with the other philosophers I examined. I slowly realized that I too tried to find in Socrates a model for my own approach to the things that are important to me. My own interest has turned from the study of the art of living to its practice; or, rather, I have come to realize that to study the art of living is to engage in one of its forms. That is an interest I discovered only recently, and I am not sure where it is likely to lead me. And though, like all such projects, mine too is, and is bound to remain, unfinished, I hope that is not also true of the part of the project this book constitutes.