John Lachs opens his latest work with a challenge to philosophy professors: become relevant to the lives of our students and community or remain a curious intellectual sideshow impotently cowering from the power of ideas. In concise, rapid-fire prose, Lachs prescribes the reconstruction of our discipline necessary to achieve this end. First, we must acquire habits of courage to engage in public debate, including the courage to view our own ideas as experiments. Second, philosophers must abandon their comfortable compartmentalized sub-disciplines and examine experience as a whole. Third, we must recognize that teaching is a sacred calling, that in soliciting growth within our students we commit an act of faith in our community’s future. Last, we must reform the university to address the growth of the internet. Because a student can access any information at any time, memory becomes much less important a trait than caring, critical judgment and appreciation. He writes, "What is stored in persons, by contrast, is living knowledge constantly in the process of transformation. Perhaps because much of it does not exist in the form of sentences, its depth is indeterminate; people questioned about what they know can surprise even themselves." (27). Lachs envisions a reconstruction of our discipline, both scholarship and teaching, to extricate it from self-imposed irrelevance.

In his second section, Lachs turns his attention to immortality, transcendence and the insignificance of much of human existence. Characterizing death as the “paradigm of what is beyond the human world” (46), he argues that personal survival of death is an incomprehensible notion. Despite this, fear of death is not a fear of nonexistence, but a consequence of care of what we leave behind. As Lachs puts it, “Death is horrible, therefore... because it cleaves the person and imposes an inevitable parting.” (86). Lachs provides a significant alternative to Rorty’s anxiety of influence as an explanation of our fear of death. Lachs also comments on the meaninglessness of much of what passes for human experience. He carefully and thoroughly discusses Dewey’s concept of means-end integrated activity. Despite Dewey’s optimism that we can meliorate our disintegrated modern lives and live more aesthetically, Lachs argues that Dewey’s conception of means-end integrated action does not help us enough. In an
interesting chapter, Lachs discusses the connection between aesthetic experience and the transcendent. We transcend our quotidian experience when we become immersed in the everyday, experiencing a "joyous absorption in the present and in anything present to consciousness." (79). In equating transcendence to aesthetic absorption in the everyday, Lachs fails to discuss other possible meanings of transcendence to pragmatists, including the indeterminate call to conscience, or the concept of growth. Both of these imply a transcendence of present experience that Lachs does not discuss.

Lachs's third section discusses applied ethics. He begins by arguing that we have made significant moral progress in recent generations. Acknowledging the difficulty in valuing our valuations, as well as the fact we remain capable of moral abominations, Lachs claims that developed countries live a materially and morally better life than our ancestors. He follows this with a concise criticism of the principle-based approach to medical ethics. He argues that social and individual purposes ought to guide our decisions more than principles, and that the purpose of bioethics itself should be to "lay bare the unarticulated purposes that frame conflict and propel action." (112). Currently, we deliberate far too superficially concerning death, and articulating purposes will enable us to make more reasonable and worthy choices at the end of life.

Lachs draws on his criticisms of general ethical principles to discuss the ethics of medical research and genetic enhancement. He criticizes any large-scale program of genetic enhancement because "perfection has always been a destructive dream" (122). Such programs would fail to determine our normal species functioning, and fail to address the intricate connections between disability and opportunity. In this he is probably right. But Lachs ignores dilemmas surrounding individual parental choices. I suspect many parents would pay to have genetic enhancements tailored to their particular purposes, to make their children a bit more smart, strong, or good-looking. If this is the case, then Lachs has missed the ethical issue here, the conflict between individual purposes of wanting what is best for their children and the social purposes of equality of opportunity. In ignoring this dilemma, Lachs loses an opportunity to show the importance of purposes for bioethics. His next chapter also fails to
discuss the importance of purposes. He discusses the problem that medical research often inspires unreasonable hopes in patients. He concludes this chapter by claiming "The neglected virtue of caring is an indispensable condition of human decency and of community life" (128). Again, he dispenses with any careful delineation of purposes, and opts instead for universal principles and transcendental arguments. In both of these areas, Lachs ignores his own prescriptions for good bioethics.

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This book offers a philosophical treatment of poetry. It begins by using Heidegger's writings on poetry as a way of looking at the workings of what Lysaker calls "ur-poetry." Ur-poems are "events of poetizing and [they] poetize poetizing (41)." As such, ur-poems enable a thoughtful reader to experience "the birth of sense" because "ur-poetry brings us and pins us to the realm of originary occurrence, ... the region wherein presencing comes to pass (68)." In Heideggerian terms, we approach the site, or Ort, of the poem in which the reader can experience "a Sprache des Wesens (64)." Lysaker refers to this process as an event of "autofiguration." Here, the language of the poem "reach[es] back into its own ground (38)." Like a palimpsest - a manuscript in which a prior writing, though erased, is still discernable - the language of the ur-poem is (re)inscribed within this foundational, inceptual event of determination. As Heidegger says, "We do not merely speak the language - we speak by way of it.... All perception and conception is already contained in this act."

In order to appreciate the ontological potential that poetry has, Lysaker begins by taking the reader through an analysis of Rilke's "Archaic Torso of Apollo." The poem ends like this: "... for there is no point that does not see you. You must change your life." The importance of this poem, for Lysaker, lies in the manner in which it attests to the ability of the ur-poem create the measure through which all things appear ("for there is no point that does