Stuhr’s latest book is an attempt to create a new pragmatism: one that goes beyond and yet is still resonant with past pragmatisms. The background concern motivating this project is the thought that pragmatists have for too long neglected to “think differently and live differently from the pragmatists of the past” (1).

A seeming exception to this generalization is Richard Rorty’s neopragmatism. But I sense that Stuhr is dissatisfied with Rorty’s work in embarking on his own attempt to think pragmatism differently. What Stuhr thus offers is a much-needed (at least according to those who find Rorty lacking) contemporary pragmatist alternative to Rorty. Notable is the fact that Stuhr does not engage Rorty by accusing him of infidelity to Dewey and James. Rather, he simply builds up his own original pragmatism for those not content with Rorty’s.

The point at which I find Stuhr’s pragmatism most original in the context of contemporary scholarship is also that on which I find it most convincing. Pragmatists for the last fifty years or so have tended to conceive the relevance of pragmatism in terms of its neat account of truth, its dissolution of the epistemological problematic, its conception of the relation between fact and value, or its model of the interpenetration of self and society. To be sure each of these aspects of pragmatism here remains important. Yet Stuhr’s claims is that “the most important resources that twentieth century pragmatism can make to the education of humankind are not championed figures, a correct doctrine or two, some justified theses, or pages of true propositions ... it is a matter of temperament. It is a matter, as William James said, of vision” (199).
The central qualities of pragmatic vision and temperament, Stuhr argues, are pluralism and meliorism. It is through and in these that pragmatism can enable our hopes for future growth.

Stuhr’s vision of pragmatism is thus a call for a culture of unceasing work in a world of unceasing change. Growth, Stuhr claims in the first chapter, is the centermost quality of Dewey’s radical and ethical vision of democracy. Throw off, then, the yokes of traditional philosophy in order to finally and fully appreciate the potential of the democratic experiment. “Most philosophies promise their adherents and would-be adherents some sort of heaven, some kind of transcendence,” Stuhr notes with justified consternation (193). The failure of these philosophies is perfectly captured in a line of Emerson’s from “The Poet” that Stuhr could have easily quoted to good effect: “every heaven is also a prison.” Pluralism and meliorism, because they affirm a dynamic world that we grow by our own lights, together constitute an alternative to the imprisoning heavens of the philosophers.

Despite my agreements with what I take to be Stuhr’s most original and central claims, I find myself in disagreement with certain other of his claims. Two stand out.

The first is Stuhr’s argument that pragmatists ought to give up the idea that we are philosophy’s best hope for the future. Disabusing ourselves of this pretense is supposed to amount to finally and fully affirming pluralism. But why? So long as we remind ourselves that pragmatism is not about giving guarantees and drawing up heavens it seems that it can play a key role alongside other philosophical traditions in the project of reconstructing philosophy (Stuhr considers Deleuze, Foucault, and Adorno in this context). Reconstructing philosophy is the only alternative I can see to abandoning the philosophical hopes which almost everyone has lost confidence in; Rorty is only the most honest among us on this count. If we do not want to abandon philosophy, then we ought to pragmatize it. This entails, I suppose, something like building philosophy up out of the concrete details of actual practice.

Stuhr’s approach can be seen as resulting from a challenging problem inherent in pragmatism itself. The quickest way to make this point is as follows. Pragmatists do not even want to credit, let alone try to solve, the discipline-constituting problems first drawn up by Kant. Pragmatists refuse to show “greater concern for the problems of philosophers than for the problems of women and men” (60). But sometimes we pragmatists get so psyched up insisting that we must attend to the “lived problems of women and men” rather than to the “learned problems of philosophers” that we forget, in all our breathy excitement, to actually do anything about the actual lived problems. Sometimes we get so busy showing other philosophers that they are addressing the wrong problems that we forget to address the right ones ourselves. But unless we do turn pragmatism toward detailed problem-solving, it will come to