

**PART I**

THE ART OF  
SELF-FASHIONING



# 1

## The Call of Character

Some things are in some real sense really you, or express what you are, and others aren't.

—Bernard Williams

### 1

The question of how to live a life worth living has an illustrious history in our society, for leading philosophers, psychologists, theologians, and artists have grappled with it at least since Socrates. But what sets our era apart from earlier ones is that our relationship to this question is deeply ambivalent. On the one hand, we are no longer sure if it's worth asking. We know (or strongly suspect) that God is dead,<sup>1</sup> that Truth with the capital T is difficult to attain, that the universe is a chaotic place, that the world is a violent mess, and that there may not be any final purpose to our lives. What, then, would be the benefit of dwelling on the overall validity of the life path we have chosen (or been thrown into)? And given the enormous trials faced by the world—war, hunger, poverty, social inequality, environmental damage, and so on—isn't