Dedicated to Rocío, Santiago, Emilia

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Overview

Decadence in philosophy is truths dedicated to the intensification of thought. For decadents the best truths don't describe experience accurately, they incite the most subsequent thinking. This doesn't imply wanting truths that are wrong but it does mean right and wrong lose relevance because every philosophic conclusion is valued purely in terms of its ability to generate more philosophizing. It's valued that way since thought no longer exists to pursue truth; truths exist to serve and accelerate thinking.

French Nietzscheanism in this book runs from Nietzsche through his appropriation by Gilles Deleuze, then it spreads to include those participating in their shared convictions and desires. It's not a group of individuals though, it's the convictions and desires as they've taken hold of contemporary theory.

French Nietzscheanism becomes decadent when it contorts into philosophy as only wanting to instigate thought. This book shows how the contorting happens, why, and, in sweeping terms, what it means to raise thinking above any stolid truth.

Decadence of the French Nietzsche's first chapter establishes that our discipline is fundamentally ruled by thinking and truth's relation, by the determination about which exists for the other. Going in the prosaic direction, truth gets privileged. The second chapter goes the other way into decadence where all philosophic claims are ordered into the unrestricted service of more thought; they're devoted to thought and reduced to an offering for it. Philosophy's principal studies it follows are no longer about forming truths and then deciding which are most persuasive but about provoking thinking and determining which truths do that more effectively than others. With decadence defined, the third chapter demonstrates how and where the decadent realignment has been happening in French Nietzscheanism, and not accidentally. The realignment has been happening from the movement's beginning and through its primary, motivating elements because they provide the theoretical material necessary for reconstructing philosophy as truths serving thought; the premises, habitual practices and defining attitudes of contemporary philosophy,

the argument is, are carriers of decadence, they make and explain it. The last chapter considers our time's most controversial philosophic current under pressure from its adversaries. It reviews several of the powerful criticisms leveled against recent theory and responds by showing that while they usher French Nietzscheanism into its late stages they don't lead the movement to abrupt termination, instead, they provoke French Nietzscheanism's particular decadence.

Finally, a note about reading this book. Because it's composed from a lengthy argument (concerning the condition of French Nietzscheanism in the history of philosophy) and a compact idea (what philosophy looks like when the relation between thinking and truth are reversed), there are two ways to begin. If you're interested in the longer argument then starting on the first page is recommendable. If you want to go straight to the decadent idea, though, the second chapter becomes the book's center and reading should start there.

Chapter One

Philosophy as the Sacrifice of Thinking for Truth

Philosophy is not about truth, it's about what happens between thinking and truth: what philosophers want and do is delineated by how thinking and truth are related.

The relation is sacrificial, one is offered for the other.

Customarily what's sacrificed is thought. The sacrifice is called for because thinking doesn't naturally cooperate with truth and therefore placidly culminate in it, instead, thinking is forcefully reduced to an offering and that debasement allows truth. Elaborating begins by quickly indicating how the customary sacrifice works in two areas much more immediate and practical than philosophy; I'll show that writing doesn't directly lead to a book but is terminated to permit one, and that reading doesn't intrinsically lead to an interpretation but is relinquished to make one. After that the discussion moves up to philosophy's level.

Will writing be renounced—will it stop—so there can be a book? As anyone who's decided that a manuscript's done knows, the answer's not clear until after the end. All authors know this as surely as they know what comes just after supposedly finishing. Reformulations begin interrupting the night's sleep. Sometimes they're major reworkings: a section needs to be redone with more apt examples, one of the book's central arguments lacks a substantial, intermediate step. More often the drowsy revelations are largely trivial and for that reason all the more tormenting. An overlong sentence from the middle of an undistinguished paragraph should be divided into shorter articulations, the word "aggravates" appears too frequently in the middle of chapter three. After a week of this the hesitant decision finally gets made to read everything over, just one more time. Along with that decision comes a conclusion. Generating the patience and determination to sit down and write something is obviously difficult but determining to irrevocably stop writing is even more difficult, and for that reason it's writing's sacrifice more than actually writing that makes a set of pages complete and finished and called a book.

There's another route to the same conclusion, one passing through the recognition that the act of writing presumably leading to a book actually works away from one. Starting with the first lines of any manuscript, as soon as they're written they already need to be revised; some phrases and sentences demand more development while others straying from the main idea have to be momentarily set aside. Then, through the subsequent developing and refining, an acceptably decent paragraph eventually takes shape but, by the time it does, the words excluded from what's tentatively done are already indicating and forming two or three more paragraphs. Next, assembling those will prove no more contained and the cycle of multiplication churns forward until a basic problem eventually becomes unavoidable. If this is the way writing begins and continues then it's difficult to see why it would somehow culminate with a final sentence. It's difficult to see what might exist *in* writing that leads to a last, terminal page. It's less difficult to see, however, that the desire to write and the desire to write something—a single paragraph, a chapter, a book—are not at all allied, they're in conflict. Editors understand this, at least implicitly. That's why they execute (grimly) with word limits and deadlines. Put more explicitly, what editors understand is that a book's author is not the one who wrote but the one who stopped writing.

Reading also revolves around a sacrificial question: will it be offered to have been about something, will it end so that an interpretation may form? By an interpretation I mean a broad comprehension of a book comparable with the understandings others have formed and interacting with them as more or less justifiable. With these requirements fixed, it's clear that a justifiable interpretation separates from another kind, from the provisional interpretations forming from the opening lines of any book. While these immediate responses are understandings, they're only tentative and exploratory; they're decisions about what category of literature is being entered (philosophy, literary theory, fiction) and then a little further on they're determinations about an author's interests, assumptions, arguments or plot. Sometimes, preliminary interpretations go still further, to predictions about where the book will ultimately lead and to anticipatory judgments about whether the conclusion will be persuasive, dubious or just boring. Still, no one stops after three pages to proclaim a tentative expectation as the, or even as one, of the book's meanings, or at least no one would want to defend the partial comprehension in the company of others who've worked through to the last page. The reason

no one wants to defend preliminary interpretations isn't that they're incomplete. All interpretations are incomplete. The reason no one wants to defend them is that they aren't made for explaining a book, they're made to let us go further into it. Preliminary interpreting is *how* reading goes further; it's the constructing of a framework for approaching the next paragraphs and chapters. Stated differently, even if a provisional understanding takes the apparent form of referring to a noun, to the book, it actually refers and clings to the infinitive verb "to read." Regardless of how the meaning is articulated, though, preliminary interpretations don't function as defendable ones.

More, they don't lead to defendable ones; preliminary interpretations even resist them right from the start because of the way reading starts. From the first paragraph what reading does is find or produce understandings that are about the reading to come, that prepare it. And if this is the way reading begins, there's no reason to assume it will naturally lead to a stopping point, one voluntarily giving way to a firm conclusion about what has been read. There's no reason to assume, in other words, that there's something *in* the act of reading that will lead to a settled interpretation for defending or comparing with others, instead, reading just calls for more by continually forming tentative understandings that drive its own action forward. Among those who sense this interminability most acutely are graduate students, especially those having trouble getting going on their dissertations. One of the reasons it's so difficult for students to begin writing about the books they're studying is that it's very easy to become a victim of reading. It's even easy to be ruined by it since everything read seems to lead to more pages for turning instead of a settled conclusion. Nearly everyone, I suppose, who's directed doctoral dissertations has actually seen this particular ruination happening. A student reappears three months after the last meeting to report that, having worked through every one of Nietzsche's inscrutable notebooks, the moment has at last arrived to . . . read the *Genealogy of Morals* yet again. The student, it must be conceded, is right about that. Right, because reading's action from the start produces interpretations that encourage more of the same, and the encouragement lasts beyond any particular book's end, it extends to other books and crosses back through the first one again. Finally, the sensation that "Now I can *begin* reading" subsists in all reading because its functioning is perpetually inaugural.

The way reading perpetually functions is the debilitating and ultimately fatal weakness intrinsic to what Umberto Eco has correctly called the "old" and incorrectly called the "still valid" hermeneutic circle.[1] The idea old circular readers like Eco cling to is that if we're prepared to sensitively go through the book in front of us, if we'll let our expectations be modified by the words and then return to the start and work through the pages again and maybe again for as long as it takes, then we'll progressively get closer to the book and, eventually, reach an understanding that's persuasive and defendable. The reality, however, is that while persuasive and defendable understandings of books surely exist it's equally sure that the hermeneutic circle won't help us reach them. It will even push them further away since reading, no matter how meticulous, doesn't progressively close in on a convincing, terminal understanding, it goes in the other direction, toward interpretations inciting still more reading. If we want an interpretation for exposure to others, therefore, we won't get one—or even get closer to one—with just a little more patient effort as defenders of hermeneutics propose. We'll only get a stable interpretation by doing something much more abrupt. We'll get one by eliminating reading. Reading's fundamental mechanism must be broken so that interpretations can become something more than inducements to the next page; reading must be forcibly renounced so that a provisional interpretation can be left as last and defendable. It's not, consequently, that last and defendable understandings emerge from reading, they emerge from the end of reading. They emerge from reading's sacrifice. From that sacrifice, a basic conclusion about all reading and every interpretation also emerges. A book's readers aren't those who determined what its words meant but those who stopped letting them mean that there's more reading to be done.[2]

The sacrificial conclusion about reading joins the previous one about writing in together leading toward a broader and more important sacrifice, the one belonging to philosophy. What does it mean for thinking to be offered for truth, and will it be? To reach a substantially developed and solidly explained answer, two general routes can be followed. One begins with the elements asked about, it gets to the sacrifice by first meticulously defining thinking and truth. On these subjects a lot of work has already been done. Starting with thinking, Socrates defined it as remembering, as recovering something we all once knew. As distinct from that, Aristotle's division and collection represented thinking as a method.

Again differently, Descartes thought by adhering to mathematically strict rules. For Kant, ethical thinking meant formulating impersonal regulations and testing them for contradictions. For Nietzsche, thought was distinguishable as a tool serving the individual desire for power. For Michel Foucault, thinking meant tracing the interactions of divergent historical forces. (How do medical ideas about madness and legal ideas about criminality interact in different cultures and times?) For Gilles Deleuze, thinking meant experimentally rearranging the world's diverse elements. (How can Kafka's stories be construed as philosophical arguments?) The list goes on, but what's already accumulated sufficiently indicates a serious problem with trying to answer the question about the sacrifice between thinking and truth by first answering one about what philosophic thinking is. Next, things get worse—even more complicated and uncertain—on the other side, on the question of truth. There, we have answers located in the past, even further back, in the past of the past as something beautiful and lost (Plato). And there's truth that corresponds with perceptions of reality and lets us organize that reality objectively (Aristotle). There's also truth as what's proven, as what reduces human experience to the purity of algebra (Descartes). Then there's truth that doesn't yield quantifiable knowledge or arid demonstrations so much as it grants freedom in the certainty that real liberty is bondage to our own rational imperatives (Kant). Moving from individuals to communities, it could be that truth is fundamentally political and grants power. Or, truth reflects power (Nietzsche). Less sweepingly, truth could be nothing but a transient solution to a practical problem about how, for example, an episode in history may be understood (Foucault). Maybe truth can't even offer that much, maybe it's only a new perspective, a new way of conceiving how, say, philosophy and literature intersect (Deleuze). Possibly, truth isn't very much like any of this. Regardless, if approaching the sacrifice between thinking and truth requires firmly gripping the two elements in question, then hopes are slim.

The other way into philosophy's sacrificial question is direct, straight at it. Rather than fixing definitions of thinking and truth on the way to determining what it means to offer one for the other, go to the sacrifice first and from there delineate what surrounds it. Following this route, all that needs to be established about thinking and truth are some tentative orientations, some guides toward what's more fundamental. For that reason the standard examples of both I just listed don't need to be further

examined but quickly bundled together as markers pointing to where focused investigating begins. The implication here is that what's essential—and the word is used without shearing off connotations—about thinking and truth no matter how they're conceived is their relation. By this I don't mean something dialectical; it's not that to understand one you need to understand the other and then the opposite. The assertion is that for philosophy what's critical in any form of thinking and for every kind of truth has almost nothing to do with either because their definitions along with why we want them and how we know we've really got them follow from the answer to the sacrificial question. In three sentences, the assertion is that philosophy isn't about thinking. More significantly it's not about truth, and not about that no matter how the word is understood. Philosophy is primarily about what happens between thinking and truth.

Further on I'll be forced to modify the preceding sentences, though not dramatically. What won't need to be modified is the following question that every page of this chapter tries to answer in every one of its senses: what is the philosophy of sacrifice?

A painful concession for a megalomaniac to the Nietzschean degree:

> Even we seekers after knowledge today, we godless antimetaphysicians still take our fire, too, from the flame lit by a faith that is thousands of years old, that Christian faith which was also the faith of Plato, that God is the truth, that truth is divine.[3]

Nietzsche's admission stung because he'd studied the past so meticulously and then written against it so tirelessly in his effort to escape what was thousands of years old. As for his writing tirelessly, in the year the cited passage appeared in the *Gay Science*'s significant amendment, *Genealogy of Morals* was also published. The year before *Beyond Good and Evil* as well as important additions to *Human, All-Too-Human*. All these pages were conceived, and then many reconceived, in the name of what Nietzsche desperately wanted: to be the anti-Plato, the anti-Christ. He didn't make it. Or, at least he didn't make it by relentlessly working out an antimetaphysical philosophy since, as Nietzsche admits, that labor finally sent him back to the fire that got everything going in the first place. To understand this realization, to develop this conclusion that the philosophic destruc-

tion Nietzsche hoped he'd wrought with his determined mental hammering finally didn't amount to more than an irreverent reinforcement of the tradition he wanted to wreck, what needs to be outlined here is just what it means for a godless antimetaphysician to have faith in divine truth.

Any casual observer of Nietzsche's work can't help but come away with the blunt (not for that reason wrong) idea that godless antimetaphysicians reject abstract, enveloping understandings of the world in favor of limited, palpably subjective ones. Which means the ancient faith in truth as divine seeping forward and contaminating Nietzsche can't be related to the preference for one or another kind of truth. What it does relate to, though—what Nietzsche admits sharing with the long tradition preceding him—is a belief that *whatever* truth may be, it will be wanted.

The wanting, the divinity running from Plato through Christian Platonism and then Nietzsche is uniform, on the compressed level where it operates all philosophers constantly worship in the same way. Setting up a rudimentary example, a truth reaches majestic proportions with Plato's notion of Justice as it's habitually outlined in Introduction to Philosophy classes. On the other hand there are common and banal truths, blatantly ignoble ones that can't escape triviality but that nonetheless preserve the desire and the faith. We know these truths, they're the ones mentioned only in passing in elementary courses (and later on not at all) because they seem so shamefully embarrassing for our discipline. Socrates earnestly reflecting on how two of his fingers are different sizes and shapes but still fingers, Descartes fiddling with a piece of wax on a solitary afternoon. In the classes we teach, if we discuss these episodes it's only to show how both Socrates and Descartes proceeded to build their trifling interests into grand intellectual monuments; we protect philosophy, we protect what we do, from the humiliating urge for whatever truth by lifting Socrates and Descartes's curious findings out of insignificance. But that lifting isn't necessary for Nietzsche. It's not because there's something significant right there at the beginning and regardless of whether any grand Truth will evolve from the mundane. What's there is truth as divine because it's desired, and desired whether it comes with a capitalized first letter or wax underneath the fingernails.

The desirability truths share isn't *in* them, they don't all possess something making them attractive for everyone all the time. Nietzsche, in fact, never tired of poking at and deflating this possibility as he did when he cited and laughingly approved of the mythical Odysseus for slyly trick-

ing the monster of Lemnos out of his bow and arrows.[4] What should be taken—in the real world that doesn't include monsters—from this myth and Nietzsche's reaction to it is that while divine truths are necessarily wanted, the divinity isn't necessarily in effect. That leaves the question about when and where it is and isn't. One way to begin drawing the line is provided by the rhetorical boundary Nietzsche proposed when he wrote, "Even we seekers. . . ." The boundary is the words Nietzsche selected to mean what he did, it's the specific terms along with their references, allusions and implied knowledge. One of the messages all this conveys is an appropriate audience for Nietzsche's writings, a set of people for whom they readily they make sense. Following this lead, Nietzsche's idea isn't that *he* finds truth to be intrinsically desirable, and it's not that *he thinks* truth is intrinsically desirable. Instead: as a philosopher Nietzsche can't help but want truth. The wanting, in other words, that makes truths divine occurs among those who don't think it's strange to contemplate their fingers and brood over pieces of wax, it occurs in irregular places like Descartes's remote cabin and Nietzsche's idiosyncratic books. It occurs for philosophers, it's the reverence they demonstrate for truths.

Nietzsche taught the reverence. "I hope," he wrote in the *Genealogy*, that philosophers "know how to keep their hearts as well as their sufferings in bounds and have trained themselves to sacrifice all desirability to truth, every truth, even plain, harsh, ugly, repellent, unchristian, immoral truth."[5] The lesson this Nietzschean aspiration teaches doesn't concern those particularly disconcerting understandings he so enjoyed announcing; the lesson is much less tangible though not at all ambiguous. It's that being a philosopher requires revering every truth and, more importantly, philosophy's reverence expresses a faith that's virtually religious. I mean, if Nietzsche's desire for truths goes on regardless of the hurtful effects they may have for the eyes because they're ugly or for the body because they're repellent or for the soul because they're immoral, if the desire goes on no matter how disgusting and painful, then it's extremely difficult to see how it could be reasonably explained or persuasively justified. And if it can't be then Nietzsche's aspiration for philosophy teaches that there's no *reason* to desire truth. There's only faith—groundless faith—that it should be desired.

The faith is depressing. Depressing because Nietzsche's participation in it reveals—as he recognized and acknowledged—that while he knew

he wanted to defy everything philosophy had been before him, he didn't, ultimately, know how to be defiant. Even though he cultivated a palpably carnal disgust for metaphysical certainty and the Christian God, in the end Nietzsche couldn't stop believing in that thousands of years old faith which was the Christian faith and also the faith of Plato. Nietzsche couldn't stop believing in philosophy as bound to truth.

It should be added that it's difficult to actually see this pervasive faith in the greater part of philosophy's tradition because its founders commonly asserted that truth was naturally good, pleasant and agreeable, and that makes it hard to distinguish the common and perfectly reasonable desire for what's good and pleasant from the much narrower and purely philosophic faith that truth should be wanted no matter of how it is. Still the faith has always been there. It was there for Socrates and for Descartes, and it's obtrusively there as Nietzsche's worshipping in the midst of the harsh, ugly and repellent.

Piety is the word Nietzsche chose to designate philosophy's devotion to truth not for reasons but as an expression of faith.[6]

The question about sacrifice in philosophy—will thinking be offered for truth—can now be answered under the regime of piety. The answer is there's no reason it won't be.

Further, it's not difficult to trace some of the ways it is. One of them, and one of the most glaring, is that even the bitterest philosophic antagonists share a willingness to junk one kind of thinking for another if that's truth's demand. Beginning with an extremely bitter antagonism, not many reach the strident antipathy of analytic against recent Continental philosophy. Manifestly different forms of thought, it hardly needs to be noted that austere, contemporary analyzers are tempted to skip over Nietzsche's exuberant studies of reality's harshest, ugliest and most repellent parts. Or, trading Nietzsche for one of his more contemporary advocates, it's equally evident that there are few better ways to dismay and aggravate our discipline's most sober representatives then by reciting Foucault's contemplation of hideous bodily tortures in the first pages of *Discipline and Punish*. Continuing along this line but replacing Nietzsche and Foucault with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, there aren't many analytic philosophers who see much of anything at all for serious intellectual work in the following sentence:

> We're considering a very simple problem, like William Burroughs with drugs: can you harness the power of drugs without them taking over, without turning into a dazed zombie?[7]

No final decision needs to be made about whether this narcotic thought should be included on philosophy's itinerary. To get where I'm going, it will be sufficient to simply leave the consideration of mind alteration as a possibility for thinking. Now, presumably at least, even the most straight-laced analyzers *would* seriously consider this possibility if they could be persuaded that it would help them draw respectable conclusions. The supposition is that even if analysts wouldn't experiment with drugs they would follow Deleuze and Guattari in experimenting with the idea of experimenting with drugs if that allowed them to achieve results their colleagues would admire. Granting this supposition is also granting that the severe style of thinking practiced by analytic philosophers is expendable; expendable, that is, when balanced against truth. Next, the same expendability is just as rapidly reached by crossing the analytic-Continental divide in the other direction. Starting from the side of those pursuing recent Continental theory, for them the strictest formulations of the driest intellects often seem lifeless and impotent. Example:

> Quine's view that indeterminacy in the realm of intentionality is over and above the underdetermination of physical theory is presented as carrying a prejudice against the intentional. Rorty says it is a way of denying factuality to the intentional, and is a consequence of Quine's interest in reducing, a) the mental idiom to the physical idiom, and b) the non-extensional idiom to an extensional one.[8]

While thinking with these specialized words and within this hard argumentative grid seems mentally sterilizing, even the most vivid phenomenologists would likely take the argument seriously if they could be persuaded that it would yield intriguing and persuasive knowledge about their experiences. Assuming they would do that, assuming they'd give up their kind of language and paths for thought in exchange for "Quine's view that indeterminacy . . ." is also concluding that phenomenologists are indistinguishable from those worried about Quine's indeterminacy from this narrow perspective: even the most zealous advocates of either

analytic or Continental manners of thought will jump to the other side if deeply convinced that the other way will get them to the particular truths they seek more effectively. If that's right, then it's also right to understand that those truths casually hold thought under the threat of sacrifice and, further, it's the willingness to sacrifice that holds the words "analytic" and "Continental" together with the word "philosophy."

Truth completely dominating thinking—piety—is not only active between analytic and Continental schools of thought, it also emerges from shiftings in particular individuals' work. As an example (and one admired by both analysts and Continentals) there's Wittgenstein. About him, we know in general terms how his philosophic work and views shifted. In the movement from his early to later writing a conviction that language represents and communicates objective truth because it firmly connects with things in the world was replaced by the judgment that language is just another malleable component of experience functioning in diverse ways to interact with physical and psychological events. We also know that Wittgenstein's *way* of thinking shifted correspondingly. A dedication to numerically stern organization buttressed by syntactical discipline was replaced by appeals to the most common and concrete experiences, to games children play, to plain boxes that may or may not contain bugs. Much of the contemporary work on Wittgenstein is oriented by this shift, by this conversion from something called (in English) a *Tractatus* to the more immediately comprehensible *Investigations*, and a typical question for study is whether the conversion should be called progress or an improvement. That question and others related to it don't matter here, though, because Wittgenstein's bibliography is not only the story of a man pursuing one sort of truth about words and their relation with things and then another, beneath that the story is also about a philosopher doing what *makes* him a philosopher: sacrificing one kind of thinking for another. Specifically, sacrificing formal maneuverings for empirical reflections since the latter better served the distinct truths that occupied his later work. Writing the sacrifice differently and from the perspective of we who are his readers, Wittgenstein changed his ideas as well as the ways he thought toward those ideas as time passed, but when you and I witness that we do so almost exclusively in terms of his conclusions, in terms of (crudely) Wittgenstein as compatible with Platonism becoming Wittgenstein as compatible with Nietzsche. Of course we acknowledge that the way Wittgenstein thought was also transformed—

metallic descriptions and assertions were replaced by provocative questions and fluid metaphors—but that's only a footnote. It's only a footnote since no one would argue that *because* Wittgenstein transformed the way he thought his philosophic findings were also modified. The privileging goes in the other direction; Wittgenstein indifferently sacrificed one kind of thinking for another as his views shifted and then we sacrifice thinking altogether when we grasp that shift exclusively as a transformation of Wittgenstein's truths.

Then again, what I just wrote about Wittgenstein might be wrong. Assume it is, assume that solid evidence could be gathered to show that he first changed the way he thought and that led to distinct understandings about how language touches experience. Quickly filling one version of this hypothetical proposal out, an argument could be made that as a young man Wittgenstein labored within the entrenched presuppositions, standard maneuvers and rigid vocabulary of an elite group of philosophers at an English university (the years spent at Cambridge culminating in the *Tractatus*) and then, later, the channels and connections of his thought were dictated by his experiences removed from university life and as an elementary school teacher in Austria. The conclusion would be that the more tangible and immediate ways of thinking inspired by and refined within the company of children were ultimately manifested as the *Investigations*' philosophy of language. The conclusion wouldn't be, however, important with respect to the *Investigations*' philosophy of language. Since it only concerned the thinking leading to Wittgenstein's ideas and not the ideas, the conclusion wouldn't change whether we believe they're right or not. And if it wouldn't change that then our response to this Wittgensteinian study would be both abrupt and decisive: So what? The response would be flat indifference because it doesn't matter how a philosopher comes up with ideas, all that matters is what they are and whether they're true. Formulated more aggressively, even if it could be shown that Wittgenstein's *Investigations* resulted from literally childish thinking his book wouldn't be in the least discredited.

Pushing further into this indifference to philosophic thought, if a biography revealed that Wittgenstein wasn't a childish thinker at all but, worse, that his well-known eccentricities were actually symptoms of his being an over-committed Deleuzean habitually using poisonous drugs to fire up the synapses, even then we wouldn't subtract a portion of the quality we attribute to Wittgenstein's writings about language. We

wouldn't do the subtracting—and we wouldn't subtract no matter how unsettling *any* biographical revelation proved—because in philosophy thought doesn't matter. Better to write that in pious philosophy thought doesn't matter.

Better yet to write that the preceding two paragraphs began dubiously (Wittgenstein as a childish thinker) and then strayed further from the plausible. With respect to that straying the hard reality is that while the idea of drug-driven writing is not an entirely unhappy daydream when you've spent three hours trying to get a single paragraph in order and more work is still needed, it won't happen, no brain drowned in venom will ever find or produce valuable conclusions. That doesn't effect a stubborn fact about piety, though. When piety governs philosophy there's a subsequent insistence that we shouldn't hesitate to exchange frustrated hours of meticulous outlining, writing, rethinking, reformulating, deleting and seemingly interminable reconstructing in exchange for a drug that inspires agitated fingers to type a paragraph as long as the mind-bent tapping is certain to produce the writing that all the laboring was directed toward (and as long as the brain damage isn't permanent). It follows—and now we've reached the edge of the absurdly impossible—that disciplined thinking will be sacrificed for a drug *if* the drug will surely grant something that's compelling, right, true.

Finally, and as is so often the case, the absurdly impossible easily nudges into perfectly sober reality. Only two questions to get there. What's the difference between the stupidly narcotized philosopher and what we're told Socrates really did on his last day? What's the difference between sentences conjured up with drugs and what all of us have taught with perfect seriousness in an Introduction to Philosophy course?

Two sets of adjectives surround thinking's sacrifice for truth. On truth's side the set includes admirable, dedicated and dignified. These words are summoned by the sacrifice as it demonstrates a steadfast dedication to knowledge. On the other side, though, on thinking's side the sacrifice appears very differently. There, it's shameful because it diminishes respect for thinking, disdains it and, in the extreme case, brands thought with the word irrelevant. Naturally it's sacrifice's dignified side—the offering for truth—that pious philosophers emphasize with their work. What can't be entirely covered over, however, is that philosophy's history has also been composed from the degradation of thought. To the

degree it has, our discipline's central figures should be construed not only as proponents of unwavering faith in truth but also as perpetrators of thought's humiliation. We can't, in other words, conceive of philosophy as a purely noble enterprise; it's also ignoble, it's also a project of debasement.

One seminal example of philosophy understood not as meritoriously pursuing truth but as thoroughly degrading thinking comes from Socrates, from the tension between his meticulous examinations of ideas and his penchant for relating zany stories about celestial charioteers and citizens bound to rocks and grasshoppers that used to be people. The reason cutting arguments and absurd stories are exchanged freely throughout Socrates's teaching is evident. His thought was uneven because he tuned his sophistication into the level of his interlocutors; when speaking with Phaedrus, for instance, he loosened things up to properly connect with a mind not as energetic as his own. Allowing for that is allowing the fanciful tales to become considerably less embarrassing for Socrates as a teacher since it's obviously not his fault that some of his compatriots weren't radiantly bright. This justification doesn't do anything at all for Socrates as a *thinker*, though. Socrates as a thinker was constantly belittled by his own rhetoric. Belittled because it's not quite right to say that Socrates's violent swings of sophistication were a response to his interlocutors, they were more a response to truth as it illuminated thought for those interlocutors: Socrates employed the kind of reasoning that would most effectively lure specific listeners toward the highest level of understanding (he believed) they could attain. It follows that, ultimately, it was a notion of truth—along with a relentless dedication to it—that forced Socrates to appear alternately as the protagonist of a children's show and a crack examiner. Next, and with the responsibility for Socrates's constantly altering level of discussion correctly established, the following becomes clear. The alterations were degrading; even on those days when Socrates shaped his debating words with breathtaking skill they were still being casually manipulated by the truth they served. I mean, it would be one thing if Socrates had been blessed with a certain capacity for reasoning and did the best he could with it, but to have his mental work strung along recklessly by the particular level of truth he happened to be working toward, that's the humiliation of thinking. It is the pious humiliation of thinking.

It's an humiliation that Saint Augustine, as he reports on an amusing page of his *Confessions*,[9] perpetuated. He did after noticing that his devout mother regularly placed food—little cakes—at the feet of statues of the apostles. To this veneration the Saint responded not by embarking on a sophisticated metaphysical discussion about the theoretical role of representations of holy figures; instead, he simply congratulated his mother's reverence. Given a choice, that is, between spurring another to think as intensely as possible no matter where the effort might lead (even if it might lead to confusion, doubt, the jeopardization of faith) and encouraging a belief that was simplified but true, Augustine followed Socrates (in conversation with Phaedrus) in taking the second. He took it, and without hesitating, because of his piety. Not piety as respect for religious customs or God, instead, piety as thinking made ridiculous for truth.

Proceeding to Nietzsche, he did the same thing. His Zarathustra went to town to proclaim the overman and ended up with the ludicrous task of burying a tightrope walker whose performance ended not according to plan. Later on Zarathustra was presented as deciding to converse with animals. Staying with Nietzsche and animals but not Zarathustra, in the *Genealogy* readers are treated to the story of the bird of prey and its delight in devouring little herd animals. "Nothing is more tasty," Nietzsche informs us, "than a tender lamb."[10] Now, these and most of the rest of Nietzsche's farces are, we are told, for his "friends," for "those who have ears."[11] Hidden underneath their superficial frivolity, in other words, are the insights, understandings and godless truths forming the bulwark of contemporary philosophy. Which, Nietzsche determined, would be too heavy for most people to bear. And it was because of the unbearability that Nietzsche wrote sentences at once trivial and serious, it was because he wanted to divert less capable readers from overwhelming knowledge that he wrote on levels.[12] As a result, and no matter how prudent or fraudulent or contemptible this incarnation of the ancient Platonic writing strategy may finally be, it repeats the habit of degrading thought. It reduces thinking's expressions to interchangeability at the whim of the truths—the levels of truth—that are humbly served.

Though I don't think Gilles Deleuze believed in philosopher-kings and socially responsible misrepresentations in quite the way his distinguished predecessors did, he nonetheless acknowledged their rhetorical division of thinking into layers of sophistication. In a footnote, appropriately, to one of his studies of Spinoza, Deleuze reminded us of the

early Modern "procedure that consisted in concealing the boldest or least orthodox arguments in appendices or notes."[13] So, Deleuze recognized the historically institutionalized practice of cutting up thought's force and intensity without hesitation or guilt; further, more than simply recognizing, Deleuze also participated. Though he removed the sinister tone of Plato and Nietzsche (it would be difficult to read through his main books under the tutelage of, say, Leo Strauss's *Persecution and the Art of Writing*), at least one of his pages can be set near Plato and Nietzsche's esotericism. On it, Deleuze inscribed a sentence destined to prove—this is as unfortunate as it is certain—the most frequently cited line of his collected works, the one about how he dealt with the tradition's principal figures by taking them from the rear.[14] The first point to make about this scandalous metaphor is that when it's considered for even a few seconds by anyone who's read more than a few pages of Deleuze it immediately falls apart. While the image it presents of Deleuze's philosophy is no doubt embarrassingly intriguing it's also largely wrong because Deleuze wrote books about major figures to provide them with ingeniously twisted offspring, not to waste his productive forces on convulsing endeavors that come to nothing. In *Kant's Critical Philosophy*, for example, and then in his subsequent references to Kant later in his career, Deleuze sought to demonstrate that there are ideas in Kant's writings that Kant couldn't deny fathering but that nevertheless betray his principal arguments.[15] What Deleuze wanted to do with selected portions of his predecessor was bend them into a philosophy that actively disputes Kantianism, that's not only gratifying but productive of a next generation of philosophical investigating. Still, and while recognizing that Deleuze's image of philosophy as sodomy doesn't tell us much about his philosophic activity, it must also be admitted that for people who want to talk about Deleuze's Kant but aren't prepared to actually struggle through Kant's frigid books and then Deleuze's complicated appropriation of them the scatological image at least allows some vague idea of what Deleuze was up to; at least it communicates the certainty that what Deleuze did with one of the tradition's principal figures wasn't entirely conventional. The result is that Deleuze's image of sodomy tells us something superficial but not much more about his philosophy. The fact that Deleuze *used* the image, however—that's more enlightening. It shows us that it was important for Deleuze to reach even those who weren't prepared to fully grasp his frequently difficult writings; Deleuze wanted them to know something

about his ideas, he wanted them to see what kind of truths he was producing. The image also shows that if facilitating the understanding sometimes required the degradation of disciplined thought, then the degradation would happen.

To the extent the degradation did happen in Deleuze and before in Nietzsche, both resemble Plato's Socrates in not caring what path they follow *as long as* it lets them reach some truth. What should be taken from this is that while Socrates and Nietzsche and then Nietzsche's (French) friends with ears were celebrating their bold discoveries they were also disdaining the thought enabling their determinations. Part of the cost of Nietzsche's and Nietzschean philosophy, it follows, part of the cost of the perspectives, interpretations, concepts and so on is no different than what Socrates paid for his truth: the dignity of thought. Without protest, and for Socrates and Nietzsche and Deleuze one after the other, philosophizing gets stretched in one direction and then bent over and contorted back and arranged differently yet again. And the various postures aren't limited by some narrow confines that mark the autonomy of thinking, that let *it* dictate what's acceptable and what isn't; instead, there are no limits, work curls about in an open range stretching from mechanically rigorous proofs and tight chains of argument to cleverly frivolous allegorical stories to unorthodox metaphors. Like an intellectual harlot, thinking is constrained to serving in one position then another and without protest and without ever receiving anything more than assurances that it has faithfully evoked one of the truths that philosophers have decided to believe in on one or another of the levels that's deemed appropriate for reaching. For the pious, of course, these assurances are sufficient. For them, since philosophy wants truth, thinking's degradation is hardly worth considering.

For those who aren't pious, that's not right.

Leaving right and wrong for later, for the present this conclusion: the word philosophy—what it means—splits. On one side it means the unwavering consecration of truth. On the other, philosophy means the humiliation of thought.

Piety accents the humiliation. Qualifying philosophy as pious is maintaining that while a persevering dedication to truth is the most actively promoted aspect of our discipline and what ostensibly keeps it going, what really and fundamentally holds the history of philosophy together

and moves it forward, is the willingness to degrade thought, to reduce it to an offering.

Translating thinking into writing, piety means that before we choose literal words or metaphorical ones about little lambs and philosophers coming at others from behind, before we employ the strict rhetoric of a *Tractatus* or try to recreate the suggestive prose of Wittgenstein's *Investigations*, before we write sentences styled after "Quine's view that indeterminacy in the realm of intentionality . . ." or questions resembling the one involving Burroughs and drugs, before we decide on any of that we decide to write philosophy. And before we decide to write philosophy we determine that thinking manifested as writing is contemptible. We'll write to get truths, and *they* will dictate what words are written and how they're arranged. More, as long as the words manage to transmit some truth, what they are and how they're arranged drops toward irrelevance. (This explains one of the most obtrusively bizarre aspects of philosophy, how it is that within the discipline—though obviously nowhere else—painfully clumsy writers can nevertheless convince others that they are experts in the study of language.) After something's been written, philosophic thought can act through reading. Before we decide to read in one way or another, though, before we choose to read sentences literally or metaphorically, before we read to follow the steps of an argument or to be inspired by captivating suggestions, before we use our limited time reading the early Wittgenstein or the late Wittgenstein or a book from Plato or Nietzsche or Deleuze, before we decide on any of that we decide to read philosophy. And before we decide to read philosophy we determine that reading is expendable: we'll read in whatever way and whatever books are necessary to get the best truths we can find or make. (This explains why the set of books we call philosophical cannot be organized as a literary genre.) In sum, writing and reading—doing philosophy—means already conceiving of thinking as an offering.

Going back to the beginning of this chapter, the conceiving explains why Nietzsche concluded—why he *could* conclude—that even he, a godless antimetaphysician, still oriented philosophy with "a Christian faith that's also the faith of Plato." Nietzsche reached this conclusion because of where the faith he shared with Plato is located. Beginning where it isn't, it can't be solely in the realm of truth because there the two are incompatible; they're as irreconcilable as Platonism's pristine visions and Nietzscheanism's desire for earthly, frequently sordid knowledge. What

can and does hold the two together, though, what Plato and Nietzsche both believe in before anything else is that thinking will be sacrificed for truth, and will be sacrificed no matter what the truth is. To be as clear as possible here the argument is that if philosophy is directly and exclusively about truth then there's no way two individuals who hold violently antithetical views about it can be comfortably joined. But if philosophy is principally about the sacrifice happening in the midst of thinking and truth, then differences marked by the way philosophers think (and write and read) along with differences marked by what's wanted (God, godlessness and so on), all that becomes secondary. What's primary occurs between thinking and truth, and there Plato and Nietzsche are identically pious, they share a single faith that doing philosophy means forcing thought to serve truth.

The change in the definition of philosophy from the pure love of truth to the sacrifice of thinking for it is not merely semantic, the change twists understandings of our discipline's principal figures and reforms the discipline's past. While there's obviously not space here to review all that, two decisive and problematic episodes in philosophy's history can be quickly formulated in sacrifice's terms. One belongs to that Christian faith which was also the faith of Plato; it belongs to Saint Augustine. The other belongs to the most godless antimetaphysician, Nietzsche.

Coursing through the heart of Augustine's *Confessions* are difficult problems elicited by his Christian conversion: what is it, how did it happen, what does it mean? No matter what the answers are, we at least know what came before. Augustine relates that his conversion was preceded by valiant, sustained intellectual struggles; he labored in the midst of persuasive hedonism, insistent skepticism and difficult Manichean arguments on the way to final belief. Augustine's ultimate revelation was not described, however—and this is where the problems with his conversion begin—as a triumph of stern intelligence. Instead of representing a victory for Christian theology when rationally tested against other explanations of experience, Augustine was inspired to his last truth by a silly children's song echoing over a garden wall. Sitting alone one afternoon, Augustine relates, he heard some unseen boys and girls chanting something like "Take it and read it, take it and read it."[16] After listening for a moment he spun around, picked up his nearby Bible, scanned a few lines and in a flash struggling ended. As for this surprisingly juvenile and stub-

bornly inscrutable climax placed at the end of a life of critical investigating, there are at least two ways to manage it. The first is the standard interpretation of Augustine which fits underneath the privileging of truth in philosophy. The second works through the privileging of sacrifice.

The standard interpretation affirms that God, when He finally arrived, overwhelmed Augustine's devotion to philosophical inquiry and thus neutralized any skepticism related to the revelation's origin; the magnitude of Truth, the argument goes, eclipses concerns about where it happens to come from. Certainly, this reading of Augustine's conversion makes sense, it's a reasonable way of dealing with the children wrapped into the discovery of God. It's also difficult to deny, however, that the reading is extremely vulnerable to Nietzschean cynicism. The conversion episode seems *too* absurd; a revelation instigated by childish singing on the far side of a garden wall seems to suggest—for those with even mildly sensitive ears—a story for readers who are innocent, though not in the venerable, holy sense. To this suspicion Augustine's orthodox advocates respond by repeating that Truth came and caused the end of thought and that's it. There's nothing more to be considered, there shouldn't be any more considering.

The second understanding of Augustine's conversion—the one oriented by philosophy as sacrificial piety—gets at the question of how the childish episode should be read by redefining Augustine's experience this way. When Augustine finally became a worshipper of divine truth it wasn't divine in the form of God as embodying perfection but divine in the sense of the kind of truth that degrades and then sacrifices thinking. This means Augustine's progress to conversion was not about a movement from one truth to another more truthful one and then to a culminating and perfect One; it wasn't a slow escalation of knowledge from the skeptics' belief to the Manichees' to Christian divinity. Instead, the conversion happened between thinking and truth and with the following transformation: before final belief Augustine was not disposed to sacrifice his thought for understanding, whatever that understanding may have been. After the conversion—as the conversion—he was. For that reason it wasn't something *in* Augustine's final truth that caused him to sacrifice his critical labors but something before that; it was the piety existing between all thinking and every truth that finally culminated as outright, irrevocable sacrifice and consequently instantiated final Christianity. Formulated slightly differently, it wasn't God that forced Augustine to

stop thinking but the halting of thought that raised a certain truth named God to the level of the last one.

Setting this conception of Augustine's conversion next to the question about how he presented it, one of the conception's advantages lies in its rapidly explaining why Augustine surrounded his singular moment with an absurd scene blatantly mocking his intellectual efforts. Augustine wanted to show that the conversion represented—and represented nothing more than—his final willingness to utterly humiliate thought. If that's what happened then the reason the conversion wasn't coated with the nobility presumably adequate to a revealed perfection is entirely straightforward; it's because the conversion derived from and communicates debasement, thinking made absurd. The conclusion is that the replacement of God as victorious truth with thinking ridiculed at the heart of Augustine's conversion allows us to efficiently and cleanly account for the episode's prominent silliness. It also allows the supposition that the children Augustine heard on the other side of his garden wall weren't benevolent cherubs representing the purity of holy revelation, they more likely resembled those kids J. K. Huysmans described in his parody of Augustine in *Against the Grain* (*A rebours*),[17] they were rotten juveniles well equipped to symbolize denigration and well suited to represent the terminal, disgraced condition of Augustine's life as an advocate of dedicated critical reasoning. That's not to assert, however, that Augustine's God should be likened to Huysmans's grimy youngsters. Maybe He should be, or, He may have been what Augustine's conventional defenders say He still is. There's no way to know because there's no way to be sure whether Augustine ultimately arrived at unequivocal truth, we only know he arrived at a final one. Augustine's God was only final since the conversion episode reveals that it wasn't because of Him that thinking got sacrificed in the *Confessions*, it was the other way.

Nietzsche can be twisted this other way just like Augustine. And, as was the case for Augustine, the twisting happens in the midst of a (or possibly the most) stubborn and aggravating problem inhabiting Nietzsche's philosophy. The problem starts with Nietzsche as an imperialist, it starts with: "The signpost to the right road was . . ."[18] and "This should dispose once and for all of the question of how . . ."[19] These citations have been cut off, obviously, at their most captivating moments. The reason they're cut off is because, for my purposes, where the right road leads or what particular question has been settled once and for all is

irrelevant. What matters is that these iron quotes from the *Genealogy* can easily be multiplied. Consistently throughout his books Nietzsche claims preeminence on the basis of his truths: he was right, everyone else was wrong. Now, the maddening theoretical problem rising alongside every one of these confident assertions isn't so much that they prove invalid when carefully examined for argumentative coherence or seem incorrect when checked against experience. The really difficult problem is that the imperial Nietzsche formulating his grand claims runs counter to another Nietzsche, the one who worked from the suspicion that everything's interpretation. "There is," this other Nietzsche sensed, "only perspective seeing."[20] If Nietzsche's right, then it immediately becomes evident that there can't be any "right roads" or "once and for all" ends of questions. Pushing this uncertainty to its fullest extension, there can't even be a once and for all end to the question about whether there are once and for all ends of questions. There certainly can be and is, though, this tension severely straining Nietzsche's intellectual reputation: why did he simultaneously claim that some truths are unshakably right and that all truths are limited interpretations? (Transferring the tension from the epistemological to the ethical, how could Nietzsche maintain that his figure of the overman is valuable because he represents the future's model philosopher and also maintain what the overman maintains, namely that there are no model philosophers, only endless creations of interpretative values?)

Regardless of how this deep, Nietzschean problem is presented there are two major routes to its resolution. The first works within Nietzsche's philosophy as being about truth, the second within his philosophy as being about the relation between thinking and truth. When Nietzsche's philosophy is taken to be about truth, the commonly followed way out of the contradicting imperialism and perspectivism is suggested by Nietzsche's bombastic writing style; the resolution is to selectively tone down (or silence altogether) parts of his texts. Following this somewhat parental reading strategy, it's allowable to deduce that when Nietzsche wrote about being on the right road and coming upon a once and for all certainty, he didn't actually mean that, he was just proclaiming a limited interpretation in a very loud voice. Which was understandable. Given the fact that Nietzsche's work drew frustratingly little attention from his contemporaries it's reasonable to suppose that he—like most anyone in those circumstances—would at least occasionally exchange some consistency and sobriety for noisy hyperbole. It's difficult to read Nietzsche, in

fact, without perceiving a conviction that the only thing worse than a bad philosopher is a philosopher no one's heard of. Consequently, it seems fair and justifiable for readers to moderate some of Nietzsche's assertions; it seems fair for one commentator to write that Nietzsche is burdened with "histrionics" and "cries out to be blue-penciled,"[21] and it seems justifiable for another to maintain that "as always in reading Nietzsche, one needs to distinguish between the excited exaggeration and the underlying genius."[22] The objection, however, to this strategy of selecting Nietzsche's good parts while modifying or just getting rid of the rest is that if we do that then it seems as though we must already know on some level what needs to be changed or disregarded and what doesn't. We must already know, in other words, what Nietzsche has to teach us. And if we already know, then why bother reading him at all? The result is that this way of undoing the fundamental contradiction in Nietzsche's writings ultimately ends up undoing Nietzsche.[23]

The other way out of the Nietzschean conflict doesn't hammer down the imperialism, it seeks a reconciliation of his two kinds of truths. The reconciliation begins by positioning the contradiction in Nietzsche around his own question about whether thinking will be terminally sacrificed for truth. The answer for the perspectivist Nietzsche is no. He'll reduce his labors to nothing more than what exists to reach understandings of experience, but the denigration won't make it to the irreversibly sacrificial extreme. Instead, this Nietzsche subjects his philosophizing to constantly slumping forward which means ceaselessly altering old interpretations, redirecting some of them and constructing new ones around them. When understood *in terms of truth*, this incessant altering, redirecting and constructing is easily recognized as the colorful narrative of Nietzsche's joyous and gay expounding. When understood in terms of piety, though, the story is about philosophical thought as constantly shamed but never eradicated since it serves truths but won't give up existence for them. So, within pious logic, Nietzsche as a perspectivist is *not* the one who constructs narrow, constrained interpretations, he's the one who interprets by degrading but not irrevocably sacrificing philosophic work. Rewriting the previous sentence, Nietzsche's perspective, limited understandings may not function everywhere all the time, or, they may; theoretically, they *may* be universally correct. That doesn't matter, though, because for the perspectivist Nietzsche the reason no interpretation will prove immune to subsequent reformation is that when the practice of

philosophizing is degraded but not entirely offered it necessarily goes on, and as long as it does, no truth can be considered permanent. As a result, for the perspectivist Nietzsche there are no permanent assertions in philosophy because—only because—there's no end to philosophic thinking.

For the imperial Nietzsche, on the other hand, there are permanent assertions lying along the right road for thought to follow. In repeating Nietzsche's steps along that road, we only need to be careful to avoid a confusion. This road isn't right because it leads to a conclusion resisting even the most prying examination; instead, the road Nietzsche is on deserves to be called right because it leads to the highest piety, it goes to the place where the degradation of thought culminates. After the sacrifice, what remains is a truth that's no longer open to question because there's no thinking left to do the questioning. Therefore, and as was the case with Augustine before him, Nietzsche's once and for all declarations aren't the best ones or the most infallible as descriptions of the world, they're just last ones, nothing more. Making this specific, when Nietzsche wrote, "This should dispose once and for all of the question of how the Holy God originated," he didn't mean that he had accurately and exhaustively grasped what happened in history. He meant that his piety had culminated as critical thinking's end. Then, and because of that end, an interpretative understanding of the past became once and for all. More generally in Nietzsche, a proclamation that something is simply and certainly right has little to do with the particular truth that's announced, it has to do with what runs deeper than any truth. It has to do with the faith that thinking is *for* truth and for that reason—when pushed all the way—thought becomes nothing more than a dead offering for an understanding that can no longer be criticized.

This conception of Nietzsche's imperial proclaiming implies a broad distinction between all last truths and any best one. The distinction is difficult to draw when philosophy is conceived as about truth before anything else since under that regime the only way a truth can legitimately be positioned at the end is if it explains everything and therefore is also the best. But if philosophy's first question takes place between thinking and truth then a space separating the last from the best spreads open when a truth that's not best nonetheless becomes last by emerging from thinking's termination. With respect to this opening, it's somewhat ambiguous in straight theoretical terms but not difficult to see—even impossible to avoid—in practical terms in our time. I mean, in the midst of contempo-

rary philosophy that takes its intellectual bearings from Nietzsche, nearly all of us who've come after him concede that even our most accomplished work will prove vulnerable to refutation. That doesn't stop us, though, from forming positions and adhering to them; it doesn't stop us from composing books that make strong claims any more than it stopped Nietzsche. In fact, we couldn't write anything at all if we didn't do that, if we didn't make at least one strong claim; we couldn't even *start* writing if we didn't accept something as true and build from there. We only need to be sure to emphasize in our work that when we say something's true and build above it, we don't mean the foundation is unshakeable; we only mean to mark an enclosed location where thought has been sacrificed *so that* something more can be done. In the most ordinary language, in order to get our books underway we need, at one moment or another, to stop worrying about a question, accept an answer and go with it. Taking this book as an immediate example, before starting to write I thought quite a bit about the Nietzschean sentences cited near the beginning. I never reached a stable confidence that I'd correctly understood their meaning but at some point in the past I nonetheless determined to stop asking about them. That decision made this book possible. It also thrust me into the space separating a last interpretation from a best one.

Moving the last/best distinction back over to the subject of the aggravated division separating the perspectivist Nietzsche from the imperialist, the distinction allows the elaboration of a specific advantage philosophy defined as starting from the sacrifice of thinking holds over any philosophy starting from truth. Philosophy starting from truth and orienting everything around that must set an exclusive disjunction between the two Nietzsches since the perspectivist cautiously maintains all truths are vulnerable to refutation while the imperialist abruptly makes announcements that can't be refuted. Subsequently, if these Nietzsches *are* forced together the unity can only be formed by softening or simply eliminating the once and for all declarations. Philosophy starting from the sacrifice of thinking, on the other hand, holds onto both the perspectivist and the imperialist but without contradiction. The unifying starts with the perspectivist consigning his intellectual labors to the perpetual activity of constructing interpretations that always lead to more because thought is never entirely offered for the understandings being produced. In palpable, biographical terms this is Nietzsche as constantly rewriting his own books, it's his habit of adding substantial amendments to those already

published and his frequent excerpting of old paragraphs for expansion or modification in later writings. In sum, it's Nietzsche thinking *for* conclusions but refusing to stop thinking because of them. Then, and going just a little further down the single line of this dedication to truth, a critical point is reached where understandings become solidly "right" and decisively "once and for all." It only needs to be added that these strong adjectives aren't merited because the understandings completely explain reality. Instead of being best truths they're only designated as last ones, they're little more than sentences that won't be returned to and won't be rewritten. The significance of this permanence is that it reveals Nietzsche's imperialism pushing thinking's devotion to the limit, to the sacrificial extreme. But no further. Nietzsche's permanent sentences don't mean anything more than the end of his thought. Next, and since the permanence means no more, the perspectivist and the imperialist Nietzsches shouldn't be considered fundamentally distinct, they're only separated in degree or extension of their commonly practiced faith: the only difference between the two is how far they'll go in reducing thought to an offering for truth. The perspectivist and imperial Nietzsches, therefore, hold together. While their words diverge, they both come from the same source as expressions of the same philosophical piety. Granted, the perspectivist is less committed than the imperialist, but that's all.

It's not much because it leaves space to claim that all Nietzsche's truths—whether they're cautiously limited interpretations or embedded with the rhetoric of finality—are, more than anything else, scenes of Nietzsche worshipping. And despite appearances they're scenes of Nietzsche worshipping in the same way and at the same place Augustine worshipped. This place isn't the church of perfect understanding but a house of sacrifice where truth receives thinking's dignity and sometimes receives everything, even the existence of thought.

Conclusion. Since truth receives thinking's dignity and sometimes receives everything in both Nietzsche and Augustine, the distinction between them isn't very important to philosophy. It's extremely important to the history of truth, but the history of philosophy isn't traced by following truths, the history of philosophy is traced by following sacrifices.

Notes

1. Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, p. 64.

2. The conflict between reading's sacrifice and the hermeneutic circle in literary interpretation can be clearly fixed within a specific example. In his *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* [Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, pp. 45-66], Umberto Eco illustrates blunt sacrifice as the decisive act of interpretation in the very paragraphs he uses to advocate the careful application of hermeneutics. In those paragraphs, Eco disparages a certain understanding of Dante as "overinterpretation" because its author, unable to tear away from Dante's writings, ends up getting lost in infinite details: as a symptom of nearly endless rereading, the interpreter finds himself attaching deep significance to even the most accidental words of what he's studying, and that has the effect of constantly bending him back toward yet another consideration of Dante as informed by the new discovery and then on and on and into increasingly farfetched understandings. Now, it's just this zeal for increasing and increasingly marginal interpretations that, according to Eco, readers should guard against and, he affirms, one way to guard against it is with the hermeneutic circle. What Eco obtrusively doesn't do in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, though, is show *how* a hermeneutic method will protect readers of Dante from the particular fever of overinterpretation he admonishes. The omission was wise. Wise because if Eco had filled the gap in his book with a scholarly, hermeneutic consideration of Dante, the result would have been just what he wanted to avoid. In accordance with his own rules for reading, interpretation would have accelerated into overinterpretation since the kind of reading that constantly circles back to reconsider sentences won't intrinsically slow and finally halt at a defendable understanding, it will naturally spiral into an increasing velocity of endless meanings as a function of the way all reading works. In fact, the reading of Dante that Eco disparages could be seamlessly inserted into his argument as an example of just the kind of reading Eco proposes. As a result, while Eco uses a specific case of overinterpreting to argue for hermeneutics, the truth is that the rules of the hermeneutic circle he advocates are instructions for producing the kind of interpreting he's against. That doesn't mean, however, that overinterpretation can't be avoided. It can be; for readers to do what Eco wants, for them to interpret Dante's writing (or anyone's) without overinterpreting, what they need to do is break the hermeneutic circle, not lubricate it.

3. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 283. (Book 5, Section 344.) In this citation, as occasionally throughout this book, quotations have been modified slightly to facilitate reading.

4. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, p. 322. (Section 321.)

5. Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, p. 25. (*Genealogy of Morals* Essay 1, Section 1.)

6. The title of the aphorism from which I cited at the chapter's beginning: How we too are still pious.

7. Deleuze, *Negotiations*, p. 23.

8. Bilgrami, "Comment on Rorty," p. 95.

9. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 6, Chapter 2.

10. Nietzsche, *Genealogy* p. 45. (*Genealogy of Morals* Essay 1, Section 13.)

11. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 343. (Book 5, Section 381.)

12. "One does not only wish," according to Nietzsche's (presumably direct and sincere) formulation, "to be understood when one writes; one wishes just as surely not to be understood." Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 343. (Book 5, Section 381.)

13. Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, p. 29.

14. Deleuze, *Negotiations*, p. 6.

15. See the chapter "Image of Thought" in Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*.

16. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 8, Chapter 12.

17. Huysmans, *Against the Grain*, Chapter 13.

18. Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Genealogy* p. 27. (*Genealogy of Morals* Essay 1, Section 4.)

19. Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, p. 93. (*Genealogy of Morals* Essay 2, Section 23.)

20. Nietzsche, *Genealogy* p. 119. (*Genealogy of Morals* Essay 3, Section 12.)

21. From Walter Kaufmann's introduction to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in: Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 106. Just before this citation, Kaufmann writes that Nietzsche is "melodramatic" and explains that part of the reason was the "complete failure" of Nietzsche's work "to elicit any adequate response or understanding."

22. Michael Tanner's introduction to: Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, p. xiii. Elsewhere, Tanner writes "By the time Nietzsche produced his last works he had behind him a uniquely impressive series of books, especially *Human, All-Too-Human*, *Daybreak*, and supremely *The Gay Science*, in which he employed scrupulous analysis, teasing, and satire lyrical depth psychology; and no one had given a damn. So he produced *Twilight of the Idols* as 'a grand declaration of war.'" From the introduction to: Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*, p. 17.

23. Another approach to the problem of Nietzsche's contradictions runs through political aspirations. The premise here is that Nietzsche was frequently more interested in power and the politics of imposing his truths than he was in maintaining theoretical purity. In other words, given the choice between ruling and noncontradiction, Nietzsche was tempted by the former.

While it's understandable that someone would make that choice, and while this deference to the political makes Nietzsche's contradictions understandable, the explanation isn't satisfying for philosophers because it only alleviates the conflict of truths by diminishing the importance of philosophy generally in Nietzsche's writings.

Chapter Two

Decadent Philosophy Is Truth Sacrificed for Thinking

There are two histories of philosophy. One is delineated by the sacrifice of thinking for truth, the other by the sacrifice of truth for thinking. This chapter is about the second. It's also about decadence; the history of philosophy conceived as the sacrifice of truth for thinking is an introduction to decadence.

Nietzsche:

> If one were to prove this God of the Christians to us, we should be even less able to believe in him.[1]

One understanding of this sentence focuses on the word "prove" and repeats the common though not weak argument that proving God is counterproductive: if God depends on a proof then the proof surpasses God; the proof becomes God. This isn't, of course, a refutation of the Christian Divine's existence, only a danger intrinsic to establishing it. A little further on I'll return to this but only after going in another direction, toward Nietzsche's decadent impiety.

By qualifying impiety as decadent I mean to separate it from the standard notion of impiety connected with Nietzsche's most celebrated irreverence, the one dismissing beliefs in Platonism, God, any universal truth. Nietzsche's decedent impiety steps past that dismissal by taking up the most obvious and direct question raised by the above citation. Why be less likely to believe in God if He's proven? Because after the proof thinking is done, and if there's nothing left to think about, then there's no reason to have God. What this answer reflects is the guiding principle of decadent impiety. Everything within our discipline is subordinated to the desire to incite philosophic thought. For God, that means, if He is, He only is to encourage thoughtful arguments in favor of existence.

Arguments in favor of God's existence—with the word God understood broadly—can be formulated in numerous ways. They're all accepta-

ble and laudable to the extent they stimulate critical thought. What's necessary and sufficient for a proof of God, therefore, isn't that the foundation be unassailable and each theoretical step follow rigorously and undeniably from the previous; what's necessary and sufficient is that the proof's elaboration demand legitimate philosophic work. Because this is the sole demand, the list of historically influential routes to God gaining respect from the decadently impious is long, very long. One is a series of sophisticated and honed provocations leading to an ultimate intuitive understanding in the optimistic, Platonic manner: clear-headed intellectual labor becomes the necessary prerequisite for revelatory breakthrough. Moving forward to Platonism as adopted for Medieval Christianity, for representatives of both schools it was *because* they had thought so critically for so long that they were finally prepared to receive truth. There was, however, at least one substantial difference separating their versions of complete understanding. Socrates believed that philosophy's ultimate attainment implied giving up every trace of bodily existence and consequently the entire loss of individual identity; contemplating truth meant surrendering everything that allowed me to be me and not someone else. The constrictions of pragmatic religious concerns, by contrast, forced theologians to assert that individual differences are preserved in heaven; some trace of individual, bodily existence needs to subsist on the other side of mortality because without that what could lead *me* (or individual parishioners) to want to believe?[2] Leaving speculation about possible answers aside, what's clear is that Socratic and Christian Gods are distinct. But this distinction, while being crucial for anyone who believes in truth, holds little importance for the decadently impious because they believe in God only as an opportunity to exercise theory. So, what draws the decadently impious to both Socrates and Christian Platonism *equally* and *in the same way* despite their different notions of truth are what the truths do. Both require the philosophic mind's relentless training and application as preparation for revelation. And again, as for exactly where the training and application leads, that holds no importance.

A second historically influential way of approaching God fortifies the philosophizing of strict reason. Instead of thinking critically as preparation for revelation, we think rigorously about our world to directly prove the necessity of a perfect being. This was the route Descartes—following Aquinas, following Aristotle—explored. Descartes showed that a sharp

analysis of common experience leads back to the necessity of God when, for example, we ask where we came from: I was produced by my parents who were produced by their parents who were produced. . . . If we keep going back, the argument is, and want to avoid absurdity, then sooner or later we can't avoid acknowledging an *un*caused caused. Obviously, I'm simplifying the Descartes-Aquinas-Aristotle triad violently here, but it's only necessary to see that these three offer a way for the idea of God to generate theorizing that's distinct from Socratic thought. For the three, thinking isn't preparation for revelation, instead, if it's good then it persuasively takes us straight to the highest conclusion. With that established, this notion of good thinking can be moved into the realm of the decadently impious with only a single modification. Whether the proofs are persuasive has nothing to do with God's real existence, the question about persuasiveness only has meaning within the context of whether the proofs function as instantiations of disciplined reasoning.

With Descartes, Kant shares a highly Modern adherence to uncontaminated reasoning. Still, Kant offers a distinct way for the divine idea to be harnessed by the desire to philosophize. We know Kant sought to bound the realm of human knowing by delineating how we perceive our world. We also know that, in accordance with his intention, the work didn't lead to a certain answer about God's existence but did successfully render inoperative all disproofs by setting that existence cleanly outside the boundaries of possible knowledge. Kant's ingenious and distinguishing accomplishment, in other words, was raising up a God of true faith by using reason to cancel reason's application to the question of faith. Next, and setting this accomplishment before the decadently impious, they may or may not decide to share Kant's sophisticated Christianity. They will definitely be interested, however, in pursuing the theorizing that cleared space for it. They will be interested, that means, in the theorizing though not in the space for faith that it happens to open. Pushing this further, Kant's approach to God can be quickly transferred into more contemporary and secular concerns. Today, the *Critique of Pure Reason* is still customarily cited by those trying to segregate what we may be able to know from what's beyond us in order to facilitate the philosophic endeavor for truth by concentrating our forces in those areas where there exists legitimate hope for progress. The decadently impious avidly join these investigations. Their purpose, however, is not to mark the limits of reason in order to progress toward knowledge; instead, the purpose is

limited to furthering the study of knowing's limits. Kant's work is valuable in our time for the decadently impious not as an orientation toward the kind of truths we can hope to reach but as a catalyst for philosophizing that happens to be about the outer boundaries of our reaching.

Continuing by transforming the Christian God into other versions of solid certainty allows the list of those certainties' participations in the generation of theoretical work to extend indefinitely. The proving labor may be a recounting of dialectically charged understandings culminating in Hegel's overwhelming unity. More practically, the proving may be culturally and politically animated in the Marxist tradition. In language, the proving may be guided by Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. More contemporaneously, the proving may go on in a book like Thomas Nagel's *The Last Word* which is to be praised (from the decadently impious point of view) because it never actually spells that word out. Regardless of what form the argument takes and which form God happens to have, these are all examples of ways that something ultimate and unwavering demands the action of theory. For the decadently impious, these are all ways that the highest truth can be envisioned as primarily stimulating intense and focused thought. They're all ways of asserting that a carefully developed proof of God—no matter what form God happens to take—is not for Him, it's not in His name and it's not an intellectual way of believing in Him. Everything goes in the other direction. God—whether Socrates's version or Augustine's or Descartes's or whoever's—is for the proving and exists in the name of the proving and expresses belief in the proving.

This belief, finally, returns to what I wrote immediately after citing Nietzsche's sentences, namely, that if God depends on a proof then the proof's divinity surpasses God's. That's true. But this conclusion is no longer an affront to God, it's the first line of a testimonial to thinking. This is the last. If the possibility of God's existence inspires proving minds then we believe; if the proving is done, we don't.

How do we choose a God to believe in? Schematically, there are two habitual ways and then the decadently impious one. The first habitual decision is pragmatic. Under this heading what Nietzsche called the "God of the Christians" may be as desirable as the practical benefits He offers are considerable. For instance, Descartes taught that since we know God exists and is good and therefore not a deceiver, then whatever seems clear and distinct to our mortal eyes may be taken as a view

through God's eyes as well. In the last chapters of his *Meditations* he enumerates some of those certainties and we'd all admit that it's good to know that we really do have physical bodies. The other major reason that certain Gods and not others have been set atop Western civilization is the conflict of reason and theoretical reasons; we believe in that God that can be most convincingly argued to really exist. This history of discriminating and scholarly belief refers back to the paragraphs I just wrote listing some of the various routes principal thinkers have followed to God's proof. All that needs to be added is that now each of those arguments are not only evaluated as persuasive or not, but also as more or less persuasive than others.

The decadently impious refuse to consider either earthly wellbeing or theoretical persuasiveness when selecting a God. For them, because philosophical investigating is what any highest form of existence is about, the particular one they decide to pursue will be selected exclusively to fuel their labor. If the hope of reaching an intuitive God of Truth-Justice-Beauty spurs concentrated investigations, then philosophy immediately flows back to ancient Greece. If a majestic God as original cause of all earthly existence solicits intense proving, then study at a Catholic university is called for. If complicated dialectical exploring underneath a notion of God as ghostly idea heightens philosophical passion, there's Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* to work through. If thinking gets driven better in the material world and through careful studies of history and economics, there's Marx's utopia to recondition. If God can be translated into explorations of bedrock certainties about language, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is inviting. For the moment, no decision needs to be made between these various possibilities, it's only necessary to underline that no matter which gets selected philosophy goes to the same place, a claustrophobic place where it's not important what God *is*, all that's important is how effectively a certain truth impels proving minds.

Choosing a God solely to impel philosophic proving cleanly reverses the pious relation between thinking and truth. Returning to that relation, Augustine taught it when his furious debates on the way to revelation projected the expectation that his converting instant would be a triumph of mind-throbbing dedication. What he gave us, though, was a juvenile singsong gauged to humiliate all his sharpened intellectual tools and careful labors. The result was two connected, pious lessons: any

thinking that gets you where you want to go is better than thinking that doesn't, and one kind of thinking (rigorous investigating) will be abruptly replaced by another (following children's instructions) if the new style lets you reach the final truth you've been wanting. Moving these lessons over to the decadently impious, they hold onto Augustine's teaching but turn it around. Because they elevate thinking, one God will be substituted for another and there won't be any looking back if one arouses thought more than some other.

The substitution of Gods indicates complicities between the pious and decadently impious. Even though the reason the two kinds of philosophers will make changes is different—the pious replace an old God with one that's more true while the decadently impious carry out replacements with Gods that provoke more thought—both kinds of substituting are identical in this sense: they occur above a single, fundamental judgment that the relation between every God and all thinking goes only one way. The pious grade thought exclusively in terms of the quality of the truth arrived at, the decadently impious reverse that but maintain the exclusivity. What the two have in common, therefore, what they uncomfortably share is a stern refusal to mix thinking and truth; it's one *or* the other, one *for* the other entirely.

Another more tangible complicity joining the two philosophies is their quotidian habits of thinking. Crucially, the decadently impious don't pass their days differently than the pious, they don't privilege literary studies where the pious prefer analytic inquiry or pursue examinations of bodily experience where the pious concentrate reflection on language. Instead, in terms of daily philosophic labor impious work is indistinguishable from Plato's, Augustine's, Descartes's, Kant's and the rest. It's indistinguishable because what counts as real philosophizing for the decadently impious is simply lifted from the tradition's major figures. With respect to that lifting, I've shown that the pious tradition provides and legitimates a nearly endless list of ways of activating philosophy under the idea of God. There's Socrates's and Augustine's preparation for revelation, Descartes's direct proofs, Kant's clearing of a space of faith and so on. Impiety accepts them all. Some organizing will have to be done to segregate the better from the worse (Augustine's thoughtful debates with defenders of Manicheism are more aggressive and exciting than his intellectually juvenile inspiration by the children's song), but there's no reason

to assume that anything more than a sorting out and selective appropriation of what's already been established will be necessary. It follows that impiety can subsist in the pious history of philosophy. The decadently impious can go to work in the morning and do the same things as their studious, truth-loving colleagues; they can array their ideas and lines of thought around the same basic ideas, they can employ the same premises, assumed knowledge and technical language, they can pursue the same questions and engage in the same debates. And, since no last word in any philosophic debate has ever been spoken—since no ultimate truth has ever been located, defined and irrefutably shown to exist—the decadently impious can do all that without giving themselves away. I mean, the absence of irrefutable assertions in our discipline's discussions has the practical effect of making it impossible to know *why* particular philosophers are involved in them. There's no way to distinguish between those involved because they really want something irrefutable and those who accept the aspiration for the irrefutable simply as a way of getting intensely involved in philosophy.

Coming at this indistinguishability from another direction, a completed, decadently impious article or book may be seamlessly inserted into the pious tradition; impious pages may look just like pious ones and be set next to them without raising the least suspicion that anything important has changed. The possibility is easy to outline. A contemporary investigation of Descartes may be written by an admirably dedicated scholar really interested in the results, which means that the truths dotting the pages may actually be what those pages were written for. Then, as a consequence and reflection of that some aspect of the author's life outside philosophy may be modified. The author may, for instance, be convinced by Descartes that even the most heinous crimes cannot possibly come from something evil but only from the abuse of something basically good, free will, and subsequently an attitude toward capital punishment may change along with voting habits and participation in political organizations. If we leave those real life alterations aside, however, if we stay *within* philosophy books and don't try to discover what authors believe and do when not writing, then there's no way to be sure that those same pages weren't composed by someone whose mind was already made up about capital punishment and who was only interested in pursuing some questions circulating around evil and freedom. Either way, the conclusion is there's no way to know from a piece of writing

about Descartes whether the author actually cares about the truths; there's no way to know whether the author intends to let philosophic conclusions affect anything beyond the hours dedicated to thinking in their direction.

Expanding from the Descartes example, if you look at most any academic journal article or philosophy book, you won't find indications about whether it was written for truth or for thought. Authors don't tell us. With isolated exceptions—Socrates as presented by Plato, Augustine, Descartes, Nietzsche and a few others—philosophers refrain from discussing how their professional labors effect their lives. Which is good, no one wants our discipline drowned in personal revelations and emotional gushing. One of the effects of the exclusion, though, is that nearly all academic publications waver back and forth across the line dividing piety from impiety. Then matters get more confusing because some of the authors who most fervently insist upon their faith in truth, especially Plato's Socrates and Nietzsche, also recognize in their own pages that they're not exactly trustworthy. Then matters get still more confusing because writing may not be driven by truth *or* by thinking. Someone may simply repeat a few theoretical movements commonly exercised in the profession on the way to an undistinguished but sturdy essay. Next, the essay may be sent off to a respected journal, get accepted and consequently allow a line to be added to a CV and, with that, demonstrate its true purpose and what it was really about: getting something published to get promoted. It's hard to tell. Judging from typical pages found in philosophy journals and books, it's hard to be sure whether they were written for the truths or the thinking or something else. In any case, what's important is that the written evidence can usually be read in any of the three directions. As for the third possibility—writing that's not about truth or thinking—it's safe to assert that there's quite a bit of it to be found in a typical university library. As for the second and the first, it's not so clear. It even can't be clear because thinking's placement below truth or above doesn't happen in straight philosophy writing, not even in this one.

In fact, the movement can't happen in any philosophic writing because the decision made one way or the other is what lets philosophy's writing happen.

The theoretical explanation for the ambiguous nature of philosophy books is that neither piety nor decadent impiety is about truth or think-

ing; both are only about what happens between, about which serves the other. It follows that there's no way to discern whether an author is pious or impious from the kind of thought employed on the way to producing a book, and there's no way to determine whether a finished book is pious or impious by reference to the particular results it presents. Even in truth's maximum instantiation there's no way to be certain, ultimately, from the content of a book if it was written for God or if God appeared in the pages because the desire to think was already there.

"God is because the desire to think was already there" is heretical, and heretical in a way that separates from the simpler and more common notion of impiety attached to the affirmation that God is dead. In relative terms, this latter heresy is only minor as it takes its meaning and force from the assumption that God isn't dead, the mortal assertion only makes sense if God lives on as what's not believed in anymore. For that reason defenders of the Church have no trouble whatever dealing with most Nietzschean-inspired Antichrists, they only need to remind their insolent adversaries why it is that they can make their brash announcements. The sincere belief in God in order to do philosophy, on the other hand, will prove considerably more difficult to counteract.

The difficulty allows the spoiling of two distinct beliefs in philosophy to be clearly separated. The first is the unadulterated belief in the existence of God. The second, the belief that it matters whether God exists or not.

Taking them in order, the first spoiling, we know, began bluntly and aggressively and with the announcement that God is a lie. In the *Genealogy*'s second essay Nietzsche asserted that the Christian divinity didn't exist before human history but was born within it from unsavory parents: hate paired with cruel lusts for the infliction of pain. Subsequently there came a less violent and more positive kind of argument against perfect truth, it's that perspectives (Nietzsche), excessive understandings (Georges Bataille), power/knowledge mappings (Foucault), concepts (Deleuze), deconstructive ironies (Derrida), weak truths (the Italian Gianni Vattimo), pragmatic descriptions (Richard Rorty), vagabond judgments (the Mexican philosopher Carlos Pereda) and so on, all these kinds of tentative and constructed interpretations are what philosophy should be about as they explain specific experiences more accurately, efficiently, persuasively

or usefully than any absolute version. The consequent and cumulative idea is that if you want to tell the truth, then you'll do better trying to manage limited assertions than by searching for a source of inappealable judgment.

Moving this idea outside philosophy's principal historical current, its effects can easily be spotted in analytic thought where the wreathing death of God occurred in a debate about realism. On one side, meticulous studies of language and careful soundings of our rational capacities were mustered to support philosophy's oldest hope while, on the other and finally heavier side, anti-realists including Rorty conceded that though objective certainties would be nice if we could get them, we haven't had much luck so far and therefore we should probably do the best we can with our subjective and constantly shifting understandings of what's going on around us. A similarly practical argument carried the day in most schools of literary theory. Even if we concede—and we might not if we actually consider the possibility—that we'd like to catch sight of Northrop Frye's "synoptic view of the scope, theory, principles, and techniques of literary criticism,"[3] no one has yet provided that compact, triumphant vision. And since a lot of first-rate minds have strained their eyes to virtual blindness with their various ill-fated attempts, it has become reasonable to suppose that we're better off reading novels without the nervous hope of making any fully comprehensive sense of them.

Briefly going beyond philosophic truth and the closely allied field of literary interpretation, a strong argument could be made that the energy generated by God's demise has propelled much of the last decades' hardest impacting work across a broad spectrum of theoretical investigating. History (Foucault), cultural anthropology (Bataille, Alphonso Lingis), political and legal theory (Stanley Fish), psychology (Lacan under a certain reading), and so on, all of these fields have absorbed Nietzsche's influence insofar as they try to make and defend their own brands of knowledge without recourse to something indubitable. All of them, that means, have learned the following lesson written through the long history of failures in the name of universal truth. If you want to grasp experience, then you should reach for some modest understanding you can reasonably hope to partially defend.

Conclusion: this modesty is the intellectual common sense of our time. From philosophy to analytic philosophy to literary theory and fur-

ther outward, the spoiling of the unadulterated belief in God has come to define our collective place in the history of the theoretical Humanities.

The current definition of our place is also a definition in trouble, and for an entirely predictable reason. Since the confusion of originality with contrariness is a constant in the academic world, a stiff backlash against today's accepted wisdom was inevitable. It's with us now, and in appropriately inelegant language. "Within Postmodern literary disciplines," an eminent United States philosophy professor proclaimed in 1998, "bullshit is quite acceptable."[4] Unfortunately, a painfully lengthy set of similar citations could be accumulated and added here. That's not to say, though, that all criticisms of contemporary Nietzscheanism along with everything it stands for may be dismissed as clumsy and frustrated resentment. Alain Renaut and Luc Ferry's jubilantly slashing *French Philosophy of the Sixties* stabs deftly and repeatedly at the heart of Foucault, Deleuze and others without belittling our entire discipline. I would do well to insert large segments of their book at this point because it's such a joy and delight to read, even though it leaves advocates of French Nietzscheanism like myself clenching our jaws. For the moment, however, I'll leave out a review of Renaut and Ferry's broadsides against the "aporias and disastrous effects"[5] of contemporary thought and skip directly to one of their conclusions and a crucial line it draws, the line clearly separates resentment of our current philosophical condition from critical and engaging philosophic development. This is the separating line: "Today, it is a question of thinking after French Nietzscheanism and not only against it."[6] What these authors mean is that the difference between thoughtful analyses of recent appropriations of Nietzsche and aimless ranting is the difference between criticisms that go forward and those simply getting stuck in hatred of the present. Developing Renaut and Ferry's distinction in general terms, the condition of being stuck in the odious present may be diagnosed from several symptoms. One is simply the blurting of pointless vitriol. Another, and this is the fundamental symptom, is the inability to escape the questions Nietzsche forced all philosophers to ask at least momentarily. They include: can God be brought back, can He be resurrected through advances in ontology, epistemology, obsessive language studies, steely logic or the empiricism of our highly adept physical sciences? More broadly, can we somehow recover the theoretical assumption that somewhere there exists something we can all cling to and be certain about? Most broadly, and finally, the question that's asked in one

form or another by those who despise the present but can think of no way to get beyond it: can the common sense of our time and the philosophy of the last forty years be undone? The answer's clear; it's as clear as the fact that calling something bullshit won't make it go away. And it's as clear as Renaut and Ferry's statement that today philosophers must think after French Nietzscheanism, not against it.

That answer leaves the question, though, of how to think after French Nietzscheanism; how can philosophy get out of the present without merely abhorring it? The most direct response is indicated by the problem. If being trapped in contemporary Nietzscheanism means brooding over the various manifestations of God's death, if it means morosely sulking over the worry that unwavering truth won't be brought back, then the shortest way out and the fastest escape is to affirm that it doesn't matter.

Decadent impiety is the affirmation that it doesn't matter.

Because the decadently impious affirm that it doesn't matter whether God's dead or whether He'll be coming back, it's clear that the faith decadent impiety spoils is entirely separated from the most celebrated faith Nietzsche and his advocates are blamed for ruining. As removed from the end of unadulterated belief in any final certainty, decadent impiety spoils the belief that debates between those who want solid truth and those who only want tentative, interpretive truths are important. They're not, and they can't be because philosophy is not about pursuing truth but about accelerating thought.

Because philosophic thinking is worth more than any truth, it's worth more *regardless* of whether the understanding in question is metaphysical (Plato) or theological (Augustine) or ultimate (Hegel). And, on the other side of Nietzsche, it's worth more regardless of whether the truths are subjective impositions (Nietzsche) or fleeting intellectual expressions of excessive energy (Bataille) or historically uncertain interpretations (Foucault) or temporary, enabling compositions of experience (Deleuze) or dialectically unstable hierarchies (Derrida, deconstruction) or weakly articulated propositions (Vattimo) or pragmatic descriptions of immediate reality (Rorty) or vagabond judgments (Pereda). Next, and given the devaluation of the entire spectrum of philosophy's truths when set against philosophic thought, it follows that debates about which one tells the most truth deteriorate toward pointlessness. The antiquated disagreement about if and to what degree the Platonic notion of the Good was sur-

passed by Augustine's notion of God, that dispute recedes even further into the past. The question about whether the religious God Descartes ostensibly believed in was improved by the mathematical certainty he developed as his *Principles for the Direction of the Mind*, that becomes lifeless. The dispute about whether the bloodless formulas of the technocrats and scientists are less illuminating than Marx's understandings of human labor and conflict in the industrial world, that loses all vigor. The discussion about whether Marx's studies of labor and conflict can be modified to retain value in the midst of human history without destiny as Foucault asserted, that loses relevance. The debate about whether Foucault's mappings of interacting social forces in history are bettered—made more useful in the present—by Deleuze's heterogeneous concepts or by deconstructive ironies or weak conclusions or pragmatic descriptions or vagabond judgments, all that reduces to a secondary level of importance.

Outside philosophy's mainstream, conflicts in contemporary analytic philosophy between students of language orienting their studies toward objective knowledge (realism, the early Wittgenstein) and others investigating the perpetually shifting rules for language's use (anti-realism, the late Wittgenstein), they become pointless. Similarly, disagreements in philosophized literary theory between author-centered critics (who use historical and biographical information to read for the author's intention) and text-centered critics (who allow a wide but not limitless range of correct interpretations for literary texts, Umberto Eco) and reader-centered critics (who attribute all meaning to particular readers), that sort of discussion slips into the distant background along with the rest of the antagonisms concerning which approach to literature yields the most convincing—most truthful—kind of interpretation.

This long list of devaluations could be extended further, but the main idea can be most efficiently captured by summarizing on the panoramic level and against the sweeping question about whether interpretive descriptions of experience deriving in one way or another from Nietzsche do more for truth than the philosophic tradition preceding Nietzsche. The answer is that the question burns out; I don't mean it gets decided, instead, the question's energy level drops toward zero. It drops because decadent impiety insists that nothing fundamental changed when Nietzsche put an end to the God of absolute truth, and nothing fundamental changed when Nietzsche's readers joined the crusade to orient philosophy toward the construction of perspectival interpretations of

experience. Nothing fundamental could have changed because all fundamental philosophic changes revolve around thought.

The preceding paragraph marks a transition in this chapter. In the chapter's first parts the assertion that it's irrelevant whether God exists meant that since thinking is the primary philosophic desire and not truth, whether God *really* is slides toward the peripheral. As long as His presence or absence doesn't interrupt philosophic labor, questions about an ultimate reality don't matter any more than questions about thinking did for the pious. Or, the same idea articulated positively: whether God exists is determined by a prior question about whether the existence drives philosophic thought. Leaving that idea behind, when I now write that it doesn't matter whether God exists I mean it doesn't matter whether the word truth should be capitalized. Placing this conclusion within the context of contemporary French Nietzscheanism, it no longer matters what verdict finally gets turned in—if it hasn't been turned in already—about that frenetic intellectual movement. It doesn't matter because the divisive, contested line animating central debates in philosophy should not be drawn between absolute certainty on one side and hesitant interpretations on the other. The critical division and gap of contention should be cut between those notions of Truth *or* truths that stir thinking and those that don't. For this book to advance, therefore, the distinctions I've already outlined between various versions of Truth in terms of their ability to incite thinking must be extended forward through godless truths.

Between various versions of Truth the distinctions were formed this way. On one side there are universal understandings that stir thinking by demanding rigorous and applied study. An example I cited is Socrates's notion of Justice as presented in the *Republic*. Then, on the other side there are notions of Truth that knock thinking out. An example I haven't cited but that's quick, natural and extremely stark is Thrasymachus's rugged idea that everywhere and all the time Justice is simply the advantage of the stronger. With these two versions of certainty identified, the decadently impious go on to assert that Socrates's idea is better for this single reason: while his notion of Justice stimulates philosophizing, Thrasymachus's kicks the philosopher in the head since little or almost no philosophic thinking is required to understand, elaborate and employ the proposal. Repeating the conclusion, it's for this reason—*only* this reason—that Socrates's Truth is better than Thrasymachus's.

The same reasoning goes for isolated, unambitious, post-Nietzschean truths. There are perspectival interpretations that electrify thought and others that don't. The former are good, the latter aren't. Introductory examples of good ones are provided by Foucault and Deleuze who together believed that their constructed understandings of experience not only yielded knowledge but also drove critical explorations toward still more productive interpreting. I'll specify first in the case of Foucault and subsequently with Deleuze. Foucault began producing good truths in the field of philosophy and history by denying the traditional idea of the historian as observing the past's clashings of armies, customs and ideas from a dispassionate distance; that distance collapses since historians aggressively intervene in the subjects of their study and contaminate it with their own prejudices and desires. One route of contamination is the selection of a way into the past. When a scholar studies, say, ancient Greece in terms of dietary practices instead of political conflicts, antiquity is being observed through a decision made in the present and consequently under the influence of the present's predispositions. Witnessing the past, it follows, is participating in it. From this, an expansive set of clever sentences follow: the past is happening, the past is in the future, history demonstrates that there is no past and so on. More important than these paradoxes, however, is this effect for thinking. Since the past involves an intervention from the present, studying it immediately requires both the study in process *and* a study of the intervention. A working historian, in other words, needs a second historian to account for not just the past but for the past understood as combined with the present. Then, because the work of historian$_2$ will itself be an intervention, more work is needed from historian$_3$ and historian$_4$ and onward. There's no conceivable end. Which has two effects. First, a theoretically coherent and comprehensive investigation of what has already happened never finishes. Second, what investigating will do in the process of never finishing is constantly create more histories that need to be studied; what the investigating will do is produce truths that constantly stimulate more thinking.

While that's going on, a highly practical question rises. If this is the way Foucault understood the study of the past, then how is it that he actually finished writing historical books, how is it that he stopped the regress of investigation by publishing *Madness and Civilization*, *Discipline and Punish* and the rest? One answer already given is that Foucault's published books aren't so much pieces of thought as the remains of its sacrifice. No

matter what the answer is, though, it too can be classified as good or bad. A good answer is any one that drives Foucault scholars back to libraries and results in still more theoretical labor about the past and what it means and how we can know what it means. A bad answer dies. After being read and understood, it gets packed away along with the innumerable other scabs of knowledge accumulated every day and everywhere that don't provide any impetus for more work. One example of a bad answer—a manifestly bad answer—would be the claim that Foucault finished his books because he needed to get them published to get promoted. Another bad answer would be a detailed summary of the book in question coupled with a review of the evidence and a concluding assertion that Foucault was right and therefore he published. While a scholarly effort like that would no doubt elevate its author's reputation for seriousness and capacity among those who adore Foucault, it wouldn't do any more, it wouldn't send them back to Foucault's books to rethink them. Just the opposite, it would be an excuse to not rethink them.

As very tangible (though generic) examples of writings on Foucault that may elevate a scholar's reputation but not philosophic thought, there are graduate dissertations. Of course, not all graduate dissertations fail to provoke their readers but many do for two reasons. First, and very sensibly, graduate students are normally more interested in joining an academic community (in this case the one centered on Foucault) than they are in making noise there. The second reason dissertations are so customarily dead on arrival is that their young writers simply haven't gained the experience necessary to determine what kinds of claims will excite other philosophers. Graduate students frequently haven't presented enough papers at conferences to have learned what kind of paragraphs provoke interested questions, and because they haven't given seminars to their own graduate students they usually haven't had a chance to learn how large scale ideas can be developed before a sophisticated audience in ways that captivate, that make members of the audience want to participate in the project. As a result, while a dissertation's pages are generally competent and right, if they're exciting at all then usually only for their authors. Again, the problem with many dissertations isn't that they're mistaken about their subjects. Ordinarily they're not and in any case that's not important because right and wrong don't make any difference here. The problem with many dissertations—what makes them bad—is that their collected interpretations and assertions are usually little more than true.

Foucault's books, by contrast, are quite a bit more. They're more because they offer engaging and provocative ways of comprehending experience that often make readers—both those who agree and those who disagree—want to do their own writing. And, Foucault's ideas are also more for the particular, structural reason I initially indicated. Since he understood theoretical studies of the past as an intervention from the present, the *kinds* of truths he spelled out *necessarily* invite more thinking.

Gilles Deleuze also produced good interpretive truths. And like Foucault not only because they tend to be captivatingly interesting but further because they necessarily produce more thought. In Deleuze's case, the necessity follows from where he stationed his findings. To reach that particular effervescent spot, Deleuze began by joining the Nietzschean skepticism of any ultimate certainty at the end of philosophy. He didn't push the skepticism too far, though, he didn't get caught in inverse idealism; instead, Deleuze asserted: it isn't that there's Truth and it isn't that there's no Truth. As is evident, this string of negatives adds up to a contradiction but, as Deleuze constantly emphasized, the contradiction only happens within the boundaries Platonism set around our discipline and, according to Deleuze, those boundaries can be overrun. More, following the overrunning is following the basic intellectual move that made Deleuze's philosophy. This is the move. Instead of fretting about which of the two extremes should finally be chosen, he dissolved the entire question by fixing attention on a certain word, on the single word that the entire Platonic tradition despised more than any other, "becoming." In becoming, Deleuze found a descriptive term for the philosophic understandings he was producing that didn't commit him to Being (Truth) or no Being (no Truth). Philosophy as becoming develops—it goes on—without the hope or fear of either one.

One of the results of this uncommitted condition is that when philosophers produce a conceptual understanding they can't know for sure whether it's truer than previous ones since there's nothing permanent they may be getting closer to (unwavering knowledge) or further away from (the absence of unwavering knowledge). The entire question, that means, about whether philosophy is advancing disappears. Philosophizing continues, nothing more. Which is depressing. In fact, it's the most depressing outlook possible as it's the only one more gloomy than resignation to the fact that we'll never get anything perfectly right because now we can't even safely conclude that we'll never get anything perfectly

right. Recognizing the threat of despondency, Deleuze immediately sought an animated way to express his style of thought. As the expression he settled on a commitment to churning out truths, to churning out more and more. In fact, Deleuze had no option but to follow this route of speeded laboring. He had no choice because his commitment to becoming inescapably implies that while philosophy can't think for any last certainty, philosophers also can't stop thinking toward understandings of their experiences as that resignation implies the victory of no Truth, of hopelessness and futility. So, when Deleuze escaped Platonism by rendering both Truth and no Truth obsolete with the word becoming, he also set in motion a kind of thought that cannot stop, that must go on and keep going on.

There's another and more direct—though also more technical—way to articulate the Deleuzean condition. In his language, concepts of reality are "assembled" from "heterogeneous elements."[7] Truths, that means, are not natural, they aren't made from parts of the world that fit together like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. (An example of what Deleuze rejects: putting together a notion of beauty by asking how a Praxiteles statue fits together with a Raphael painting along the edges of common elements including symmetry and realism). Instead, for Deleuze the components of any concept are forced together and never fit perfectly. (The concept of a statue and a painting as together beautiful is assembled from parts not intrinsically related, parts including the disparate materials stone and oil, and then other parts that aren't material at all, including the reason why a certain individual wants to call both the statue and painting beautiful.) Subsequently, and because every concept is assembled from ultimately irreconcilable components, another is restlessly beckoned that will account for the incongruities subsisting in each conclusion. Every one of Deleuze's concepts, in other words, requires another that will demonstrate *how* it is that the previous one holds together. Then that conceptual explanation calls for another and so on. Deleuze's production of concepts, consequently, resembles the aspect of Foucault's studies of the past I underlined in that both are structured to constantly call for more philosophizing.

As I'll be referring to Deleuze extensively and in much greater detail throughout the remainder of this book, I don't want to get any further into him at this point. I've only written enough about his philosophy, and about Foucault's, to show that there are highly theoretical reasons (rea-

sons that are, admittedly, too theoretical and too technical to serve as more than provisional orientations) for determining that the truths these two French Nietzscheans produced are good ones. They're good—just as Socrates's notion of Justice was—because they trigger more philosophic work.

Not all the theory emerging from Nietzsche's arrival in Paris is good, however. There are limited, perspective understandings that anesthetize thought just as effectively as Thrasymachus's rough pronouncement that might makes right. An example is Roland Barthes's slogan for post-Nietzschean truth in *The Pleasure of the Text*; it's his ejaculated conviction that interpretations of literature are nothing more than various manifestations of: "That's it for me!"[8] Now, if this is how the meaning of written words should be formed and justified—simply as whatever I happen to think at the moment and that's all—then it very quickly becomes extremely difficult to see what more a critically inquisitive mind can hope to do in the region of philosophy's interaction with reading. I mean, it's difficult to see how thinking could possibly go forward or backward or in any direction at all as a result of Barthes's idea. When someone cries, "This is how it is for me!" the most appropriate response, the *only* response, I can imagine is, "Ok, and this is how it is for me. Now let's order a pizza and watch some television."

Because Barthes, at this moment of theory at least, numbs thought with his pithy version of French Nietzscheanism, the way's clear to maintaining something more substantial than that Foucault and Deleuze's considerations of experience are good because the incite thought. Beyond that, they're substantially *better* than Barthes's. Though not better because they're truer. Very possibly they're not. It's perfectly conceivable that even the most developed and complex French Nietzschean philosophies are really just convoluted articulations of Barthes's selfish pronouncement and therefore if contemporary thinkers really want some truth, then something like what Barthes wrote is the guide to follow. The argument for Barthes's preeminence in French Nietzscheanism can be stated fairly rapidly. It starts with the assertion that once you get rid of overarching knowledge, there's no intermediary stop on the way down to pure relativism. There's no halfway because if there *is* something—virtually anything—that's perfectly sure, say, 1+1=2, then there's no reason why that one perfection shouldn't be sufficient to organize everything around it in those terms which, in this case, would be mathematical or, somewhat less

rudimentarily, Cartesian. If, in other words, there's certainty somewhere then there can be certainty everywhere, and philosophy's task is to go all those places. On the other hand, if something as basic as 1+1 doesn't equal 2 (in the kitchen, one cup of water plus one cup of flour equals one lump of dough), then it's hard to see how a reasonable person could hold out much hope at all for any certainty whatever. And if there's not much hope at all, then what remains for thinkers can't be much more than the composition of self-indulgent stories about how reality happens to seem for each of the stories' authors. Repeating that more directly, if I can't even be sure that 1+1=2 for you, the reader of this sentence, then it's difficult to see any reason for me to have written it or the paragraph enclosing it or this entire book except as part of a report about how things appear to me. And if that's right, and if the earlier point about the expansiveness of any single certainty is also right, then the blunt decision all philosophers must make is between (potentially) complete understanding and total relativism; it's between the pursuit of universal truth and the endless writing of autobiography. Next, setting this decision before French Nietzscheanism, since the movement denies overarching certainties it immediately drops to the other extreme; philosophy converts into autobiography. Stronger, it won't be anything but autobiography no matter how many sources and pieces of supporting evidence intellectuals including Foucault can cough up to support their characterizations of the past, and there won't be anything but autobiography no matter how many scholarly and specialized theoretical contortions Deleuze and his advocates can twist through on the way to delineating their practice of concept production. The assertion is, finally, that no matter how astutely these philosophers disguise their ideas with reams of evidence and knots of complexity, and regardless of how clever they are in mustering arguments to fend off the charge, the reality is that when everything is taken apart and understood clearly all Foucault and Deleuze are really doing is writing about themselves. French Nietzscheanism as represented by these two inescapably reduces to Barthes's abrupt version of truth. More, Barthes's version is *more* truthful—simpler, clearer, more *honest*—than those of his less forthright associates. There's some real bite to this conclusion. There are problems with it too. But even allowing for them, I don't think anyone who's fair-minded can simply dismiss the reduction of contemporary Nietzscheanism to "That's it for me" as flat wrong. What can be dismissed, however, is the belief that Barthes's work is bet-

ter than Foucault's or Deleuze's within decadent impiety. That belief is immediately dismissed because the decadently impious judge truths as good or bad purely as a function of how much subsequent theoretical work they impel, and "That's it for me!" doesn't impel much of anything. Foucault and Deleuze's ideas, by contrast, are proficient generators of philosophic thinking and as long as that's so their truths are better. Their descriptions and concepts are better even though they may not be entirely sincere.

A repetition of the preceding broad, introductory strokes of division between more and less desirable French Nietzschean truths. This time the division will be drawn with the finer lines of a more developed consideration of Gilles Deleuze, and the division will be drawn across a concrete subject, Descartes.

The repetition comes with a slight rhetorical change as well. Up to now I've been using the phrase "decadent impiety" to name the philosophic faith that every truth—eternal or temporary, objective or subjective—exists to serve thought. For reasons articulated further on I'm going to cut that title in half and call the same philosophic faith decadence.

A good and specific decadent truth curls out of *What Is Philosophy?* when Deleuze asks who, exactly, Descartes is in the *Meditations*. The answer Deleuze proposes begins by describing the basic components of Descartes as "Myself who doubts, I think, I am," and by citing Descartes's definition of himself as "I am a thinking thing."[9] Next, Deleuze assembles these elements in a particular way; he proposes that Descartes includes I' (doubting), I' ' (thinking) and I'" (being), and then that the *me* in Descartes—I am a thinking thing—emerges from their touching or crossing through each other. The self called Descartes, according to Deleuze, is the individual formed at the point where doubting, thinking and being all meet. Subsequently, and with a conception of Descartes vaguely identified, the idea gets sharpened: Deleuze's definition isn't what I as doubting and I as thinking and I as being all intrinsically lead to; it's not I doubt, *therefore* I think, *therefore* I am, *therefore* I'm Descartes the thinking thing. This conventional reading of the *Meditations* is replaced by the assertion that doubting, thinking and being are only set together underneath the name Descartes. Deleuze's rendering, therefore, moves away from more common understandings of Descartes by substituting a prac-

tice of juxtaposing for a chain of therefores within his identity. Leaving Deleuze briefly, this substitution can be visualized in somewhat less abstract terms through Cubist art. Taking a simple example, the Cubist logic isn't that a nose is painted in profile and *therefore* only one eye will be painted. Instead, one or both eyes may be painted depending on how the subject is assembled by the painter; the elements painted are contingent, that is, on the effect the painter wants to project. So too for Descartes when assembled by Deleuze. As opposed to being an inescapable consequence of doubting, thinking and being, Descartes is the effect of their contingent arrangement. Deleuze's Descartes, in other words, is the effect of components that were chosen and that might have been chosen differently.[10]

Pages more could be written on Deleuze's definition of the one called Descartes, but what I've got is sufficient to demonstrate that his definition, his truth, is a good one within a decadent framework. Actually, what I've written is more than sufficient, at least more than sufficient for the first part of the demonstration since for the next few pages it won't even matter what Deleuze's definition is. What matters—what's relevant for decadence—is the way Deleuze defends his definition. It's not at all typical. Deleuze doesn't cite other readings of Descartes's most famous claim and then show his is preferable because it's more coherent or accounts for more of Descartes's text or explains our common experience more convincingly. In place of those possibilities Deleuze responds to the question about which interpretation of Descartes is better than others by joltingly asserting, "Philosophers do the best they can, but they have too much to do to know whether a particular interpretation is the best, or even to bother with this question."[11] At first, this looks like a typical and strident post-Nietzschean assertion: Since there's probably no single, irrefutable understanding of Descartes, objections to Deleuze's proposal will surely also prove vulnerable to refutation and therefore critics should leave him alone. That's not what's going on, though. Instead, Deleuze *has too much to do to even bother with the question*. Regardless of whether there is or isn't an indisputably best understanding of "I am a thinking thing," worries about whether a certain conception of Descartes is better than others disappear because philosophers are completely occupied doing what they should be doing. And what philosophers should be doing, what they should be entirely concentrated on doing according to Deleuze, can be stated quickly. It is "forming, inventing and fabricating con-

cepts."[12] Because, the result is, Deleuze invents conceptual truths so fervently, he doesn't have time for complaints that his idea might not be better than others.

To underline the preceding sentences darkly, I'll reformulate them from a slightly different direction. If Jean-François Lyotard is followed in naming mainstream, contemporary French Nietzschean theory with the word Postmodernism, and if we accept his characterization of the movement as primarily the suspicion of any description claiming to accurately and completely account for a certain reality (Lyotard's "suspicion of metanarratives"), then Deleuze, at this moment, is *not* a Postmodern. Instead of being consumed by suspicion of any philosophical determination, he's entirely dedicated to thinking's fabrication of concepts. And it's because of the dedication—not any suspicion of metanarratives—that Deleuze moves away from customary questions about which understanding of Descartes may be best or whether there is a best one. Stated slightly differently, it's not that Deleuze refuses to cling to his conception of Descartes because he fears that it can't be effectively defended, instead, he refuses to cling to his conception because having it means already wanting another.

Stated slightly differently again, Deleuze's wanting leads to a decadent conclusion. Truth is being subordinated to thinking. The subordination happens because the understanding of Descartes that Deleuze invented and all the questions surrounding it (Is the conception persuasive? Is it more convincing than other proposals?) are being displaced by his desire to go on and do more inventing. Deleuze, as a result, isn't doing philosophy to get a conception of Descartes's notion of the self, in place of that his concept is just a remainder of the philosophizing he did and an abandoned remainder of the philosophizing he will go on to do. Deleuze's conceptual truth is, and is nothing more than something that occurs in the midst of the doing. Inserting this reality into Deleuzean scholarship, the devaluation of the conceptual truth about Descartes explains why, once an understanding of Descartes has been formed as an expression of thought, questions about it, about whether it should be doubted or not, become irrelevant. Inserting this conclusion into scholarship on decadence, the devaluation explains how and why at this (worrisome) point in *What Is Philosophy?* Deleuze is slipping toward it. He's slipping toward decadence because he believes that the *reason* we have truths of *whatever* kind—best or not best—follows from a more funda-

mental desire, the desire to invent concepts, the desire to think philosophically.

I concede that Deleuze won't slip too far. Before *What Is Philosophy?* finishes he'll reclaim autonomous value for his conceptual inventions by inserting them into some of our world's real problems; thinking will be subordinated to truths understood as socially useful understandings. Staying focused on the discussion of Descartes at the start of the book, however, limits our view to Deleuze eliminating objections to his proposal about the Cartesian self. The first step in that effort was not to reinforce his own idea or criticize others but to claim that there's no time for debating. There's no time because Deleuze verges on decadence.

Next, Deleuze takes a second step toward cutting away objections to his idea about Descartes which, like the previous, leaves him on decadence's edge. The step is Deleuze limiting possible ways for objections to be voiced, it's his discrediting of an entire category of philosophic discussion.

> When it comes to creating concepts, conversation is always superfluous. Sometimes philosophy is turned into the idea of a perpetual discussion, as a "communicative rationality," or as "universal democratic conversation." Nothing is less exact.[13]

The "communicative rationality" is probably a reference to Habermas. The "universal democratic conversation" sounds like Rorty. The names don't matter, though, because regardless of who gets chosen to represent philosophy as happening within a rational conversation that endeavors to include everyone, they're going to be wrong. Wrong at least for Deleuze because this kind of discussion has the effect of crowding thinking into the ordinary, the mundane, and if philosophy is the art of *inventing* concepts, then work within those confines won't be qualifiable as philosophical no matter how right (rational and communally legitimated) the conclusions may be. This is easy to see. As we can't avoid knowing, there are many truths wandering from mouth to mouth that at least approach universal accessibility and that attain acceptance by those most of us agree are rational. Examples: *A solid personal principle is do unto others* and *A solid social principle is the greatest good for the greatest number.* Undoubtedly, these two pieces of advice are persuasive and felicitous when checked in most common situations, but that doesn't mean they're *philosophic* rec-

ommendations. The reason they're not—Deleuze's justification for stripping the label philosophy off these widely agreed upon guides for behavior—traces back to Nietzsche's main idea in *Gay Science* sections 354 and 355. In those frequently quoted paragraphs Nietzsche wrote that philosophizing through sympathetic conversation with broad swaths of others means that each of us will always succeed in becoming conscious only of what is not individual but average. Further, what is average is "shallow, thin, relatively stupid."[14] In Nietzsche and subsequently in Deleuze's Nietzscheanism the message is: philosophers can't lift a society up by mentoring clear, accessible conversation, instead, typical members of normal societies weigh down their mentors with leaden minds and banal participation. It follows that in this way (as in so many others) philosophy is like comedy (and therefore also like tragedy). If a joke or a truth is really individual and invented as some jokes are and all philosophic truths should be, then a lot of people simply won't get them; on the other hand, if everyone gets a joke or a truth, then you can be pretty sure that it's an old joke or a hackneyed truth, it's a plagiarism, not an invention. Leaving comedy aside, the result is that requiring philosophers to formulate their ideas for *all* audiences—for a universal, democratic conversation—effectively reduces thinking to plagiarism. And that's one thing, Nietzsche and Deleuze agree, that can't be philosophy.

Because it can't, real thinkers have no choice but to pursue their labors largely alone. In Deleuze's words, "Debate is unbearable to philosophy. But," he added, "not because it's too sure of itself. On the contrary, it is its uncertainties that take it down other, more solitary paths."[15] The specific uncertainties Deleuze had in mind here concern what new conceptual truths can be constructed, and his point is because that constructing only happens outside the leveling constraints of broadly accessible conversation, the uncertainties effectively lead philosophers away from others.

Then, and after marching until they're sure they're alone, real thinkers can be trusted to keep going further still because of this conviction. The philosopher is a lonesome wanderer proudly trekking remote intellectual landscapes unburdened except for the sorrow felt for all those incapable of understanding their bold, singular ideas. That, in a single sentence, is the Nietzschean (Zarathustra) and the French Nietzschean ("Debate is unbearable") rhetoric of solitary philosophy. A long passage of amplifying citations concerning the sad but generously valiant plight

Nietzsche and Deleuze shared could be inserted here, but the fact is their proclamations of noble solitude rapidly grow tiresome especially when they come in books written for mass production and indiscriminate, global distribution. In Nietzsche's defense, at least he could plead that he sincerely believed no one would actually read his writings. In Deleuze's defense it should be noted that he barely approached the insufferable extreme that, say, Maurice Blanchot attained when he wrote, over and over and over again, that what must be written can't be written in common, comprehensible language and therefore left his pages to repeatedly—though inscrutably—announce solitary superiority. *The Writing of the Disaster* (*L'Ecriture du désastre*) is probably Blanchot's singularly heinous example (though the book's title seems to have been intentionally chosen to facilitate its own burial beneath snide comments). In any case, and however things were for Blanchot, it would be mistaken to portray Deleuze's philosophy as drifting completely out of sight of everyone else. Still, Deleuze definitely leaned toward the Nietzschean conviction that intellectual conversations oriented by the search for a universally accessible consensus are a miscarriage of thinking. And that's important. It is because it has the effect of devaluing truths. Since the ways we habitually raise truths up and set them at the center of our attention generally involve answering questions about them, adding arguments in their favor and resisting objections, and since all of that implies working together with others, Deleuze's insistence on philosophizing solo reduces the consideration of truths to a marginal activity. The idea of truth, that means, understood as what philosophy is about and what philosophers gather around collapses. What remains is thinking. What remains are philosophers freed to do what they should be doing, which is inventing truths and not discussing them.

Conclusion. In the first pages of *What Is Philosophy?*, Deleuze cuts off the possibility of criticizing his concept of Descartes as the one who says "I am." But, he doesn't do that by defending his understanding, instead, he eliminates criticisms—he makes them effectively impossible—by redefining what it means to do philosophy and to be a philosopher. Doing philosophy means being too busy constructing truths to worry about the ones that have been constructed; being a philosopher means working away from everyone else instead of with them and therefore leaving philosophic results to serve almost no purpose. Taken together, these redefinitions twist through Deleuze as an attitude that making truths is more

desirable than having them and as a faith that the ability to make still more is preferable to all those that have been made.

This attitude and faith—this decadence—presses Deleuze (in the first pages of *What Is Philosophy?*) up against Roland Barthes (in *The Pleasure of the Text*). When Deleuze determined that he was too busy to answer objections to what he'd done and, further, that what he was doing only happens when unburdened of contributions and criticisms from others, he was unmistakably touching the philosophy of "That's it for me." Still, Deleuze didn't fall into Barthes's intellectual selfishness. Or, better, he did and he didn't. He did because the status of both authors' conclusions overlaps: what's true for both is, more than anything else, simply what each one comes up with. The difference, however, occurs in the *process* of their forming individualized ideas. In the case of Barthes and his straight version of "That's it for me," no matter what the "it" is—an idea about a novel, about Descartes, about something else—it sends philosophers straight to the television room. Deleuze, on the other hand, offers a vibrant truth as his concept of the self in Descartes. Not vibrant in the conventional sense as exciting because it explains Descartes more persuasively than someone else's formulation, but vibrant in the decadent sense because Deleuze's work helps someone else go on and explain Descartes differently; it helps someone else *do* more philosophy.

How does Deleuze let his readers carry on philosophizing? By providing components for the assembly of concepts that can be put together in distinct ways. On the subject of Descartes, Deleuze didn't just spit out a proposal about what it meant to be that person; he built an identity in a way that facilitates, that even hints at other constructions. In fact, Deleuze does more than hint: in *What Is Philosophy?* he wrote that there may be "other concepts" of Descartes that can be invented by other philosophers that "have similar or almost identical components but from which one component is lacking, or to which others have been added."[16] So, where Barthes's just says "That's it for me" and leaves the next wave of theorists empty-handed, Deleuze says this is how it is for me and adds: here are some parts of a truth that you can rearrange and modify as you will.

A rearrangement schematically carried out. Deleuze said that the one called Descartes should be understood at the triple intersection of the doubter, the thinker and the one who is, and then *as* that intersection and marking it. I will meet Deleuze at his intersection and then remove a

component and add another. What goes is the doubter; doubting is just a form of thinking. What gets added to the intersection of thinking and existing is philosophy; Descartes is a philosopher and not, say, a butcher or a farmer. The one called Descartes is not a butcher and not a farmer because Descartes's *Meditations* doesn't engage them, it has nothing to do with their interests or activities. Even though Descartes took visible steps to make his writing accessible to the general public (the *Meditations* was published not only in the time's language of the intellectual elite, Latin, but also in common French) he clearly aimed his work, as philosophers generally do, at others like himself. With respect to the proofs of God, for example, Descartes never retreated to that non-philosophical but highly effective argument by disjunction: Believe or burn for eternity. He didn't use that, he didn't see any reason to use it because he knew, just as we do about our own written pages, that they wouldn't be read by a butcher when there're no clients in the shop or by a farmer as a way of passing the winter. Stated positively, Descartes knew his book would be read mainly by others with similar interests and abilities, and that leads to my adjustment, my restructuring of his identity as it was proposed by Deleuze. It leads to three components intersecting at the place named Descartes: I think, I am, I am a philosopher.

This is a very particular Descartes, it's a decadent one. Decadence gets into him (he becomes it) because this assemblage of components culminating in an individual doesn't include truth but does include—as elemental content—thinking. Refining that, the Descartes who exists and exists as a philosopher combines with thinking in particular ways, in ways defined by example in the short book titled *Meditations*. What thinking means in the book includes reasoning through ontological cause and effect (I have an idea of God which must have a cause at least as real as the idea), and it includes reasoning through analogy (as a mountain cannot be imagined without a valley, God cannot be imagined without existing), and it includes reasoning by implication (God is, and is not a deceiver, therefore my clear and distinct impression that I have a physical body is correct). All these techniques along with the others exhibited in the *Meditations* are integral to the identity of the one called Descartes. Further, they come bound up with exclusions, with directions thought doesn't explore. Descartes never resorts to public opinion and the pursuit of consensus (twenty-seven out of thirty people asked confirm that God exists). He doesn't rely on emotions (I am sad, therefore I am). He refus-

es, initially, to trust his eyes, ears and nose (I hear my footsteps and therefore know I have a physical body). So, following this conceptual understanding of what it means to be the philosopher who exists and is called Descartes, what Descartes does, in a verb, is philosophize in a loosely determined set of ways. After that, and with respect to the conclusions that are left over, those concerning God and the fact that I really have a physical body and so on, they're only secondary. Stronger, they're secondary to the point of being nearly irrelevant. Outside philosophy they're obviously nearly irrelevant because out there nobody reads Descartes and even if he was read he wouldn't be taken seriously as no one with more than two grams of common sense wastes their time reading a nonfiction book where the author has to write a chapter and a half just to figure out that he really exists. More importantly, inside philosophy—inside philosophy as personified by this conception of Descartes—the truths also hardly matter because in here they only follow after thinking, they only echo the existence of the man who *already is* because he works philosophically as he does in the *Meditations*. Being as clear as possible about this relation between thinking and truth, there's no doubt that truths must appear in the midst of Descartes's labors as there's no thinking without them. But whatever the truths are (God exists, I have a physical body and the rest) they only derive from the more basic component of the identity. It's thought and not what thought arrives at that fundamentally and literally attaches to the "I am" and the "I am a philosopher" making Descartes. Finally, since this is how Descartes is made, he comes to decadence. Descartes understood as the triple intersection of "I think, I am, I am a philosopher" is the one who exists not as a certain set of philosophic truths but as the *act* of philosophic thinking he presents.

The decadent Descartes is visible in the *Meditations*' central argument. Within it, everything begins with the certainty of philosophical thought happening. Later comes the existence of an idea of God and finally God's existence. Following Descartes's line of reasoning, therefore, the *Meditations*' foundational first three chapters lead to the conclusion that thinking *precedes* God. The reasoning leaves behind, however, the question about what the precedence means. The first and obvious answer is it means that Medieval confidence in what Descartes called the "Book of Wisdom" was replaced by confidence in rational philosophy; the precedence means the beginning of Modern history. The second answer, the decadent one, goes further. More than subordinating blind faith in God's

existence to human philosophizing that demonstrates His existence, thinking preceding God in the *Meditations* means God exists only so philosophizing can occur. The decadent conception of Descartes, the proposition is, works within the *Meditations* to provide the following, specific explanation for *why* God appears where He does in the book's development. He's set after thought because His truth is not the book's primary and significant accomplishment; instead, He's something that happens in the *Meditations* as an extension and reflection of the significant accomplishment: Descartes coming into being as a practicing philosophic thinker.

With this decadent reading of the *Meditations*' central argument delineated, it can be traced within historical reality. It can be since the decadent reading is a form of the reversal between divine existence and human action that raised serious doubts among seventeenth century theologians about the piety—in the traditional sense—of Descartes's pages. The theologians' concern (which was foreshadowed by Descartes's suppression of his treatise "Le Monde" for fear that it was too similar to the work causing Galileo's condemnation) was that the *Meditations* effectively set reasoning man above Christian faith. The theologians, we know, were right to be concerned. What I'm adding is that they should have been even more concerned than they were because Descartes didn't just put man above God, he put thinking (man as philosophizing) above truth (God as highest truth). Now, even though these two challenges and pieties being challenged are very distinct, they can be equally coherently inserted into at least one aspect of the seventeenth century discussion, the one revolving around the *Meditations*' crucial, introductory pages. Customarily, those pages are read as a pandering attempt to appease the institutionalized Catholic Church. When Descartes dedicated his book to "the very sage and illustrious Dean and Doctors of the Sacred Faculty of Theology of Paris,"[17] and when he informed them that "it is impossible elsewhere to find greater perspicacity and solidity, or greater wisdom and integrity in giving judgment,"[18] what Descartes—a man as crafty as intelligent—was actually doing was trying to keep space open for the uninhibited pursuit of earthly philosophy. Now, in the seventeenth century the pressing question about that space was whether it would be closed by the Catholic Church or filled by those trusting their own reasoned conclusions about divinity. Leaving seventeenth century concerns behind but not the inherited doubt about Descartes's sincerity, in the present the

Meditations' introduction can be read with the *same* historically grounded skepticism, it's just that the question raised by Descartes's manipulative appeasement of his time's most venerable theologians changes. The contemporary question is no longer whether faith in God or faith in the reasoning philosopher merits more respect, but whether faith in truth or faith in philosophic thinking merits more respect. The question about piety that the *Meditations* introduction obtrusively asks in our time through its suspiciously extravagant flattery of truth's most reverential advocates is whether Descartes went off to his remote cabin because he believed, as he too vehemently insisted, in "the perfection and felicity of life to which truths are fitted to conduct us,"[19] or because he believed in concentrating his thought and leaving truths about the existence of God and the reality of his physical body and the rest as nothing more than consequences of what he really wanted.

Whichever it is—whether Descartes should be conceived as someone who wrote the *Meditations* to reach truths or to do philosophy—the determination will only hold tangential importance. What's central is the subject of the preceding paragraphs and what can be concluded from them. Though his name has been absent, the paragraphs have been about Deleuze, and they were written to show that *his* conception of Descartes is a good one. It's good because Deleuze assembled an identity named Descartes from certain components and I used some of those components along with one other to form a distinct concept and then develop it through one of philosophy's central writings. Within a decadent framework, because I could do that, and because Deleuze helped me do it, his conception of the *Meditations*' author is a good one. That's enough to make it a good one. It's also enough to make it *better* than any understanding that doesn't help others continue philosophizing. Deleuze's conception of Descartes is preferable to any announcement resembling "That's who he is for me."

The secondary literature found in university libraries provides a quicker route to the conclusion I'm repeating, the conclusion that Deleuze has done more for theorizing than Barthes's selfish version of French Nietzscheanism. With respect to secondary literature's usefulness here, it won't be necessary to actually read any of it since results aren't what philosophy is about. All that needs to be checked is that the thinking the studious books and journal articles contain is legitimate; the only assurance we

need is that the writing about Deleuze and about Barthes under consideration is derived from applied mental labors compatible with what we consider philosophic work. It's not difficult to gain the assurance. As most of the books and articles in university libraries have been screened by professors before being published by academic presses, the requirement of legitimate thought is virtually fulfilled by the fact that the pages are found where they are.[20] With that established, a trip to any university library's catalog room should rapidly confirm that much more professional work has been provoked by Deleuze's writings on his various concepts than by Barthes's private exclamation about how things are for him. Nothing more needs to be added here. What I've just written is sufficient to demonstrate that Deleuze produced better decadent truths than Barthes.

Of course I recognize that quite a bit of secondary literature *has* been set off by the book containing "That's it for me!" But it's *The Pleasure of the Text*'s more fecund ideas that inspire further investigating. For instance, there's the claim that reading bliss results from abrupt textual incongruities straining between form and content (neatly arranged sentences of vulgar exclamations). Without going into more detail about this conflictive notion of literary enjoyment, the reality I'm noting is that it—along with many of the other propositions filling Barthes slim book—have generated reams of subsequent and exciting pages of work. Since that's right, and since "That's it for me" is mixed through the pages that also contain more stimulating opinions about critical reading, I need to admit that my guiding example about what makes a truth bad isn't as pure as it could be, I can't avoid conceding that I've dislodged my example from Barthes by aggressively ignoring the main parts of the book from which it's drawn. In my own defense, though, I don't know how I could have found something purer, I don't know what I could've done to locate an *entirely* stillborn piece of theoretical writing that incited no further thought whatever. It would have been necessary, I suppose, to have done a kind of inverse library search, one seeking books that generated no subsequent footnotes in others books, no reviews in any journal, no comments whatever by other theorists. If I could find a book like that, then I'd have one full of nothing but bad truths. In any case, and whether or not such a book could be found, it can be rapidly confirmed in university libraries that Deleuze's books aren't like that; they're thick with good truths.

To set this point into the sharpest possible relief I can refer back to the possibility of an entirely stillborn piece of writing and incarnate that extreme as Nietzsche's books. Though it should be acknowledged those pages never received *no* attention, their initial reception did approach intellectual sterility and then later things changed. For decadents, that change can be summarized this way. Initially, Nietzsche's efforts were widely dismissed as irrelevant, as not worth reading, and for that reason their quality was *correctly* graded with the word poor. (Making the corollary sentence explicit, it's not that Nietzsche's books were poor and for that reason they weren't read.) Subsequently, the dismissed writings were energetically reconsidered and their grade heightened considerably, which does not mean that Nietzsche's books were discovered to be valuable in the sense that they resolved certain stubborn philosophical problems or convincingly described certain aspects of reality or, in general, were somehow found to be truer than previously thought. Instead, it's that they were read widely, discussed heatedly, written about extensively and for that reason they converted from bad to good.

Extending these decadent definitions of the words bad and good as applied to philosophical work, they're not only active as a way of distinguishing Barthes from Deleuze, and not only within a particular way of understanding Nietzsche's career, they also function tangibly and contemporaneously for professors, tenure committees, deans and most of the rest of today's university decision makers. That's as obvious as the plain certainty that if we could set Deleuze before the members of a tenure committee tomorrow his work on Descartes would quickly win their approval. It only needs to be emphasized that his professional contributions wouldn't be considered strong because they verified some truth in Descartes, they wouldn't be respected because they did something like confirm that *people really do exist* and *they really do have physical bodies*. If establishing truths like these were the basis for evaluating professional excellence then the best—or at least the most immediate—way to gain institutional approbation would be to visit the dean's office and directly punch the bureaucrat in the nose. That won't win an advocate, though. It won't because contemporary academic philosophy isn't geared around instantiating and proving things, it's geared to generate more instantiating and more proving. For that reason the best way for Deleuze or most scholars to gain institutional approval is by inciting others to write articles

and books about their articles and books. The best way to get ahead is to produce truths that generate more thinking.

Finally, and while it's difficult to formulate workable, effective instructions for the production of generative truths, at least one recommendation for success in decadent academy can be crisply formulated. To succeed in our discipline the first thing professors should do is forget what they teach undergraduates about the word philosophy's etymological meaning.

Returning to particular thinkers, the decadent line separating bad from good theory can be drawn out to divide Richard Rorty from Deleuze. This segment of the line will prove more difficult to mark and will demand more caution in its development than the part drawn between Barthes and Deleuze which, it must be admitted, was too easy. It's always easy to arrange contrasts by pulling a weak sentence like "That's it for me" out of context and then arguing against it. To get deeper into what I'm trying to maintain, what I'll do here is separate two of Nietzsche's descendents while letting each speak recognizably within the context of their distinct theories. I don't mean I'll grant each one an entirely generous hearing—no book gets anywhere without some violence—but there's a substantial difference between what I've been doing to Barthes and what I'm going to do between Rorty and Deleuze. In the course of presenting defendable readings that span basic elements of their thought, I'm going to demonstrate that Gilles Deleuze is a more advanced—more decadent—philosopher than Richard Rorty.

Why do philosophy? According to Rorty, it used to be for this reason: "The hope that a philosophic description will tell me who I am was the impulse which drove the youth to read their way through libraries."[21] Back when that hope was in fashion, this "who I am" Rorty refers to meant a finally satisfying and enduring definition of myself. Unfortunately that hope's gone now, gone because the energetic literary youngsters Rorty had in mind eventually got to Nietzsche (or Borges's "Tower of Babel") and that withering encounter left behind a need for "some other hope that will drive us to read through libraries and then add new volumes to the ones we found."[22] Rorty tells us what the new hope is. Instead of reading to define who we are once and for all, we read to stimulate the invention of vocabularies that describe us and our surroundings in "new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways."[23]

As Rorty would be the first to admit, the adjectives "interesting," "fruitful" and "better" are extremely messy; nevertheless, he maintains that his terms carry a significant change into philosophy. To measure it, in his essay "Pragmatism and Philosophy"[24] Rorty sets his ideas against crotchety Thomas Nagel who still believes that "deep down beneath all texts there's something which is not just one more text but that to which various texts are trying to be adequate."[25] This believer—cataloged by Rorty as an intuitive realist and who belongs among those entering libraries to find out who they are in the enduring sense—reads with the hope that sooner or later a best text will be located that gauges the others, that tells us which descriptions of ourselves and our surroundings are relatively better and worse (as well, presumably, as more or less interesting and fruitful). Rorty however and against Nagel gives up that hope, which means Rorty faces this problem: how can one description be justified as better than another? In the absence of the inappealable judgment provided by a text that's best, how can we know if we've found one that's better than what we currently have? This is an extremely difficult problem as Rorty demonstrated when he proposed the following rule for determining whether a description is better than others. Specific understandings are privileged, he wrote, "just in the sense that they come to *seem* clearly better than their predecessors."[26] The italics are the author's. It was also the author's decision to illustrate a curt rhetorical technique of evasion at this critical point in his reasoning and expounding. Rather than explaining exactly how we should recognize one description as seeming clearly better than another, Rorty simply ended his paragraph and section with this flat oxymoron. He left his readers to figure out how the words "seems" and "clearly" can be made to work together. It is clear, in any case, that there's a significant difference between Nagel and Rorty. In theoretical terms at least one knows what the word better means and the other's not so sure.

Still, and even allowing that the shift from better meaning a certain distance from the solid best to better as something that "seems clearly" is remarkable, it doesn't feel seismic in terms of what philosophers do every day. While Rorty converts the discipline from laconically fixated to tentative and ambiguous, aren't intuitive realists and Rortian describers both still working just as most philosophers routinely have, aren't they both continuing to look for descriptions of ourselves and our experiences that seem better in one way or another than the one's we've got? If so, aren't

they both working out descriptions as a tribute to what's better no matter how the word happens to be defined and regardless of whether there's a best one? Written more broadly, haven't better descriptions—better truths—consistently been what the main line of philosophical thinking presumably identifies as its passion? Passion is even too weak; the word infatuation seems more apt since philosophers (at least youthful ones) will study their way through entire libraries as part of the devotion. Surely Rorty would concede all this, but he nonetheless insists that what has changed is more than a detail. It's decisive, it transforms his job description from Philosopher to philosopher[27] and it supports an extremely well-written essay on the difference between the two professions included in a collection with a title that couldn't be more dramatic: *After Philosophy*.

The change from thinking pursuing the best to thinking pursuing the merely better also merits a new use for an old label. Because he no longer believed in any finally satisfying vocabulary for describing ourselves and our shared reality, Rorty determined that *his* self-description should include the adjective "decadent."[28] Probably, he was right to exchange Philosopher for philosopher but with this Rorty went too far. While drawing attention to the photograph adorning the cover of *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* is enough to demonstrate that, it can be added that Rorty isn't decadent because the word indicates a real alteration in philosophy, and a real altering—an authentic decadence—means something completely different than games with capital letters and meek exchanges of one kind of desirable understanding of experience for another since that exchanging is an old story, among the oldest and most routine. Plato's Good is different from Augustine's religious God is different from Descartes's mathematical God is different from one of (the pious) Nietzsche's perspectives is different from one of Nagel's intuitions about an inaudible text is different from one of Rorty's interesting and fruitful descriptions. They're all alike, though, in that they're just several of the many substitutions of wanted truths running down the wavering line of philosophy's history that Rorty calls the "endless conversation of the West."[29] Now, for legitimate decadents this particular conversation has grown *too* endless. The interminable switching and insufferable talking about it has become something to veer away from, something to escape by abandoning the infatuation thinking has for truth, for any kind of truth, in favor of the determination that Philosophy and philosophy, best descriptions and seemingly better ones, interesting ones, fruitful ones, whatever ones are

all about accelerating thought. Next, and setting this definition of decadence next to Rorty, it can be concluded that since concentration on philosophy's velocity precludes a direct interest in questions about whether one description or another provides a better understanding of the world, Rorty would have little interest in participating; he'd have little interest in actually being decadent. That's no doubt prudent. It's also perfectly orthodox and entirely conventional just like Richard Rorty, who, despite his insistence to the contrary, is only one more disciple of the ancient faith that better words are the reason we're thinking and whose collected truths are just another echo of what we've already heard many, many times.

According to Rorty's version the kind of truths we should be pronouncing are "poetically"[30] descriptive. The qualification of descriptions as poetic in Rorty derives from this decision he made about philosophers' relation with language: we should be less interested in explaining how words function, in how, for example, green connects variously to a tree, to envy, to someone, and more interested in employing words, in making them function effectively. Philosophers should, that means, imitate poets in the sense that among those literary artists there's no concern about *how* green can name both a color and an emotion or how the difference between, say, "an envious, green person" and "an enviously green person" may be analyzed grammatically. These and similar preoccupations are buried by the poetic resolve to put words together in any way possible in order to convey a meaning. And while the meaning may be a depressing emotion or something else, no matter how the words are arranged and no matter what they happen to be about they will be correct and well-said if they transmit, if they make their readers understand something. Bringing this poetic license back to Rorty, the same goes for him. Mastering language means communicating through it more than explaining it.

After philosophy has been oriented toward communicating, Rorty goes on to delineate what should be communicated. We should seek, he asserts, to capture our "surroundings in the unfamiliar terms of new linguistic inventions."[31] It can be added that these new linguistic inventions aren't unfamiliar because they're attached to exceptional experiences. What's described may be rare or perfectly common, but in either case it's the description that needs to be unusual. The unfamiliarity, in other words, that we should seek is *in* language. It follows that Rorty the philosopher, like any good poet, wants descriptions that defy readers' expecta-

tions, that rip through the expressions habitually used to describe this or that. As a quick example there's Rorty own work, his own description of philosophic truths. Qualifying them as "poetically descriptive" as opposed to corresponding with reality or enabling moral decisions or sharing significant elements with Dewey's thought is itself poetically descriptive. At least within the analytic-American philosophic community where Rorty is most comfortably located, it's an unfamiliar pair of words connected to a familiar, the most familiar, philosophic idea.

So, Rorty's philosophic writing serves as its own example which is good because it's efficient, very practical. But, it's also not so good because it mires us in Rorty's pages, and the miring has the effect of drawing attention to—and constantly returning attention to—the most obtrusively difficult problem occupying them. Once again, the problem: how can we get through Rorty's oxymoron, how can we determine which descriptions "seem clearly better" than others? Granted, some progress has been made toward the determination. Descriptions that are poetically unfamiliar are better than those that aren't. But that still leaves a lot of hierarchizing to be done. Both Foucault and Deleuze, for instance, composed glaringly unfamiliar depictions of reality: Foucault mapped converging material, social and intellectual powers; Deleuze constructed assemblages from jarring components. Both, that is, described experience in ways that were new in their time and therefore pass the poetic test Rorty administers to philosophic work. After that, though, a distinction needs to be made about which of the two we should we want more, which of the two is better. The answer, obviously, depends. And, going the other way, everything in Rorty finally depends on the answer. While I won't propose an elaborate response for Rorty the temperament of his rhetoric indicates that what seems clearly better should be judged more or less as it would be by someone swaying to the social and political rhythms of American university life in the 1970s. More concretely, Rorty provides numerous sentences besides those I've already cited that shed some further light on the difficulty. With one of them he tells us that a truth should seem better than others if it will allow our descendents to be "more decent people than we ourselves have managed to be."[32] The problem with this, though, parallels the one running beside nearly all of Rorty's suggestions. In this specific case the difficulty is that it's as hard to know exactly what the key word decent means as it is to object to the general idea of philosophers helping all of us to be that way.

Because almost all of us want to be that way—because no one wants to object to decency—most scholarly debates about Rorty begin as sympathetic approaches to one form or another of that ideal. They're debates about what words like decency mean and how philosophic descriptions may move us in their direction. More generally, they're debates about what Rorty calls pragmatism, about the practical ability to produce fresh and insightful understandings of what's happening around you and I and then distinguish the ones that will help us—to employ an appropriately ambiguous term—improve what's happening. For my purposes, however, those debates are irrelevant. What's relevant are the steps necessary to reach them. There are four. There's no single, best descriptive vocabulary for reality. Nonetheless, we should continue describing reality. As describers, we should seek poetic inspiration for our articulations so that they can be new. Once we have some new articulations, we should privilege those that seem clearly better than the others.

Gilles Deleuze accompanies Richard Rorty through three of these steps. They share the belief that aspiring to permanently satisfying understandings of experience isn't admirable so much as futile. Deleuze also joins Rorty in directing philosophers to continue generating descriptions and, further, to continue in the direction of intriguing and provocative ones. The two next part ways, though, as Deleuze climbs up a level of sophistication. Copying a crucial sentence from both thinkers measures the difference in their statures. Deleuze: "The object of philosophy is to create concepts that are always new."[33] And Rorty: "The project for philosophy is to find new, better ways of speaking."[34] The critical difference is that while Rorty's extra word successfully adds enthusiasm and brightness to Deleuze, it also hacks a large chunk of thinking out.

To begin measuring the loss, the effects of Rorty's word "better" *on thinking* should be identified. First, and no matter what the word better is taken to mean, the effects aren't fatal. Because Rorty dispatched the hope for irrefutably best descriptions, his philosophy is liberated to go forward producing always improved vocabularies and narrations into the indefinite future. Nonetheless, and even while thought's preservation is no longer in question, once a description of experience has been formulated philosophizing has been seriously hindered. Its autonomy has been severely limited because work aimed at dubiously experimental descriptions, at ones clearly seeming no better and maybe even (or probably) worse than those we already have cannot gain admittance to the pragmat-

ists' politely optimistic discussions. It's difficult to imagine, for example, Rorty allowing philosophers access to some of the most infernal trials of reality described in and weighing down the history of literature. Beginning at the end of the 19th century there was J. K. Huysmans's disastrous experiment with des Esseintes in *Against the Grain* (*A rebours*). In that forbidding book, des Esseintes, after locking himself in a narrow set of oddly decorated rooms, earnestly followed a string of weird and abusive experiments that could only appall a pragmatist. To choose a relatively benign episode there was the endeavor to experience music bodily. The effort didn't have anything to do with turning the volume up; in fact, nothing was audible at all. What des Esseintes proposed was that various alcohols with their different tones and resonances could be imbibed symphoniously.

> Quartets of stringed instruments could be contrived to play on the palatal arch with the violin represented by old brandy, delicate and heady, biting and clean-toned; with the alto simulated by rum, more robust, more rumbling, more heavy in tone; with vespetro, long-drawn, pathetic and as sad and tender as a violoncello.

Des Esseintes, we are told,

> even succeeded in transferring to his palate selections of real music. He followed the composer's motif step by step, rendering his thought, his effects, his shades of expression by combinations and contrasts of allied liquors.

Further,

> he would compose pieces of his own, he would perform pastoral symphonies with the gentle black-current ratafia that set his throat resounding with . . .[35]

This extraordinary composing continued until des Esseintes's emaciated frame at last collapsed under the weight of his deplorably innovative (and drunken) habits. Servants rushed for a doctor. The prescription: return to an at least marginally normal relation with music, and with ordinary life. There's nothing wrong with investigating through your own body, the

sensible recommendation went, just make sure that the adventurous self-descriptions are controlled so that what emerges on the other side is something better, not a human ruin.

The same prescription should doubtless be addressed to William Burroughs as he depicts himself in *Naked Lunch*. "I had not taken a bath in a year or changed my clothes or removed them except to stick a needle every hour into the fibrous gray wooden flesh of terminal heroin addiction."[36] As was the case with des Esseintes's taste for music, I very much doubt that addiction and its skin condition had ever been contemplated quite this way before Burroughs. I also doubt that any practicing pragmatist would recommend the description for life or include it with the others gathered under the title "better, more interesting, more fruitful."

Further investigations of the inadvisable—of definitely *not* better truths about human experience—will inevitably lead to the bleak reality surrounding Dostoyevsky's bitter, hypochondriacal explorations of what it means to be "a sick man, an angry man, an unattractive man."[37] Then there's Fitzgerald as himself in *The Crack Up*, Duras's second person protagonist in *The Malady of Death*, Mishima's *Temple of the Golden Pavilion*. There's Isabelle Eberhardt's: "He was proud of the scars that cut across his powerful chest and biceps—scars made by knives and stones, and even by firearms—the results of disputes over women who no longer meant anything to him."[38] And this dialogue from Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*: "That woman came here with her people to say your son killed her husband." "Who are they?" "They're people I don't know." "Then there's nothing to worry about, Fulgor. Those people don't even exist."[39] Things hardly improve with Bataille's *The Abbey C.* and with the unwholesome protagonist of *The Story of the Eye*. J. G. Ballard's *Crash*. . . . The history of literature's underside, in sum, must be a horrifying sight for a pragmatist. It's also a revealing sight, however, because all these vivid and abhorrent descriptions of human existence divide Deleuze from Rorty, they draw a clear line between what's new and what's new and better. Together, these literary descriptions delineate a space for thinking that Deleuze sourly incorporates while Rorty flutters away.

To elicit the diverse reactions there's no need to retreat to literature's marginal and poisoned talents. The Deleuze-Rorty distinction can be cut again through the most prosaic and boring bodies: a Deleuzean is more likely to give cigarettes a chance and then write a book about their effects (example: Klein's *Cigarettes are Sublime*). Or, more likely to grow fingernails

out to wicked lengths even while "finding nothing more disconcerting than somebody looking at them."[40] The distinction between new truths and new, better ones can further be cut through exceptional bodies: the Olmecs in pre-Colonial Mexico strapped pallets to their infant children's heads so that, as adults, their skulls would retreat at rakish angles and complement their teeth grounded into pointed spikes. The idea was to facilitate the description of these contorted selves as fierce serpents and jaguars. Whatever else it may be, it's clear—I hope—that this animalizing description doesn't seem clearly better than most others. It's also not an obsolete example of barbarianism confined to a gone era. Alphonso Lingis has reported a Scottish doctor who "specializes in treating apotemnophiliacs, that is, he cuts off the limbs sufferers don't want. Scotland has now become the international center of unnecessary amputations."[41]

From this, it can be concluded that Rorty has some work to do in Scotland; it can also be concluded that Deleuze's refusal to use the word better as a gatekeeper for (irreversible) experiments with new descriptions of our bodies has infelicitous consequences. Leaving those consequences aside, however, what I'm emphasizing is that repellent literature, cancerous cigarettes, flattened skulls and amputated limbs all separate new visions of reality from better ones. They all set Deleuze apart from Rorty.

In straight theoretical terms, the separation can be measured as the space separating an infinite from an unlimited series. Quickly opening that space, the series 2 . . . 4 . . . 6 . . . is infinite because it won't end, but it's also limited because 3 and 7 won't appear no matter long how long you go on counting. In an unlimited series like the one provided by *pi*, by contrast, any odd number may appear somewhere along the line. Crossing from numbers into philosophy, Rorty believes in infinite philosophic interpreting which means an endless but exclusive list of descriptions. The list of descriptions he accepts and sanctions is endless because there'll always be room for something new and better further on; philosophy is an infinite conversation. But, not every kind of thinking's invited because those studies producing tormented possibilities for life aren't making anything better. Contrastingly, when Deleuze abandoned the second part of Rorty's entrance requirement for legitimate investigating, the list of philosophically respectable descriptions began growing, on the level of the new, without limit. Drunken symphonies, wooden flesh and the rest all open up as possibilities for unconstrained thinking and unrestricted describing.

Another theoretical way to pull Deleuze away from Rorty's insistence that new descriptions must also be better derives from the Nietzschean rejection of broad, reasoned consensus that I've already detailed. Rorty rejects the rejection. For him and for the philosophy following his pragmatic lead forging agreements among capable and rational interlocutors is a basic endeavor. Describing ourselves as fair-minded participants in open debates oriented by the search for agreements is even one of pragmatism's primary endeavors for at least this reason: entrenched disagreements and polarized oppositions tend to mute the honest give and take of discussion. And that reduces our ability to formulate "new and better ways of talking and acting" in one of Rorty's preferred manners which is by "playing vocabularies and cultures off against each other."[42] Now, as it's obvious that philosophers who disagree without even agreeing to disagree won't be able to do any of that playing, it follows that consensus on some minimal, provisional level supports Rorty's pragmatic search for better descriptions; consensus folds into the search. It should be added here, though, that consensus is certainly not the primary reason Rorty does philosophy and, further, the notion of a *final* consensus ending the possibility of discussion slams against everything Rorty wrote. These two exclusions, however, still leave room for the statement that an inclination toward consensus is part of what allows pragmatic philosophers to do what they want. Next, and with that congenial inclination marked, it's hard, I suppose most of us agree, to disapprove. Whether someone's a pragmatist or not it's difficult to censure Rorty for his good-natured engagement with firm though not immutable communal accords. Deleuze censures, though. "Consensus, consensus, consensus," he complains, "what about people's becoming?"[43] The technical term "becoming" means, in this context, the formation of understandings of ourselves and our surroundings that may or may not be better than those we currently have but that are definitely different. These are the kind of descriptions, I've related, that attract Deleuze and, as I've also related ("Debate is unbearable"), they attract him even though they tend to lead away from communities of reasonable interlocutors. What can be added here is that they tend to lead Deleuze away just as Huysmans and Burroughs and the rest of the literary describers I listed wrote their protagonists away from constructive participation in the societies they belonged to. More, in those books the protagonists are frequently and blatantly antisocial; they have no interest whatever in agreeing with anyone around them or learn-

ing from them or playing vocabularies off them or anything else that might be imagined. In des Esseintes's case, in order to carry out his innovative experiments with music and drink he retreated to a remote cottage, blocked off his windows and eventually organized matters so that he wouldn't even be burdened by the sight of his grim servants. In Burroughs's case, he recounted that he couldn't be bothered to bathe, much less present himself to society. For both these recluses, consequently, discussions on the way to social agreements weren't only to be minimized, far more drastically any inclination toward discussion was entirely denied and then reduced to not making sense because they were completely consumed by forming their own vocabularies and descriptions and then following them to singularly dismal ends. Deleuze witnesses those ends. By spurning the valorization of consensus on the theoretical level, Deleuze holds the repellant destinies within his philosophy. Before these same destinies Rorty recoils and then eradicates them to the extent that he envisions thinking as what people agree to do together. The result is that the word "consensus" occupies the same disjointed spot between Deleuze and Rorty that the word "better" does. Rorty embraces both, Deleuze ignores them.

The Deleuzean attitude, besides being antipragmatic as an aloofness to what's better, verges on social irresponsibility insofar as it refuses to hold the production of new descriptions within the boundaries of what reasonable thinkers agree to be improvements. Deleuze realized that—and edged toward condoning it—in one of his interviews. "People talk about intellectuals [like me] abdicating their responsibility," he reported, and then went on to ask, "but how are they supposed to express themselves in some all-purpose medium that's an offense to all thinking?"[44] The "all-purpose medium" referred to here happens to be television, but that's not the part of the citation I want to focus on; instead, it's the balance implied between the "responsibility of the intellectuals" on one side and on the other the desire Deleuze felt to *be* an intellectual, to express himself as doing philosophy. As for the side where the responsibility is weighed, it at least includes the manufacturing of helpful, appealing and improving contributions to broad social and political discussions. On the other side there's Deleuze's advocacy of pure investigating, there's the desire for studies that may not yield hopes for improved individuals and societies and that may not elicit anything but widespread revulsion but that nevertheless are instances of philosophic describing. This is not to

equate unconstrained, unlimited philosophy with repugnancy, it's only to leave the possibility open for any thinking that refuses the restraints of a philosopher's community and its approbation. Next, and with these two extremes—being responsible and doing uninhibited philosophy—set beside each other, there's the question of the balance between them. Or, there's the question of the balance for most of us but not for Deleuze because he flagrantly insisted that there is none. Abruptly, he was not willing to participate in the formation and dissemination of better truths *if* that meant "offending thinking." Again, Deleuze (as a philosopher) wasn't willing to participate in social responsibility if that meant limiting access to words, lines of thought and regions of experience that may yield new conceptual understandings. Putting this conclusion in Deleuze's own words, "Philosophers," he recommended, "should say 'not the just ideas, just ideas' and bear this out in their activity."[45] Rorty, whose philosophy is far more sober, generous and cooperative than Deleuze's, would never talk like that. For which he should be commended.

But it should also be underlined that Rorty's intellectual responsibility, his insistence on descriptions that most of us agree seem more agreeable than their predecessors, leads to its own negative consequence; it confines pragmatic thinking and thinkers under a virtually Platonic ultimatum: better truths or banishment. The reference to Platonism is the right one here because on this front Rorty *is* a Platonist. While his infinite horizon for constantly better explanations and truths thoroughly wiped out the End for describing Socrates revered, it didn't wipe out the ancient notion of vertical organization in philosophy. Within that organization, what Socrates proposed goes equally for the contemporary pragmatist: each day's describing must happen on the philosophic ladder's next higher rung. Thought must always go upward in search of truths. Immediately, the delicate question already raised before Rorty confronts him again, the question about whether any vertical imperative to the higher can make sense if, as Rorty proposes, there's no *highest* rung. For my part, I don't think it can, but in Rorty's defense he stipulates that this is just the sort of airy worry we should forget about since it's not very pragmatic. As long as a new description seems clearly elevated over a previous one, his reasoning goes, that's good enough. Accepting the argument is letting Rorty go on with his work; it doesn't, however, resolve the following, deeper difficulty. Pragmatists, just like the Platonists who preceded them, find they're afraid of heights. I don't mean they're concerned about de-

scriptions becoming *too* good; instead, no matter how good or bad one may be, neither a Platonist nor a pragmatist can look down. Of course, if you believe in truth and want only truth and evaluate everything in terms of truth, then there's no reason to look down; if you believe that producing truths is the *reason* you're philosophizing then the refusal to countenance worse descriptions hardly merits reprobation. More, refusing to look down is plainly justified and perfectly natural. If you don't practice the blind faith in truth, though, the fear of heights—which is, ultimately, also a fear of philosophy—is not justified and it's not natural. It's an artificial and oppressive restraint on the desire to think; it's an offense to thought.

The accusation that thought is being offended penetrates Rorty because his describing is constrained to move in only one direction. It can also be aimed at Deleuze: his imperative that all truths be new appears to be a restraint on philosophy only somewhat more liberal than the chastity belt of the better. The accusation—as leveled against Deleuze—is that for him thinking must generate something innovative or it isn't virtuous, and therefore his work, like Rorty's, is repressed. Deleuze isn't repressed, though; his imperative to the new doesn't restrict thought. It doesn't because an articulated conception of reality that isn't new doesn't even result from thinking, it's only a mindless repetition, a calcifying of intellectual labor into the hardened absence of any movement whatever. Exemplifying linguistically, someone who produces the description "Heights are scary" clearly isn't considering their experience, just as a literary author who writes that sentence into the narrative (as opposed to the dialogue) part of a novel isn't writing. Thinking, like real writing, yields descriptions for heights like sweating, disorienting, frantic. Consequently, the minimum requirement for thought to function—for it to exist at all—is that it produce truths as descriptions that haven't been trampled upon, that aren't entirely conventional. It follows that the imperative to the new is an *enabling*, not a limiting definition of the word thinking. Subsequently, and only after this enabling instantiation can other definitional acts be committed and all of those, in contrast to the first, will limit, they will constrain philosophic labor. So, the demand that an interpretive description of experience be new in no way confines thought; it does the opposite: it brings thinking into existence and then impels it but without making the condescending demand that it move in one direction and not another. Articulated slightly differently, the word "new" in the phrase "thinking must produce new truths" is redundant; if a truth

isn't new then it's not the result of thinking. Articulated slightly differently again, the word "new" in "thinking must produce new truths" appears to modify the noun "truths" but really it modifies thinking, it's about thinking and creative of it. Pushing the limits of standard English, "new" is an adverb for Deleuze, not an adjective. No matter how it's formulated, though, there's a single result: a distance stretches between Deleuze and Rorty. It's a distance between someone who does and someone who doesn't believe that the pursuit of new and better truths is a grievously limited project and only the pursuit of new truths without any further restraints entirely preserves the dignity of philosophizing.

The cost of dignity is extremely high. In the library it can be found under the titles *Against the Grain*, *Naked Lunch*, and so on. Outside the library we need to hand over the certainty that good thinking naturally cooperates with responsibility in the ordinary world all of us share. Frequently, this cost was too great for Deleuze. When it was, his philosophy retreated into tepid sentences that could be freely exchanged for Rorty's. For instance, "The only constraint on thinking is that the resulting philosophic truths should have a necessity, as well as an unfamiliarity, and that they have both to the extent that they're a response to real problems."[46] Here, Deleuze comes dangerously close to inserting the "better" that he leaves out of his boldest writings, and he comes more than dangerously close to the assertion that thought should be constrained, that it should be limited to pursuing truths solving commonly recognized problems. In the end, it would be difficult to dispute the claim that thick segments of Deleuze's thought crumble into near-compatibility with Rorty's pragmatism. They do because Deleuze, like any reasonable person, finds it difficult to resist the conception of the philosopher as branded with a palpable duty to turn out conclusions arguably more responsible and beneficial than those that have been inherited. To write the same sentence in the history of philosophy, Deleuze understandably finds it difficult to resist the most ancient piety. Not piety as belief in an ultimate truth but the more pervasive faith, the one that thinking is for truth and then the subsequent belief that some descriptions of experience are better than others for reasons that have nothing to do with thinking, that exclude concerns for thinking. Still, Deleuze never settled on a determination about whether thought should be devoted to truths. And that leaves his readers with the possibility of clinging to the bolder writings, to the Deleuze who respects thought and refuses to humiliate it with con-

straints. If this is Deleuze, then the following sentence from Rorty provides the words for a functioning though not at all pragmatic conclusion. "James and Dewey," Rorty wrote, meaning pragmatism generally, meaning himself as its new representative, "are waiting at the end of the road Deleuze is currently traveling."[47] In this book, it would be better to write the opposite. Though not better because it happens to be true. It is, but that's irrelevant.

Us and them is the result of divisions in philosophy. The division I've been elaborating belongs to decadence and has extended by separating Socrates from Thrasymachus, Deleuze from Barthes and, finally, Deleuze from Rorty. In accordance with thinking's privilege over truth, Socrates and Deleuze have been arranged on one side, Thrasymachus, Barthes and Rorty on the other. Another us and them divide belongs to piety, to those privileging truth over thinking. At its deepest point this division separates philosophers pursuing objective, universal knowledge in the Platonic tradition from philosophers producing subjective interpretations in the wake of Nietzsche. These two divisions, it's clear, cross through each other, they segregate philosophy's major figures differently. Even allowing for that, though, the two lines of separation have something profound in common: both level what happens across the way. Both the decadent and pious divisions in the history of philosophy are us and them separations because they refuse to acknowledge important differences among those occupying the other side.

I'll develop this refusal first within piety then within decadence. Both are being developed as a summary of this chapter.

The deep division running through the entire pious tradition began opening when Plato took his vaunted ideas for politics to Syracuse and returned home with the certainty that modifications were necessary. Centuries later Augustine's divine truth ended up in the middle of the Spanish Inquisition. Further on came Kant's rational ethics which have mainly proven infallible in their inability to help people deal with flesh and blood moral problems. Next, Hegel's venture into the dialectical superstitious with his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Fortunately and unfortunately Nietzsche cut philosophy away from all this. His godless but nonetheless tenaciously pious ideas left philosophic conclusions to be formed with human components and without the aspiration to universality. "That's it for me!" Barthes agreed. "Redescribing ourselves is the most important thing we

can do," Rorty added.[48] "Can you harness," Deleuze asked, "the power of drugs without them taking over, without turning into a dazed zombie?" Foucault asserted that "knowledge does not slowly detach itself from its empirical roots to become pure speculation subject only to the demands of reason, rather, it creates a progressive enslavement to its instinctive violence."[49] This list of Nietzschean pronouncements could be drawn out further, but the single effect they all have is the replacement of aspirations for bloodless assurance with subjective constructions of experience. In more sweeping terms, they effectively divide Ancient, Medieval and Modern philosophy from what we've grown accustomed to calling perspectivism or Postmodernism.

Between the Ancient to Modern hope for certainty and the twentieth-century development of perspectivism there exists a long temporal imbalance, an uneven number of books published, a disparity in the number of advocates. None of this changes the reality, however, that for those who believe in truth Nietzsche's life centers philosophy. Nietzsche is the center because the line he drew through our discipline had the effect of leveling everything that came before; it reduced the many philosophers preceding him to near indistinguishability. Of course there are distinctions within Ancient to Modern history that *its participants* find important. For them, Plato is very distinct from Augustine is very distinct from Kant is very distinct from Hegel. But from the Nietzschean side those differences are barely discernable as they're just various ways of getting at a supposedly coherent truth that has lost its integrity, lost its ability to hold itself and philosophy together. The various ways truth was pursued before Nietzsche, the result is, don't distinguish the pursuers so much as unite them under the single idea of futility. For that reason we who have come after Nietzsche don't hesitate to subsume most everything before under the title Platonism, and we do that even though the label would've made no sense at all to those gathered by the word. The same leveling goes the other way. From the side of the Ancient to Modern tradition now gone, Nietzsche's books and those of his promoters can be differentiated only faintly. They can hardly be differentiated at all because they're ways of abandoning philosophy as the pursuit of unwavering truth, and as they're books dedicated to abandoning what is understood *to be* philosophy, it hardly makes sense to distinguish them philosophically. This perspective of the past observing the present can be underlined with a citation, with a sentence that only Nietzsche could have

written and that he did write implicitly about himself: "Such natures come without reason or pretext; they appear as lightning appears, too terrible, too sudden, too convincing, too different even to be hated."[50] What Nietzsche didn't mean to assert with this fomenting is that his philosophy came from nowhere—it didn't; it came from within the preceding tradition. What Nietzsche meant is that once it arrived those devoted to the philosophy stretching from Plato to Hegel would be unable to manage it, to organize it with their customary tools, because they were all fitted to work with the hope for a different kind of truth.[51]

Deleuze, the good French Nietzschean, repeats Nietzsche's divisive idea in terms of identity and difference. "Let us consider the two formulas: only that which resembles differs [because differences are distortions of a fundamental identity] and only differences can resemble each other [because all resemblances are illusions swirling out of fundamental differences.]"[52] The agreement here between Deleuze and Nietzsche is that there are two basic ways to do philosophy—one revolving around identity, the other around differences—and therefore there's also agreement that doing philosophy one of the ways precludes sympathetic involvement with those doing it the other since what each side considers fundamental is only derivative for the other. Sliding a little further down the list of Nietzschean repetitions, Rorty asserts that "there is no way in which the issue between the pragmatist [the anti-realist and anti-metaphysician] and his opponent [the realist, the metaphysician] can be tightened up and resolved according to criteria agreed to by both sides."[53] There can't be any tightening up, according to Rorty, for the same reason Deleuze and Nietzsche already located, because crossing from one side to the other means changing the basis for making philosophical decisions; it means changing a fundamental element of one's identity as a philosopher. Now, it needs to be noted here that these quotations must be read cautiously since neither Rorty nor Deleuze nor Nietzsche nor anyone else really believes that philosophy's entire story neatly reduces to pragmatists and opponents or two formulas or two sides. Nevertheless there remains the insuperable reality that the Nietzschean division monitors what the word philosophy means, where philosophers begin, what they're looking for and why it is they sit down to work each day. Further, in every particular instance where the decision is made one way, the other way along with all its advocates are gathered up under the heading of what philosophy isn't; they're squeezed into conformity with each other as those who aren't us.

At the same time and in the same books where the history of pious philosophy splits between the search for universal truth and the construction of interpretive truths, decadence cuts another, equally deep partition. According to decadence on one side are all those philosophers conceiving of thinking in truth's terms, all those wanting truth in one way or another. On the other side, there are all those wanting thought, all those willing to sacrifice concerns about what happens to the very idea of truth in the name of fortifying thinking. One of the critical results of the sacrifice on the decadent side is that the two basic ways of wanting truth—Platonism and Nietzscheanism—fall into indistinguishability insofar as they only represent different ways of expressing what's not believed in anymore. More, distinctions within Platonism along with distinctions within Nietzscheanism also fall away. They disappear almost entirely because they're buried beneath what all these philosophers have in common: a shared participation in the misadventure of primitive worship that is wanting truth in some form. Decadents recognize, of course, that on philosophy's pious side the oldest wanting exists in particular, delineable ways. With his own body, Socrates insisted on that. Descartes concurred when he initiated the Modern era while maintaining the Socratic confidence in "the perfection and felicity of life" that truth could provide. Going forward to Nietzsche, for him it wasn't Cartesian certainties but the construction of perspective understandings that, in a fit of piety, led to "happiness"[54] and "joy."[55] For Rorty, descriptions were rewarding as "interesting and fruitful." For Deleuze—in one of his weaker moments—his particular concepts of experience provided "the only way of casting off our shame" and "men's only hope."[56] For Foucault a unique penchant for testing reality's extremes combined with a belief that "knowledge calls for experimentation on ourselves" and led to this enthusiastic announcement:

> It may be that there remains one prodigious idea which might be made to prevail over every other aspiration: the idea of humanity sacrificing itself. It seems indisputable that only the desire for truth, with its enormous prerogatives, could direct and sustain such a sacrifice.[57]

All these protests in favor of distinct truths, the decadent admits, sound nice though also a little melodramatic. What they are more than anything

else, though, for those who believe in thinking is just another flurry of ultimately empty sentences mixed in with the rest of the noise of Plato against Descartes against Nietzsche against Rorty against Deleuze against Foucault; they're just more vacuous words amidst the pointless conflicts of the infidels.

While these conflicts may be curious for someone dedicated to intellectual history or the history of truth, they struggle to hold any decadent philosopher's attention because when decadents ask about truth what they expect to hear is a response about thinking and its acceleration: Plato's Truth about justice does more than Thrasymachus's; Deleuze's conceptual understanding of Descartes does more than one of Barthes's exclamations or one of Rorty's pragmatic descriptions. Raising this up to the maximum case—Plato versus Nietzsche—the important question involving them is whether understandings of experience claiming to be objective and final inspire more or less theoretical labor than those that are subjective and transient. There's no need to provide an answer. No need as simply writing the question already says more than any answer. What the asking says is that the conventional way of approaching the Plato-Nietzsche distinction ends up going nowhere: even though a careful argument may be formed to demonstrate that one or the other tells us more about the world, and even though the argument may be recognized as strong or persuasive, the recognition doesn't distinguish these philosophers so much as prepare the gap separating their two kinds of philosophy to be filled by a verdict of irrelevance.

The irrelevance can be articulated in terms of beginnings. Within piety, the Nietzschean moment in intellectual history is marked by the conviction that forming limited interpretations is philosophy (because it allows some hope for knowledge) and the search for any final certainty is vanity (because it's hopeless), and Nietzscheans see, therefore, the displacement of Truth by truths as what enables them to start working again after the failure of Platonism. Decadents, however, see the same exclusion as little more than a capricious affront to what their philosophy is about which is producing more thinking in any direction possible. It follows that the restriction Nietzscheans place on truths—they shouldn't aspire to universality—as a way of beginning to work converts, for the decadent, into a strangling restriction applied to philosophy at the origin. The conclusion is that because decadence cannot start by excluding cer-

tain truths simply because they happen to be wrong, decadent philosophy requires overlooking the Nietzschean division in the history of thought.

The word "overlooking" in the last sentence should be emphasized since it's not only that decadents reject the division Nietzsche drew, they also reject it only in passing because their greater preoccupation is with staying out of the breach between those who believe in truth and those who believe in thinking. They want to stay out as nothing at all can be done within it. Just as pious philosophy consigns anyone trying to satisfy both the desire for Truth and the desire for truths to impotence (Nietzsche: "One does not reckon with such natures. . . ." Deleuze: "Let us consider the two formulas. . . ."), so too those trapped between the love of truth and the love of thought are powerless to begin philosophizing. Powerless because any attempt to incorporate or reconcile the two sides necessarily and constantly fails. To illustrate that I'll quickly go through two failing reconciliations, they're opposed but ultimately complementary. First, Nietzschean perspectivists can try to incorporate decadence into their own truth-centered practice. The process is simple. If the purpose of philosophy is the formation of convincing or useful interpretations of experience then the decadent portrayal of truth as kneeling before thinking may be conceived as just another interpretation; it's only another way to understand part of the world and the understanding should be evaluated in standard perspectivist terms, in terms of its accuracy or pragmatic value. In terms of accuracy, an assertion could be that decadence effectively explains why composing solid and persuasive arguments isn't a very good way for philosophers to get promoted but getting a lot of other professors to write articles and books about *whether* your argument is solid and persuasive, that will work quite well. Here, the subordination of truth before thought becomes a description of what happens in university philosophy departments and the description's value can be tested simply by checking whether it's correct (by, for example, asking a representative sampling of professors how it is they got promoted). The other customary Nietzschean way to evaluate interpretations is with respect to their practical value, with respect to whether they provide "men's only hope" (Deleuze in a weak moment), or whether they let us be better and more decent (Rorty). Going in this direction the evaluating question to ask is: does the description of philosophy as reversing thinking and truth's traditional relation serve one of these aspirations? The answer's clear. More importantly the overriding problem with these

kinds of appropriations of decadence *as a truth* is that no matter how correct or pragmatically worthwhile the results may be, decadent philosophers will have no interest in them. They can't be interested because their regard for interpretive depictions of reality is sharply limited to whether they fuel the next burst of philosophizing. If they do then thought goes forward without reference to accuracy or felicity. If they don't the truths are abandoned no matter how accurate or felicitous they may be. Now, faced with these assertions the pious have no choice but to believe this: they're witnessing nihilism. And from their side of philosophy, it must be acknowledged, they're right. As a contemporary, pious defender of Deleuze maintains, "Deleuze's would be an utterly banal form of philosophy if it were motivated purely by a desire to conceptualize [to have truths] for the sake of conceptualizing [of thinking]."[58] Expanding the complaint to cover Nietzscheanism generally, philosophy beginning with faith in truth can only believe that considering experience without making sure the findings are either right or tangibly beneficial is a squandering, a waste, a collapse of philosophy into nothing. Unfortunately, the purely decadent response isn't to refute the accusation or submit to it, but to ask how the accusation can be used to impel more thought.

From the other side, decadents can try to incorporate pious philosophy. This leads, though, to the same frustrated result. Reaching it starts with this incorporative claim: if the primary desire is intensifying thinking then most any truth—even those proposed by philosophers who want them—can be construed to serve that purpose. In fact, and as the philosophy section of any university library abundantly demonstrates, many arguably pious conclusions do serve that purpose very effectively. Further, as Nietzscheanism reaches its advanced stages (Deleuze's reading of Descartes) it bends pious truths into decadence with increasing efficiency (Deleuze converting Descartes's truth about who he is into a mechanism for more thought about who he can be). At the more rudimentary levels of recent theory, however, the decadent appropriation runs into difficulties. Among innumerable examples there's the episode from Richard Rorty I've cited, the one centered on his decision to continue visiting the library seeking inspiration for more writing even after the humbling revelation that no finally satisfying description of experience will ever be inscribed. As I've already related, this writing Rorty envisions doing manifestly participates in the decadent plan to incorporate piety by forwarding descriptions that always leave room for others. For that reason

Rorty's persistence is to be encouraged. Disappointment immediately follows, though, because Rorty also makes a troubling admission about his trip to the library. He won't be going solely to add more pages to those he finds there; he'll also be going, at least occasionally and momentarily, to stop writing. "On the pragmatist account," Rorty explains, "some particular social practice needs to block the road of inquiry, halt the regress of interpretations in order to get something done."[59] As for what Rorty wants to get done, presumably it relates to his sweeping project of helping all of us cooperate and achieve more decent societies. Whatever Rorty had in mind, though, it will turn thinking *against itself*. It will because philosophizing for Rorty means forming descriptions, and if a description emerges from good philosophizing it will prove pragmatically useful which means it will call for describing to halt. It must be halted so that a particular idea can be considered finished and transported (out of its philosophic workshop and) into a substantially practical—non-theoretical—endeavor. The depressing result is that in Rorty thinking doing what it should leads to its own at least momentary suppression.

The suppression can be located in a specific word. I don't mean in what the word means but in Rorty's choosing it to mean what he does. The word is "regress" as it appears in the phrase aligning him with Nietzsche: philosophy is "an infinite regress of interpretations." By choosing this particular term for the kind of endless interpreting that happens when there can be no perfectly final interpretation, Rorty indicates that he perceives a tendency in thought to move in the *wrong* direction; it goes backward and away from what he wants which are descriptions sufficiently useful to merit the halting of further modifications. Decadents, however, see this situation from the opposite side. For them the infinite regress of interpreting isn't a problem but protection from the threat truths pose to thought. It follows that the descriptive word Rorty attaches to Nietzschean labor should be replaced. It's not a regress, it's a *progress* away from any interruption of strictly theoretical labor. There's an unavoidable obstacle, however, on the decadent way to this substitution. It's that Rorty can't allow it without jeopardizing what another word—philosophy—means for him. That leaves him unable to make the change. And that leaves the assertion from Rorty's philosophy book that "some particular social practice needs to block the regress of interpretations in order to get something done" glaringly revealed as what it is. Instead of being a lesson in the production of valuable truths it's a

manifesto for nothingness, it turns thinking against itself to the sacrificial degree.[60]

Conclusion: the pious philosopher and the decadent are both nihilists, but only because each sees the other that way for the same reason that they deny the label for themselves.

These circling accusations of nihilism could be echoed as other terminal contradictions, but better to go immediately in this direction: no matter how the disagreement between piety and decadence gets formulated, it will never be overcome because each articulation is a symptom of a deeper conflict about what the words truth and thinking mean, about why philosophers want them, about how to get them and where they lead. The decision, consequently, between pursuing truth and pursuing thinking needs to be made for truth *to be* truth and for thinking *to be* thinking. It follows that the decision is exclusionary. Just as the choice between Platonism and Nietzscheanism needs to be made to begin doing what one or the other recognize as philosophy, so too the truth or thinking decision precedes anything happening either way. And when the decision is made, philosophizing will start by denying important differences among those who go in the other direction. All those over there are leveled, they're effectively the same, they're not us, they're the ones who aren't doing philosophy. They're them.

But they're us and we're them because the most vigorous movement in contemporary philosophy is a carrier of decadence. French Nietzscheanism as thought in the name of truth twists into philosophy in the name of thinking. That's the next chapter.

Notes

1. Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Antichrist*, Section 47. Taken from: Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 627.

2. The question of how God provides a final community and not impersonal awareness is an important one among students of Saint Augustine including, notably, Carl Vaught.

3. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 3.

4. Bilgrami, "Comment on Rorty," pp. 111-112.

5. Ferry and Renaut, *French Philosophy of the Sixties*, p. xxviii.

6. Ferry and Renaut, *French Philosophy of the Sixties*, p. xvi. Ferry and Renaut repeat the idea in their *Why We Are Not Nietzscheans*: "It is together with Nietzsche that we have to think against Nietzsche." Ferry and Renaut, *Why We Are Not Nietzscheans*, p. viii.

7. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 250-52.

8. Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text*, p. 13.

9. Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* p. 24.

10. Another way to write the distinction between a string of therefores that's normally taken to lead to Descartes and Deleuze's process of assembling his identity envisions the one named Descartes as marking the intersection of doubting, thinking and being as though each of the three is a curve arcing across a page. Against the ordinary understanding, for Deleuze this intersection isn't the highest or purest moment of the arcs and it's not what they all lead to; the intersection is only something that happens along the arcs' diverse ways. That's how, finally, Descartes is presented in *What Is Philosophy?*, not as the necessary outcome of a chain of reasoning but as someone who happened along the ways of doubting, thinking and being.

11. Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* p. 27.

12. Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* p. 2.

13. Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* p. 28.

14. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, pp. 299-300. (Book 5, Section 354.)

15. Deleuze and Guattari *What Is Philosophy?* p. 29.

16. Deleuze and Guattari *What Is Philosophy?* p. 26.

17. Descartes, *Discourse*, p. 65.

18. Descartes, *Discourse*, p. 68.

19. Descartes, *Discourse*, p. 161.

20. There are, as the preceding paragraphs indicate, objections to this argument. Nietzsche and Deleuze, for example, because of their shared aversion to discussion and debate would likely want to refuse automatic connections between secondary literature and philosophic thinking. There is, however, no reason why we should let them alone determine what philo-

sophic thinking is just as there's no reason why we should let any two philosophers define for the rest of us what philosophic truth is. In any case, in this book it's not necessary to strictly define either one since what's important is what happens between them.

21. Rorty, "Pragmatism and Philosophy," p. 57.
22. Rorty, "Pragmatism and Philosophy," p. 57.
23. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 360.
24. Rorty, "Pragmatism and Philosophy."
25. Rorty, "Pragmatism and Philosophy," p. 54.
26. Rorty, "Pragmatism and Philosophy," p. 54.
27. Rorty, "Pragmatism and Philosophy," p. 56.
28. Rorty, "Pragmatism and Philosophy," p. 56.
29. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 394.
30. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 360.
31. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 360. Another articulation of the idea: "The point of philosophic work is always the same—to perform the social function which Dewey called 'breaking the crust of convention.'" Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 379.
32. Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, pp. xiii-xiv.
33. Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* p. 5.
34. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 360.
35. Huysmans, *Against the Grain*, p. 45.
36. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. xiii.
37. Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground,* p. 15.
38. Eberhardt, *The Oblivion Seekers*, p. 23.
39. Rulfo, *Pedro Páramo*, p 63.
40. Deleuze, *Negotiations*, p. 5.
41. Alphonso Lingis, cited from private correspondence.
42. Rorty, "Pragmatism and Philosophy," p. 54.
43. Deleuze, *Negotiations*, p. 153.
44. Deleuze, *Negotiations*, pp. 153-54.
45. Deleuze, *Negotiations*, p. 38.
46. Deleuze, *Negotiations*, p. 136.
47. Rorty, "Pragmatism and Philosophy," p. 32.
48. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, pp. 358-59.
49. Foucault, "Nietzsche Genealogy, History," p. 96.
50. Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, p. 86. (*Genealogy of Morals* Essay 2, Section 17.)
51. As a concrete example of this leveling as imposed from the Platonic side onto the Nietzschean side, a defender of objective truth, Thomas Nagel, writes that he's against "various forms of what I (but not, usually, its proponents) would call skepticism about reason." Nagel, *The Last Word*, p. 4.

52. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 261.

53. Rorty, "Pragmatism and Philosophy," p. 61.

54. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 37. (Preface for the Second Edition, Section 3.)

55. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 271. (Book 4, Section 338.)

56. Deleuze, *Negotiations*, p. 171.

57. Foucault, "Nietzsche Genealogy, History," p. 96.

58. Buchanan, *Deleuzism*, p. 73.

59. Rorty, "Pragmatism and Philosophy," p. 59.

60. This result can be amplified with a citation from Rorty so infuriating for decadents that it seemed better not to include it in this book's main body. The citation: "The important thing for philosophers is to be able to stop doing philosophy when one wants to." [Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, p. 91.] It can only be difficult to understand how a *philosopher* could reach and utter this self-destructive determination.

Chapter Three

How Does Decadence Emerge from French Nietzscheanism?

This chapter identifies several of French Nietzscheanism's vivifying elements. It outlines a certain desire and a specific fear, then it follows a string of determinations about how we write and what kind of books we want to read, subsequently there's a conception of nausea to be considered and finally a particular notion of reversal to discuss. About each of these I'll show how it's integral to the current reception of Nietzsche and then how—with only slight modifications—it bends into a decadent framework. I'll show, in other words, that French Nietzscheanism provides the theoretical material required for constructing a coherent and substantially developed description of philosophy as truths serving thought. It does because most of what a decadent theory needs is already contained in what philosophy is today.

An intense, impatient desire for truth in Nietzsche and his strongest French readers coursed through their shift from Platonic methods and aspirations to perspective, interpretive thinking. Stronger, the desire caused the shift; the desire made it necessary. Two steps on the way to explaining. The first crosses through Nietzsche's consideration of punishment in the *Genealogy*, through his accumulating of truths on the subject by understanding it in one context as a "compromise with revenge" (you hurt me, so I'll hurt you more), and in another as "the making of a memory" (I've hurt you so you'll remember not to hurt me in the future), and then in further ways in separate situations. The list of further ways continues in the *Genealogy* until eventually arriving at a standard Nietzschean culmination. Instead of trying to organize his perspectives within a large, encompassing notion of what punishment means, Nietzsche abruptly concluded that his numerous understandings were separated by "fundamental differences"[1] and left it at that. Now, one way to explain this absence of an enclosing idea is by saying that Nietzsche didn't believe in overarching unities so he didn't feel a responsibility to unite his

various findings into a larger whole. That's not the explanation I'm going to advocate, though. Rather than maintaining that Nietzsche was first against enclosing unities and therefore gathered disparate, irreconcilable truths, it's the other way: Nietzsche gathered various truths but couldn't fit them together and so he renounced an ultimate definition for punishment.

This renunciation is the second step on the way to Nietzschean desire, and it's framed by the clear and inescapable choice Nietzsche confronted as his divergent understandings of punishment: either give up at least some of the most irremediably recalcitrant shards of accumulated knowledge in favor of an attempt at unifying the rest into a larger and more general understanding, or forgo the larger aspiration to keep the pieces. We know what Nietzsche chose, the easier of the two. The harder choice, the one Nietzsche couldn't bring himself to make, is similar to the one I suppose all of us suffer through as writers whether our subject is punishment or anything else. We suffer in this particular Nietzschean way when we come up with a sentence or paragraph that's good, but that doesn't *fit* anywhere. Like each of Nietzsche's narrow discoveries about punishment, the brief composition merits inclusion in something publishable, but it also seems distinct from and incongruous with the article or book currently being assembled. Still, and even though it's clear that the compact writing doesn't belong, it remains extremely difficult to simply delete the words. Speaking for myself, I sometimes waste hours trying to mold a short, dissonant passage into the (this) larger manuscript I'm putting together. Worse, the hours are consumed even though it's impossible—when viewing the situation dispassionately—to avoid concluding that time is simply being frittered away since the recalcitrant ninety words will never blend in no matter how much they're manipulated. Nonetheless, the hours are spent manipulating until, in the end, I normally give up. Which doesn't mean getting rid of the words like I should; instead, it means clamorously jamming them in at some spot where it at least appears they might have some vague relation with what came before and what follows. Now, I'm the first to recognize that the case of my misguided attachment to my own writing must be extreme compared to most writers of academic books, but I don't think it's entirely foreign. Stronger, I suspect that this overenthusiastic devotion at least partially explains why so many academic books are so difficult to read: with some regularity we authors can't seem to bring ourselves to cut paragraphs that

stray from the central argument's main line, and that leaves even the most cautious readers at least occasionally lost in our pages.

As a minor consolation, it's not just we theorists who produce discursive collages because of an inability to delete; the same resistance to losing what's possessed aggravates tensions in places where writing's tight control is valued far more highly then in academic philosophy. At the disciplined extreme, if you read correspondence between fiction authors and their editors, time and again you find the editor asking (pleading) for passages to be removed and authors unable to accommodate them. As an example there's F. Scott Fitzgerald who both suffered from and adopted a title for this incapacity, for this malady of holding onto incongruous chunks of words and sentences. The title Fitzgerald adopted, inaccuracy, didn't name wrong or bad sentences, just prose off the target of what the rest of the pages try to hit. Fitzgerald:

> I shall ponder, or rather I have pondered, what you say about accuracy—I'm afraid I haven't quite reached the ruthless artistry which would let me cut out an exquisite bit that had no place in the context. I can cut out the almost exquisite, the adequate, even the brilliant—but a true accuracy is, as you say, still in the offing.[2]

While few of us would claim to write the exquisitely inaccurate as Fitzgerald did, we all know what he means. We also know that editors calling for deletions are nearly always right; almost every book (theoretical and literary) could be improved by simply cutting parts out. But it's very hard to do that; we all love our own writing.

In the same way pious thinkers love their truths. For that reason it's very hard for a philosopher who has come upon some narrow streak of knowledge to edit it out. That's the harsh possibility Nietzsche faced, though, when he thought about punishment. Because his plural understandings weren't reconcilable, because he couldn't fit them into a single narrative on the subject, he had to decide between holding onto the scattered inaccuracies (many of them brilliant) he'd accumulated or deleting sentences of knowledge until what remained could at last be fitted together as a gesture toward a broadly applicable comprehension of punishment. Nietzsche's decision is clear. To maintain what he had—the compact gains he'd attained, the little understandings he'd won—he left true accuracy in the offing.

When Nietzsche did that, he verified a scrupulous adherence to his central and pious imperative for philosophy: "Sacrifice all desirability to truth, every truth." He also did something else: he began demonstrating a tangibly human aspect of our present and collective intellectual condition. What Nietzsche demonstrated was that, at its most palpable, the condition isn't so much a distrust of any ultimate or objective certainty as Lyotard famously asserted, and it's not incredulity even though it must be admitted that what Lyotard called Postmodernism certainly can be *delineated* by the suspicion of any claim stretched to universal lengths. Still, the suspicion is only an abstract, arid theory; it's only a circle drawn around more substantive experience. The more substantive experience circulating underneath Lyotard's formulation is the incorrigible piece of virtually carnal reality that Fitzgerald knew and that reaches plain visibility in both Nietzsche and his advocates. The reality is a yearning. At its human core, Postmodernism is an unconstrained desire for whatever truths we can get our hands on. Setting this against the backdrop of the history of philosophy, the dubiously sober and barely controlled infatuation for ultimate truth that drove Socrates to the end Plato remembered finally grew to such unwieldy proportions in Nietzsche that even the faintest, most transitory and localized interpretations also merited obsessive treasuring; even those interpretations that excluded or contradicted or that, in Nietzsche's words, "differed fundamentally" from those already gathered needed to be written up and stored as part of philosophy's constantly intensifying desire.

In the field of academic writing, the desire translated directly into Nietzsche's embracing of pure inaccuracy, the aphorism. When Nietzsche began writing aphorisms what he displayed was that *everything* he stumbled across *had* to be recorded, even if the proliferation hindered the assembly of a smooth-flowing monograph. In fact, Nietzsche loved each one of his little truths so much, so far out of any patient control, that later in his life he almost entirely gave up on developed arguments and devoted himself to feverishly (literally and figuratively) inscribing every disparate insight that occurred to him. For that reason, and since his own writings naturally and frequently occurred to him, it was almost predictable that near the end Nietzsche set to work on a freewheeling collection of truths about his own truths, the intellectual autobiography *Ecce Homo*. And Nietzsche's impatient wanting and writing didn't go only in that direction. After determining that the constrictions of traditional philosoph-

ic rhetoric (which his aphorisms had already pushed to the breaking point) disallowed certain formulations and thus threatened no small number of his precious discoveries, he decided to start composing poetry. We know the results. Even that steadfast guardian and sponsor Walter Kaufmann flinched. "I must confess," he wrote about the unfortunate stanzas titled *From High Mountains: Aftersong,* "that I do not admire the present poem."[3] While he admired at least parts of others, I assume we can all agree that penetrating readings of Nietzsche can be formed without extensive and specific references to the lyrical endeavors. Still, the *existence* of the poems tell us something important about their author, something more important and prior to any theories about God's death or the end of metanarratives and so on. The poems' existence betray their author as infected to the core by the real Postmodern condition; they reveal a philosopher sick with the need to heatedly clutch at any and every truth, no matter how awkward or inaccurate, no matter how clamorously irreconcilable with those that came before and those that would follow. Finally, and returning to the beginning of this section, this is the diseased wanting that set contemporary philosophy in motion as an inability to respect the conducting unity that any final, inclusive truth demands. The Postmodern condition—our intellectual condition—is an extreme human desire intensified, not a neatly gauged, reasonably asserted skepticism.

More recently, Deleuze's *Thousand Plateaus* responds to the same overwrought yearning, and responds in nearly the same way that Nietzsche did: frequently unpredictable and occasionally wild-eyed truths fling out from page after page of the hopelessly chaotic, endlessly rambling, constantly disjointed effort. Usually, the flingings are both jarring and stimulating as they're supposed to be. It's equally true, however, that each one also and inexorably absorbs attention from the *collection* of pages; each one hinders the intellectual momentum generated by the accumulated force of protracted philosophical reasoning developed through a uniformly progressing, accurate book. Even so, Deleuze was barely concerned. As his readers cannot avoid knowing, he very bluntly didn't have much time for the generation of patient and determined philosophic force; stronger, he consistently disdained it as he did, for example, when instructing readers of his *A Thousand Plateaus* to begin on whichever page they wished before streaking from one to another of the book's para-

graphs in any order whatever.[4] With that piece of Deleuzean contempt for discursive accuracy in place, *A Thousand Plateaus* inescapably collapses as a book. Any aspiration a reader might have for finding a coordinated route through it is buried beneath a practically infinite liberty of interpretation. Formulated slightly differently, since the reading strategy the book explicitly invites is to flip through the pages taking a little here and putting it together with something the eyes happen to cross further on and then something else again in whatever order impulse may determine, no *powerful* truths emerge from *A Thousand Plateaus*; the book doesn't trap its readers on the rails of a single argument and in a forced march toward some orchestrated crescendo, instead, readers and readings fly out in every imaginable direction as the book accelerates every way at once. Resistance to the anarchy, I maintain with absolute confidence, is hopeless. Even if you refuse to do as you're told, even if you decide to stomp through the six hundred pages one by one with a notebook at your side and a steely determination to organize the whole wooly thing into a carefully growing and clearly marked constellation of ideas, the erratic paragraphs will inevitably divert you because over and over and over again Deleuze sets up a cluster of questions, circles for a while in the general vicinity of some possible responses, then gets disoriented and stumbles off in another direction. While it should be noted that as a reader trying to make sense of the book's curving development you're not left empty-handed by these vertiginous episodes, it's nonetheless extremely difficult to get a grip on what you have, and even more difficult to reach for the idea that follows naturally or smoothly from what you've just understood. To take a single, dizzying instance, at one point in *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze presents the following crucial philosophical uncertainty, an uncertainty that troubles all his studies about individuality, about what it means to be a particular, distinguishable someone: "Is it not necessary," Deleuze asked, "to retain a minimum of strata, a minimum of forms and functions, a minimal subject from which to extract materials, affects, and assemblages?"[5] What this means in regular language is: "If you and I are completely free to understand ourselves by assembling any definition we can manage to put together, isn't there still some essential me (maybe something physical, maybe the act of defining) that subsists in all the possibilities?" Deleuze, it should be acknowledged, has an answer to this, but if you don't have an entire day in front of you then you're not going to figure it out from what he writes immediately after posing his ques-

tion. While he gives you some leads in those sentences, he far more industriously inspires curious thoughts about classical Western music and "Eastern music" and time and Proust and the characters in Proust's novels. Then those various ideas go in their own directions and if you're a sympathetic reader you'll follow as many of them ("lines of flight") as you can since the directions are legitimately intriguing. Still, defenders of Deleuze like myself must, if we're honest, admit that very frequently the directions are also a collection of distractions in the sense that they finally cut away from whatever initiated the line of reading. And while it's true that new questions and possible answers regularly get presented through the severing process, those generally prove no more durable. Eventually, that means, the largest question for readers of *A Thousand Plateaus*, the question about where they are at any particular moment in the book—the question about where reading's been and where it's going—that will evaporate in the heat of the author's overcharged need for the immediate gratification of writing down everything that occurs to him.

The evaporation (like immediate gratification) isn't necessarily bad or discrediting. Further, and as I've related, for Deleuze it's not at all discrediting; he would even rush to insist this about the disappearance of *A Thousand Plateaus* as a book: "That's the point." Without hesitating and without apology he'd explain that he's *trying* to loose a torrent of conceptual understandings and not get trapped in a single, stagnant idea. That's respectable. But the insistence and the explanation don't change the fact that a peculiar exchange has been made. Because Deleuze was so desperate to follow his stream of consciousness toward every truth he could possibly reach, because he wanted to get hold of them all and get every single one down and into print and out into the world, he spoiled any chance he may have had to carefully produce a single and deeply impacting argument. Again, I know that this is the interpretive reality Deleuze was trying to catalyze, and I concede that word games can be played. *The impacting argument is that there is no single, developed argument, only nomadic intellectual wanderings.* Still, if the linguistic acrobatics can be left out, what comes forward is this: where Plato once expressed philosophy's desire as the intense love of truth, it has now come to be lived as an infatuation. Any truths we can touch, grab them no matter what the cost, even if the cost is the book containing them.[6]

More than anything else, more than any concept of what it means to be me or any understanding of music or any notion of Proust and the

characters in his novels or any of the other subjects *A Thousand Plateaus* tumbles into contact with, what the book primarily concerns is the uncontrolled yearning its disorganization reveals. Like Nietzsche's poetry, *A Thousand Plateaus* has less to do with *what* is written than with *how*. It's not what truths, but how they're pursued.

The madly impatient pursuit doesn't involve irrationality or it's opposite; it comes before either one as desire following any route at all—rational, irrational, questions with answers, questions without answers, answers without questions, aphorisms, poetry, plateaus, music, Proust—as long as the route goes straight to what's wanted.

The wanting is the principal connection between Nietzsche and Deleuze. More, it's the core element of French Nietzscheanism. French Nietzscheanism is not a sober, astute theoretical state and further it's not something negative, not something that should be defined with words like distrust or suspicion. Instead, and positively, it's a human need that Nietzsche felt and Deleuze felt and that both communicated as writers, as how they wrote. If that's right, then it can surely be added that French Nietzscheanism's eruption in the history of philosophy is not at all surprising. After all those centuries of trying for Truth and not getting any, what's surprising is that it took so long for philosophy to sink into the desperation that characterizes our time, the intense, impatient clutching for any truth whatever.

How does French Nietzscheanism relate to the preceding tradition? There are two conventional answers and then a third which guides this chapter. The two conventional answers can be traced through Foucault, through a particular question about his work that intersects with and anticipates the larger discussion about our time in intellectual history and what came before. The intersection is an interview. Foucault is asked: "So, there is a certain discontinuity in your theoretical trajectory. Incidentally, what do you think today about this concept of discontinuity?" Here's Foucault's (affectedly) exasperated answer: "This business about discontinuity has always rather bewildered me. In the new addition of the *Petit Larousse* it says: 'Foucault: a philosopher who founds his theory of history on discontinuity.' That leaves me flabbergasted."[7] Foucault as flabbergasted, his readers know, is the result of the dictionary's implied claim that his work is about blocks of historical time so entirely disconnected from those around it that people who live after a certain span of

history won't be able to grasp how the span's occupants made sense of what they were doing. In response to this characterization, Foucault complains that it's a distorted simplification; even though, he maintains, specific social attitudes, assumptions and behaviors may be located as beginning and ending at certain historical moments, there's never a complete break where *everything* is disrupted. Discontinuity, in other words, is not the foundation of Foucault's historical studies, only part of what's studied.

Translating this conflict about the meaning of Foucault into one about him as a representative of French Nietzscheanism or, widening the discussion, into one about him as a representative of Postmodernism, the corresponding question is whether our period of thought is entirely discontinuous with the preceding philosophic tradition. If the answer is yes—if Foucault represents discontinuity in the history of philosophy—then we contemporaries have nothing to learn from theorizing as it was done before Nietzsche. Against this perception there's the other Foucault, the one representing the idea that while, say, the exchange of objective truth for French Nietzschean perspectives is, when abstracted from everything else, arguably a disjointed moment in philosophy, there are also strong continuities flowing through the upheaval. There is, for instance, Kant's proposal that the knowledge we can attain is dictated by the categories of understanding we use to make all understanding possible. For philosophy after Nietzsche this fundamentally Modern proposal remains important, we just no longer believe that categories for thought are universal and consistent as Kant insisted; instead, they're situational and fluctuating. And no matter how great those fluctuations are, they don't affect the lingering view that we still *have* experience in the Kantian way, as filtered through specific gateways of understanding. So, following this reasoning Postmodern philosophy doesn't break away from its Modern predecessor, it turns away; it keeps something of the past (the notion of categories for thought), discards something (categories as universal), and bends what remains into contemporary shape (categories as multiplying and malleable in passing experience).

What I just wrote is, I believe, a rudimentary but fair recapitulation of the basic, contemporary debate about Postmodernism's relation to Modernism, it's a debate that, at the extremes, naturally produces two titles for books about the last century's development of philosophy; one is *The Postmodern Break*, the other *The Postmodern Turn* (this is, in fact, a

published book's title). Next, I will add and advocate a third title moving along a distinct historical vector, *The Postmodern Intensification*. Along this line the shift from Modernism to the Post version is neither a discontinuity nor a deviation, it's acceleration in the same direction. What Postmodernism did, the argument is, was *heighten* the (Ancient to) Modern faith that philosophy is about truth. More, the heightening was so agitated in Nietzsche and his closest readers that belief in any final, objective and enveloping understanding broke under the pressure of devotion. The belief *had to* break, it *had to* fragment because within the regime Nietzsche inaugurated one scene of worship couldn't be enough to accommodate all the dedication. Concretely, this insufficiency partially explains why Nietzsche never settled on a single philosophic rhetoric: his rampant desire drove him to write in as many ways—developed arguments, quick aphorisms, poetry—as there were possible truths to be written. The insufficiency also partially accounts for Nietzsche regularly returning to his published books and attaching more sections and chapters: because his philosophy wasn't so much about the best truth he could produce but his stridently impatient need for always more, he needed to keep adding pages. Similarly for Deleuze's *A Thousand Plateaus*. There, the desire for truth as intensified, as aggravated into manic impatience, partially explains why the book both feels and is interminable: Deleuze couldn't write enough words to satisfy his yearning for concepts and interpretations. In this way, it's even right to maintain that *A Thousand Plateaus* goes further than Nietzsche. Where Nietzsche multiplied rhetorics and pages Deleuze multiplied the number of pages he wrote *within* the pages he wrote. By turning readers loose to read his paragraphs in any order he converted *A Thousand Plateaus* from a long book to a long book with nearly infinite variations. He also converted the book into an expression of Postmodernism as the boundlessly anxious desire for constantly more interpretations; he converted it into an expression of desire that cannot be contained within a single rhetoric or within a single, ordered collection of pages or within a single truth.

Another articulation. The movement to contemporary philosophy wasn't an *attack* on Modernity. Granted, it sometimes seems that suspicion and attacks are what today's theory is about. Perceiving that, one commentator identifies French Nietzscheans as those tirelessly insisting that "every utterance must be ruthlessly deconstructed."[8] He's right, clearly, insofar as recent philosophy books often do read like instruction

manuals for police interrogations driven by the presumption of guilt: *whose* truth are we discussing, *how* was it made, where will it work and when might it fail. When *will* it fail. *I will make it fail and find others*. Still, all this can be read positively, it can be read as symptoms of an inquisitional desire for more truths than the ones possessed. Because, the reasoning goes, truth is so revered there must be more of them and philosophy, consequently, must drive forward into excessive production. And since contemporary philosophy is charged positively with excessive production, it has nothing to do with negatively hating the Modern desire for sweeping objectivity; better to write that the Modern wanting was joined and then pushed hard and straight ahead. Referring this back to the brief discussion of Kant begun two paragraphs back, it's not that Nietzscheanism was built *against* him and everything he represents, it was erected *for* him and to allow his thinking even more of what it wanted; Kantian categories for understanding experience were never denied, they were furthered and amplified to allow more understandings. In the midst of the amplifying, it's clear, basic ideas associated with Kant suffered significant distortions: categories for understanding that were fixed, wavered; categories that were limited in number multiplied. But that doesn't mean the distorting was the central component of a violently aggressive endeavor. It was only an effect, an accidental byproduct of a fundamentally cooperative project augmenting the Kantian desire for knowledge. The conclusion is that Postmodernism is Kant—and all Modernity—intensified. Intensified past the critical point for any ultimate truth.

A possessive fear subsists in the desire identified as the first basic element of French Nietzscheanism. The fear is there too because impatient wanting pursues not only what it doesn't have but clings tenaciously to what it's got. In the case of written truths, the inability to delete those that stray from the aim of the rest of the manuscript—the refusal to be accurate—betrays not only too much desire for the sentences but also a fear of losing them, probably forever. There's a worry reflected by the inability to delete that if the sentences don't get incorporated, now, before going on, they'll be left aside for inclusion in the next book; then that project will get postponed for a semester dedicated to teaching and reading books written by others; then the ideas perking out of those engagements will spark a new line of interest and the idea for another piece of writing with a subject and direction previously unforeseeable and as

that's carried out more tantalizing (for their author, at least) sentences will be shunted aside, until, at last, when there's finally time to go back to the words that have been reserved for later use it's impossible to remember what seemed so exciting and provocative in them. That's worrisome. It's a worrisome prospect for all of us who already know that we're not Nietzsche and that generations of graduate students won't be laboring over our notebooks making sure that everything of any value at all gets fleshed out and included in the living memory of our uncompleted work. The worry is also an imperative, an imperative driven by the fear of sentences being lost forever: what I'm writing at this moment, I'll force it in.

This fear rising while writing goes along is completely removed from that emotion as it's most commonly attached—especially by novelists and poets—to the composition of sentences and paragraphs; it's completely removed from the fear of *beginning* to write. Juan Rulfo, for example, related that "the blank page anguishes me, it's something fearful."[9] To this, other citations about dramatic literary problems including writer's block and so on could be added but staying with the case of Rulfo, a blank page, I suppose, inspired fear in him because it represented unlimited literary potential and then the end of those vast possibilities with the first word's inscription. If that's right, then it would certainly be rash to deny that Rulfo sensed this particular anxiety and, further, his parsimonious literary output strongly evidences the claim that he did, in fact, experience the anxiety. Still, I don't believe his experience is representative or ordinary. It's much more common, it seems to me, to *not* confront the fear of a blank page. Stronger, it's normal to not even have blank pages that could cause fear. I doubt that there are more than a handful of people in the world who've written anything at all in their lives who have, suddenly, woken up one morning to face an empty piece of paper. Whether the writer is a poet or a novelist or a decidedly less tormented theoretician, whether the author is Scott Fitzgerald or Nietzsche or Deleuze or just someone wandering around a typical philosophy department, all of us have notebooks or their equivalent weighed down with ideas we'd like to pursue if we could find the time. Given that, it immediately becomes very difficult to see how many people can still be afraid of blank pages in any sense except the affected one since blank pages are very easy to fill with ideas continuing from those already filled. What's not so easy, however, is to *make* a blank page. The real difficulty and what really does cause serious hesitation for most of us is picking up a note-

book filled with old thoughts on a day of housecleaning and depositing it in the garbage bag.

If that's the difficulty, then one way into the core of contemporary theory under the guidance of fear's relation to writing follows these questions: Can an author irrecoverably throw away sentences and paragraphs because they don't fit into what's being written? Can an author cut and discard even exceedingly sharp and extremely intriguing ideas to preserve the accuracy of the book being composed? As the specific author I have in mind for these questions is Nietzsche, I've already committed myself to the answers. A more knowledgeable expert, however, disagrees, and disagrees through the combination of two unambiguous claims. The first concerns Nietzsche's frenetic mind. "Few writers in any age," Walter Kaufmann wrote, "were so full of ideas."[10] To this, it seems reasonable to add that if Nietzsche really was more full of ideas than almost all the writers of all the ages, then his quotidian output almost certainly drowned any hope of harmonious containment; the spasmodic flurry of ideas he constantly generated must have precluded anything but the most awkward and disparate writings. But, Kaufmann insists, those kinds of writings aren't what Nietzsche left us. Instead, Nietzsche signed his name to tightly organized, smooth, book-length arguments. Over and over again in the prefaces to his skillful translations Kaufmann asserts that, despite appearances, Nietzsche's pages are—for the most part—grindingly rigorous; they move from one point to the next along narrow paths that quiver with brilliance while rarely veering away from their final destination. About *The Gay Science*, for instance, Kaufmann explained that "what at first may seem to be a haphazard sequence of aphorisms turns out to be a carefully crafted composition in which almost every section means much more in context than will ever be noted by readers who assume, in flat defiance of Nietzsche's own repeated pleas to the contrary, that each section is a self-sufficient aphorism."[11] And, about *Beyond Good and Evil* Kaufmann warned readers that it "is not a collection of aphorisms for browsing. Each of the nine major parts, with the possible exception of part four, is meant to be read straight through. Each pursues one complex of problems, and what is said in one section is frequently qualified decisively in the next, or a few pages later."[12] So, Kaufmann's two assertions are that Nietzsche's fertile mind produced more ideas every day than could be included in any coherent book and his books *are* tightly organized, "carefully crafted," accurate arguments. Thus, for Kaufmann,

Nietzsche must have been a superman in at least one way: he practiced inhuman ruthlessness. With scattered exceptions (part four of *Beyond Good and Evil*), Nietzsche mercilessly slashed what could not be joined with the previous and following steps through the book he happened to be writing at the moment.

Against this account of Nietzsche's tyrannically restrained composing and the consequent pleas for readers to go through his books page by page with the prejudice that nearly everything was tailored to fit where it does, there is at least one clear, factual argument. It's the velocity at which Nietzsche produced books: from 1878 to 1888, at least one was printed each year. It seems hard to imagine that any mind could plan and execute so many well-organized monographs so rapidly. I admit, of course, that Nietzsche's intellectual caliber was tremendous, but a carefully constructed book of inventive philosophy every year pushes mortal limits.

As for whether Nietzsche actually touched those limits, there are two obvious places we can go to check, though neither will provide much reliable information. The first is the author. Unfortunately, as most of Nietzsche's reflections on his own work are bound into *Ecce Homo*, and as the book's translator felt it necessary to dedicate a considerable portion of his own introduction to the book to fending off the charge that *Ecce Homo* could only have been written by a madman, this probably isn't the route to follow. The other obvious way to consider the coherency of Nietzsche's writings flatly ignores their author by going, as the New Critics proposed, straight and exclusively to the philosophical pages. It's doubtful, though, that they will yield any surer determinations; it's doubtful that scrupulous textual studies of Nietzsche will ever provide solid findings about his writing's argumentative unity because his prose is so richly ambiguous that most fairly competent philosophers, literary theorists and rhetoricians could elaborately demonstrate that *any* two aphorisms or paragraphs—no matter how seemingly irreconcilable and no matter how divergent their sources—do, in fact, fit together.

So, since Nietzsche probably can't be confidently relied upon to tell us about his own books, and since close textual studies on the subject of his purportedly strict coherence won't lead to clear results, a less direct way into the question set around Nietzsche and Kaufmann must be sought. For clarity, the question repeated at its full extension: was Kaufmann right or not, are Nietzsche's books carefully crafted compositions

that demanded pitiless editing, or are they splintering insights refusing any demand except the articulation and inclusion of always more truths as fast as possible? The answer I'm proposing rises from a human condition, from the desire and fear animating Nietzsche's philosophy (and subsequently Nietzschean philosophy). The desire is the desperate and impatient need for understandings pounding at the heart of Nietzsche wanting every truth, even harsh, ugly truths. Then, palpating inside that desire there must also be a coordinated fear. There must be since to the extent that there's an impatient desire for more there's also a fear of losing what's possessed. Next, and if this wanting along with its consequent fear is the basic Nietzschean condition—if it's the fundamental context of his writing—then we don't even need to look at his books to see how they are. We already know; they must be desperate, they have to be afraid. More, as desperate they have to be about particular and limited truths because after trying for Truth and not winning it no option remained but going for decidedly less attractive truths. Even harsh, ugly ones were good enough. And, as afraid, Nietzsche's books must edge, at least occasionally, toward chaos. They must be documental testimonials to the stubborn inability to cut ideas no matter how incongruent or clamorous when set against the rest of the book that holds them because the attained understandings of the fearful simply cannot be weighed and evaluated for inclusion or exclusion in any particular writing. If they're truths at all they must be preserved immediately, no matter how inaccurate, no matter how awkward and irreconcilable with the others.

When Kaufmann wrote that Nietzsche's books were "carefully crafted compositions" I believe he was failing to account for the fear intrinsic to the Nietzschean production of truths. What Kaufmann overlooked was the human undercurrent impelling the writing Nietzsche did, the undercurrent of anxiety impelling *all* writing expressing the desire for truth to the desperately impatient extreme.

Another way of writing this: Kaufmann didn't have the opportunity to take into account what Nietzschean philosophy has become. He didn't see Nietzsche's fear finally reaching the point of causing a book that, as Deleuze proposed, could be read starting anywhere and with any paragraph related to any other. This kind of book—which is a virtually infinite affront to all carefully crafted compositions—effectively brings the Nietzschean condition to its fullest development, the fear even is *A Thousand Plateaus* for this reason. What Deleuze did by counseling readers to

go through his pages in any order was structure *A Thousand Plateaus* around the priority of preserving every truth the pages can *possibly* hold. Every one that every combination of words, sentences and paragraphs may state or suggest is in *A Thousand Plateaus*, and in it as a function of the way Deleuze conceived the book and conceived reading the book. Deleuze made the decision, his conceptions mean, to exchange the coherent presentation of certain preestablished ideas for the comforting certainty that all the knowledge he'd produced (consciously or not) was protected within one or another of the myriad ways *A Thousand Plateaus* may be put together. The book is organized and controlled, therefore, not by the author's intention to present specific truths but by his fear of losing them.

Admittedly, the fear of losing truths is frequently difficult to discern in Nietzsche and his descendents. Starting with Nietzsche, in him it's hidden beneath seductive invitations to Dionysian entertainments and excited sightings of marauding blonde beasts and audacious proclamations about the great health resulting from philosophizing with an energetic hammer. "We know," Nietzsche wrote from the midst of his revelry, "a new happiness,"[13] and he exuberantly announced "what is understood by so few today, joy!"[14] Nothing about or even near fear in either of these exaltations. Following Nietzsche's lead, but with the volume turned down (slightly), Deleuze found his own celebratory way into philosophy. His love of concepts became "men's only hope" and "the only way of casting off our shame or responding to what is intolerable" and the "revolution."[15] When he wanted to heighten the insurgent excitement, Deleuze switched to the imperative: "Run lines, never plot a point! Speed turns the point into a line! Be quick, even when standing still! Line of chance, line of hips, line of flight."[16] The list of commands goes on, but what I've quoted strongly implies that Deleuze's writing communicates jubilant enthusiasm more than fear. Continuing on through French Nietzscheanism, the thought of a hip's lines that excited Deleuze lit up Roland Barthes as well, they electrified his literary body as his declaration that "the pleasure of the text is like that untenable, impossible, purely novelistic instant so relished by Sade's libertine when he manages to be hanged and then to cut the rope at the very moment of his bliss."[17] Whatever else it may be, this bliss, along with the imperative of excited speed in Deleuze and the exuberant joy that invigorated Nietzsche, all these gay proclamations form loud arguments against my insistence that

their authors' intellectual state is tinged with depressing fear. On the other hand, it sometimes seems as though they're protesting too much. Regardless, my argument is limited to the following direct claim: in palpable, human terms it's impossible to want something as nervously as French Nietzscheans do without subsequently being stricken by anxiety over the preservation of what's already possessed.

That may be wrong. If it's not, though, then echoing through all of Nietzsche's bombastic proclamations and Deleuze's incitations and Barthes's literal and figurative orgasms is a definition of the French Nietzschean condition as the impetuous reaching for always more interpretations coupled with a dread of losing those that have been reached. The definition is two passions driving the pious Nietzsche and his readers to the edge of the philosophy that wants truths and fears losing them.

The next step: twist these human elements of Nietzscheanism into decadence. As this chapter is guided by the proposal that basic elements of French Nietzscheanism carry philosophy into decadence, the task here is to show how the desire and fear animating Nietzsche and his French readers repeat under that title. They repeat under decadence with a single modification: the *objects* of the desire and fear are transformed.

Starting with the desire, for decadents it's an unconfined willingness to sacrifice for even the smallest shred of what's wanted. Since it's philosophic thinking that's wanted, truths also need to play a role but they're only foils, they exist solely as incitations to more thought. When we talk about truths, therefore, we only talk about them in terms of what they can do for the desire to philosophize. Beginning to elaborate, I'll return to the straightforward examples of Nietzsche's truths about punishment I've referred to, punishment as revenge and as the making of a memory. The question to set before these two perspectives is: which is better for the decadent? The answer's not difficult to ascertain. As is (possibly too) evident, the grasping of punishment in the form of revenge does little to stimulate thought; a grade-school knucklehead effortlessly comprehends this simple aspect of experience when his candy bar gets stolen by a smaller kid and, as compensation, he delights in the administration of a bloody nose. Later on the young pugilist will probably spend a few hours mischievously hoping that someone will be thoughtless enough to steal his candy again tomorrow. If it does get stolen, then this particular truth about punishment will continue knocking forward without any preten-

sion to stimulating reflection about what's happening or what should be happening or why. By contrast, Nietzsche found it necessary to devote multiple and complicated pages to working through the idea of punishment as instrumental in the creation of memory. Just to indicate a few of the central lines for investigation, Nietzsche began by asserting that the extensively developed ability to remember is not found in us as a natural capacity, instead, punishment carves the ability to remember within us. After that, there are all the complicated steps necessary for concretizing the ability through specific memories that lead to someone's regularly and predictably saying: I remember—I can't forget—that I shouldn't steal. Then, there is an almost limitless number of studies to be performed on questions about punishment and memory as they circulate through legitimation: exactly why is it that stealing sometimes requires punishment (the theft of a book as, say, its unlicensed reproduction) and other times it doesn't (the theft of an idea from a book, the theft of a literary plot or theoretical argument)? And who makes these decisions, who decides how much, for example, of a philosophy book may be repeated verbatim in another without acknowledgments and permissions? On the basis of what are the decisions made? Which circumstances are sufficient to overturn a decision? Should a decision be overturnable? Other questions could be added, but decadents don't need to see any more than those already listed to make their choice.

Their choice expresses Nietzschean desire; it's the same desire, only reoriented. Further, as it's not just the desire but also the desire's impatient intensity that's shared, it can be added that the choosing occurs in the midst of an overbearing obliviousness to what either of the two truths about punishment may be able to do *besides* energize theoretical labors. That is, even though the exploration of punishment's relation with memory may yield useful knowledge in the practical world of moral debates and legal regulations, and even though that knowledge could be widely applied with felicitous results, decadents remain blind to those benefits. The blindness, it must be admitted, is difficult to witness. It is since the questions I listed in the vicinity of punishment and memory certainly do seem to participate in the construction, evaluation, and potentially the improvement of rules that directly govern our discipline's publications and then expand to include sweeping legal questions about intellectual property as it relates to an endless list of common subjects. What needs to be kept in mind, though, is that while decadent work may

well be *appropriated* for extraphilosophical purposes, decadents can't do the appropriating since they myopically ignore everything but truths for thought.

To underline that, the example of punishment's meanings can be developed a little further and in this direction: the decadent yearning for thought-inspiring truths actively cancels another understanding that may be extremely beneficial for the larger community to which a philosopher happens to belong. Specifically, the understanding of punishment as revenge that decadents turn away from may be one of those truths, one like 2+2=4, that's inertly dull and nearly brain-dead but nonetheless highly pragmatic, highly valuable in certain situations for people who aren't philosophers. Take the situation of institutionalized incarceration. If we collectively determine that civilized jails should be organized as sites of correction and not erected as monuments to retribution, then Nietzsche's brief discussion of punishment as revenge can function as this shrill and recommendable warning: we should be on constant guard to maintain the process of refining a criminal's memory as only that because the violently punitive actions associated with making and modifying memories can slide into cruel revenge very, very easily under cover of the demonstrably erratic word "punishment." With that established, it's evident that the understanding of punishment as a name for revenge will count as weighty and valuable in traditional terms; it will be a fragment of knowledge worth holding onto since it has a measurable and positive use as something to be identified and subsequently avoided in penitentiaries. But, decadent philosophy's narrow perception of experience comes forward here because that weight and worth clearly registered by nearly everyone else simply can't be measured on decadent scales. Pushing a little further, if, for the sake of argument, I'm allowed to simply conclude that the idea of punishment as revenge is in fact *as* socially useful and therefore as generally desirable as the one about punishment connected with the constructing of a memory, I can nonetheless confidently insist that decadents will still devote all their attention to investigating the notion of punishment connected to remembering.

The reason for the confidence, I'm arguing, is that the decadent devotion to thought corresponds with Nietzsche and his most avid readers devoting all their attention to producing and recording truths while fostering an unmistakable indifference to notable practical effects of their efforts. Nietzsche's work went on without concern—obtrusively without

concern—for the adjectives corresponding to his interpretations: "harsh, ugly, repellent, immoral." And, less dramatically, Deleuze's work went on without concern for the fact that his disparate understandings were destroying his book *A Thousand Plateaus* as a book. Moving this insensitivity over to the other side of philosophy, decadents remain indifferent to an understanding about punishment that may serve a positive social and communal purpose because their desire for thinking crosses through and *absorbs* the French Nietzschean desire for truth, but without the truth. It takes all the intensity and all the impatience and orients it toward philosophic thought.

Staying with decadence, its version of philosophic wanting along with the indifference it entails raises a question. Is the desire for thinking what it seems to be, is it callous, does it edge toward the morally reprehensible? No, the callousness is nothing more than an appearance. Further, it's only an appearance for a crucial reason, for the same reason that the understanding of contemporary Nietzscheanism as the suspicion of metaphysics is only an appearance: in both cases, there's something irrepressibly human operating underneath and before any neat pronouncements. Underneath the sober declaration of the suspicion of metaphysics there beat a rapid desire for as many truths as possible. Similarly, underneath the manifestation of decadence as callousness there's the same rapid desire but driven toward philosophical work. To extend the parallel, it's not that Nietzscheans decided to be suspicious and therefore pursued perspective truths, it's the other way. Similarly, it's not that decadents decide to be callous and therefore pursue thinking at all costs, it's only because they're *already* overwhelmingly engaged that the vision of their projects as irresponsible appears. The distinction is significant because it allows the following assertion. Decadent philosophers cannot register objections to their projects based on abandonment of certain truths that may serve broad public concerns because decadence is not an arid theory. If it were that, if the reversal between thinking and truth was just another arrangement of words to be discussed in conferences and academic journals, then decadence would verge on the contemptible because theoretical positions can easily be contorted and reformulated in accordance with pressing social problems and demands. Theories, in other words (and because they're just words), can easily be switched one for another and since that's the case decadents would have no excuse for not exchanging their kind of philosophizing for one better suited to the community in

which they live *if* what drove their activities was itself a theory. It's not, though. Desire impels decadence, the same desire that impelled Nietzsche and his most zealous (and therefore best) readers. More, the carnal desire is raised to the same degree, the extreme degree where no choices are possible except the one that answers the wanting now and with everything possible. Just as Nietzsche had no choice but to cram every truth about punishment he'd come up with into his *Genealogy* including those that were harsh, ugly and repellent, and just as Deleuze had no choice but to jam every concept he produced into *A Thousand Plateaus* including those that ruined *A Thousand Plateaus*, so too decadents *have no choice*. They must follow those truths that drive their work forward, they can't go in any other direction, they even can't see any other possible direction because it's the tangible desire that delineates all their possibilities.

William Burroughs's abnormal novel *Naked Lunch* takes me off course rhetorically but not thematically for a moment. Burroughs wrote about what he called the "total need" of physical addiction and characterized addicts as "people who cannot act other than they do." To emphasize their situation, he formulated a disconcerting comparison. Addicts are unable to act differently just as "a rabid dog cannot choose but bite." For that reason Burroughs affirmed, "assuming a self-righteous position about the behavior of addicts is nothing to the purpose."[18] Questions, he meant, posed on some dispassionate level about how an addict should behave simply can't make sense because what does and doesn't make sense for the addicted is entirely determined by and through and as an extension of the body's unconquerable wanting. Transposing this condition into French Nietzscheanism, Deleuze (nearly predictably) explicitly recognized his participation in Burroughs's logic of total need when he related that he was "considering a very simple problem, like Burroughs with drugs: can you harness the power of drugs without turning into a dazed zombie?" The response, it should be clear, is yes. The power can be harnessed by getting to the addict's desire without chemicals and with the academically rabid need for truths. In Deleuze's case, the addiction's principal symptom is called *A Thousand Plateaus*. In decadence, the symptom is obliviousness to—not rejection of—all preaching qualifications and all accusations of callousness and ultimately all choices except the one for the truth that gives the most thinking most immediately.

The last paragraph can be repeated in language and with examples more fitted to this book by rewriting it as a distinction between theory

ruling desire and desire giving rise to theories. The distinction arranges Richard Rorty on one side and advanced Nietzscheanism along with decadence on the other. Beginning with Rorty, it was because of a theoretical position he called pragmatism that he pursued the kinds of understandings he did; it was because he decided to help us trust each other and cooperate and be more decent and happy and the rest that he turned away from mightily abstract Platonic hopes and devoted himself to poetically describing things. The kinds of truths Rorty wanted, in other words, evolved from a theoretical decision he made. Obviously, Rorty isn't alone in subjecting his inclinations as a philosopher to that kind of prior determination; he is, however, completely removed from contemporary Nietzscheans and also from decadents because for them the process moves in the other direction. Nietzsche, his most intense advocates and decadents all start with their desire and then organize theories in terms of which ones serve their particular wantings. Specifically, for Nietzscheans the wanting is the most truths possible, now, and that leads to their switch from universal aspirations to subjective interpreting. For decadents, what's wanted is the most thinking, and that leads to the reversal of the relation between all philosophic thought and every kind of truth. This particular difference, however, between what Nietzscheans and decadents want is irrelevant here. What is relevant is that for both it's desire that governs theory while for Rorty it's the opposite. The space between them, that means, is measured by the solid determination about which comes first. Next, this determination can be moved into the region of philosophic responsibility I've been discussing, it can be converted into a subsequent determination about what the word responsibility means for philosophers. On one side, if philosophy is primarily a theoretical pursuit then philosophers are freed to calmly and rationally choose descriptions of experience that are socially beneficial or ones that aren't, and subsequently, because of that freedom, they can—they should—be held accountable for their choices in the sober terms that they're made. On the other side, if philosophy is only the expression of a certain and single overwhelming desire, then the results of philosophizing remain impervious to any criticisms except those derived from the wanting that gets everything going. Nietzscheans and decadents, it follows, can't be held accountable for any effects their work may have beyond the following. Nietzscheans, in accordance with their desire, have a responsibility to produce interpretations that really are true and nothing more; it doesn't

matter, therefore, whether they are judged by others as beautiful or ugly, moral or immoral and so on. Decadents, in accordance with their desire, have a responsibility to pursue truths that trigger more philosophizing and, as is the case for the Nietzscheans, it doesn't matter whether others perceive them as beautiful or ugly, moral or immoral. The result is that since Rorty understands his desire to do philosophy as controlled by theory, he theoretically has responsibilities which means responsibilities as determined soberly. On the other side, because Nietzscheans along with decadents have desires that control all theory, they don't have—they *can't* have—those responsibilities.

With this distinction in place, I can quickly return to a particular instance of it already discussed, the basic difference between Rorty and Deleuze. The difference is Rorty wants subjective descriptions of his surroundings that are better, that are more socially opportune than the ones we have while Deleuze only wants new concepts, more of them, faster. What can be added here is exactly *why* it is they break apart. They break because Rorty puts theories before his desire while Deleuze puts his desire before any theory. In fact, all philosophy breaks apart here. The major figures—Plato's Socrates and Nietzsche—go in Deleuze's direction (he goes in their direction), and the minor figures go one way or the other depending upon their ability to reflect honestly on their experiences. As for decadents, it's clear where they're going, and because they're going that way and because their version of the primary desire is for thinking instead of for any kind of truth, a blunt and disquieting reality cannot be avoided. Any objection, no matter how eminently reasonable, that's evoked by the decadent abandonment of socially beneficial understandings in favor of others that better drive thought evaporates. Objections of that kind hardly exist. If they're there at all, they're only appearances, they're only empty words.

First conclusion. Decadents will not concede that the interpretation of punishment as revenge is very true and helpful for understanding and living through quotidian reality. They won't deny it either. The question of concession or denial doesn't come up because they're too deep into the only thing they want.

Second conclusion. Bringing the decadent wanting back, again, to its origin, it *is* Nietzschean; far from being blurry speculation or an invented proposition, decadent desire is sharply defined and already exists. It's as real as Nietzsche's command to "sacrifice all desires to truth, every

truth." And it's as real as Deleuze composing a six-hundred page book that ultimately fails to be a book, that cannot be read as a book because he couldn't resist the manic need to pursue every one of his conceptual inspirations. Finally, and well past those sacrifices presently carrying philosophy into decadence there's a further extreme. Though too far removed from normal reality to be seriously considered, it nonetheless effectively closes this section by marking the far end of the desire French Nietzscheans share with decadents. Foucault reached the end and spelled it out when he (nervously) speculated that "there remains one prodigious idea which might be made to prevail over every other aspiration: the idea of humanity sacrificing itself. It seems indisputable that only the desire for truth, with its enormous prerogatives, could direct and sustain such a sacrifice." Wrong. Like all French Nietzschean philosophers willing to give up so much for what they want, decadents will give up everything for what they irresistibly want to do.

Decadent fear, like decadent desire, absorbs and redirects the contemporary Nietzschean one. Where the contemporary Nietzschean fear is provoked by the possibility of losing some shred of truth attained, in decadence the same fear rises from the prospect of losing intellectual momentum; the decadent fear is of philosophy slowing under the burden of truths that don't go anywhere.

One passage from French Nietzscheanism to its decadence along fear's way is marked by the revealingly personal introduction to *What Is Philosophy?* In that introduction—one of the last Deleuze would write and the last he did write with Félix Guattari—the authors related sensing a distinct anxiety emanating from the certainty that theirs was a "late in life"[19] book. By a late in life book, Deleuze and Guattari meant not only that their manuscript was literally written near their own ends and thus contained all the distress that implies, they also meant that the book concerns what older philosophers should try to avoid and try to do in the face of an end pressing harder each day. What's to be avoided are pages written under the auspices of the already thought, that is, pages of repetition without much difference, ones that—at best—excise the misadventures of previous publications and underline what was good and defendable in them. Undoubtedly a terminal book that falls for such culminating aspirations may be admirable from the perspective of philosophy that believes in truth as it may well state with clarity and certainty

what its authors had been struggling toward all along, but that positive quality cannot erase the reality that the pages, no matter how expert or elegant, are also dead as thinking's cessation, as the collapse of lives' work under the weight of what has already been accomplished. Against this collapse, Deleuze and Guattari erected *What Is Philosophy?* to defy dead-end thought. The defiance, they maintained, entailed pursuing an intellectual "gift of the third age"[20] (the last third of a lifetime) and the example they proposed as a guide was Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. That book is an exemplary third age gift, we are told, because within it "all the mind's faculties overcome their limits, the very limits that Kant had so carefully laid down in the works of his prime."[21] Immediately, delicate scholarly questions arise about the degree to which this conception of the last *Critique* as not so much an addition to the previous ones but an affront to them is, in fact, an accurate representation of Kant's work. For my purposes, however, those questions can be jumped over on the way to Deleuze and Guattari's main idea which is that the "overcoming" explains why Kant's "successors have still not caught up with"[22] his last *Critique*. Going a step further, it's impossible to catch up with it because that metaphor implies moving through the earlier ones on the way to the last and that's exactly what readers shouldn't try to do, according to Deleuze and Guattari, since the last *Critique* snapped away from what came before. Next, with this image of Kant and accompanying definition of a third age gift established, Deleuze and Guattari bend it into their own situation as a model response to the threat of accumulating years. The response is to write a book that can't be caught up with, that doesn't naturally follow from those already written. The response, in other words, to the anxiety of age isn't to write a book that helps readers refine what they had already thought about two authors but one that forces readers to give up some of what they had understood in order to make sense of what they're reading now.[23]

If this kind of book is written, then it will defy old age in two ways. The first and obvious way is by refusing to be an obtrusively last book since it refuses to only review and encapsulate those coming before. More importantly, a book written to not be caught up with will defy the anxiety and fear old age implies by achieving a philosophy *even more* youthful than what philosophers remember doing in their youth; it will revolt against the very idea of intellectual mortality. Explanation. There's a difference between fighting against intellectual mortality and fighting

against its idea. Writing directly against mortality means trying to produce a book that will be read forever: *The Symposium*, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, *The Genealogy of Morals*. Writing against the idea of mortality, on the other hand, writing as Deleuze and Guattari proposed in *What Is Philosophy?* means accepting this imperative: refuse Heidegger's geriatric notion of "being-toward-death" and all the burdening defeatism of finite time it entails and work until the last moment as though no last moment will come. While this imperative has a somewhat dramatic resonance, it's not difficult to put into practice. It's not at all difficult, in fact, as anyone who's tried to teach *Being and Time* to undergraduates has learned. Undergraduates even work against the idea of mortality naturally because, for them, Heidegger's pressing distress about "an end that can only be my own" and so on seems trivial and senseless, and it seems that way not at all because they're living what Heidegger would disparage as inauthentic lives; just the opposite, Heidegger naturally seems trivial to undergraduates because they're young and know it. Leaving undergraduates out but holding onto the time of obliviousness-to-death they (vividly) represent, that obliviousness, that ignorance of the fact of death is also resistance to the idea of mortality. And that's the idea Deleuze and Guattari sought to incarnate by writing *What Is Philosophy?* They sought a book that didn't need to refine and perfect any of the ideas they had already written into their previous books because, within this temporality, there will always be time for that later. For the present—within this particular kind of present that always has a later to come—any truths that are possessed and any books that have been written become nothing more than momentum on the way to writing yet more books going in their own directions because the future stretches out so far that it overwhelms the past as anything except acceleration toward what is to follow.

Bringing this down to earth somewhat, or, translating from existentialist language into an experience less ambiguous than Heidegger's anxiety about death, writing that's set against the idea of mortality resembles the writing surrounding first (and second and third) drafts of philosophy books. By that, I don't mean the semicarelessness characterizing those pages in terms of spelling and punctuation and the rest; I mean the semi-indifference to concerns about whether what's being formulated by a particular set of sentences goes with or against the conclusions drawn on earlier pages. The reason for this indifference is simply that without it no first draft could get beyond two or three thousand words: if the require-

ment for smooth alignment gets instituted from the very beginning, progress toward a finished book will be strangled by the constant need to rewrite its opening paragraphs. Authors, it follows, who want to go past a few pages find themselves constrained to tolerating aspects of the pages already tentatively done which exclude or counter the sentences being inscribed now. They need to believe that there'll be time to reconcile them later. On the other hand, though, it's equally true and equally obvious that no draft would even reach a few thousand words if the author tried to write every page from scratch, if the author tried to write without any reference at all to what had been written and therefore without the stimulus to subsequent ideas provided by those already recorded. The result is that for first drafts to happen—for them to go beyond five or ten pages and reach completion—authors need to get between the two extremes. What has been written needs to provoke sentences coming together as the current paragraph, but it can't be allowed to limit where that paragraph goes. In short, first drafts need to be written *as though* there will never be a final draft, as though there will never be a completely finished, entirely coherent single manuscript. Inserting a note here, this reality explains why Hemingway's often cited counsel that the only thing an author can do wrong on a first draft is not finish it is, in fact, a comment of considerable density. That's not so important for this book, though; what's important is that the first draft attitude of perpetual incompletion can be moved up a level to connect with Deleuze and Guattari's *What Is Philosophy?* Just as the paragraphs of a first draft being produced are stimulated by those coming before but not restricted by them, so too an entire manuscript can be conceived as standing in that relation to those already completed and published. Within this framework, the current manuscript is impelled by the previous books but not constrained to be harmonious with them, which is to say that the current manuscript is composed within the idea that a final version—a version reconciling the conflicts between the books already written and the one being completed now—will never come. And if the authorial attitude is that the final book will never come, then the very idea of mortality is overcome. It's overcome because the past's written books exist not as stages on the way to a culmination but only as catalysts for the writing being done now and extending into the indefinite future.

With the overcoming of the idea of mortality defined, the immediate question for Deleuze and Guattari writing their last book together is

whether *What Is Philosophy?* achieves it. The authors' answer is unequivocal: "We cannot claim such a status."[24] Which means they're so certain of their triumph that modesty forbids announcing it. One of the tasks, therefore, that these authors set for their students is to define the specific techniques used to convert their previous books into a last one that denied the idea of a last one. This would be a decadent investigation. But it's not the one to take up here, instead, I want to stay with the question about the "status" of *What Is Philosophy?* and ask what's beneath it, why does the question exist, why were Deleuze and Guattari worried about what kind of book they were writing? Fear. The fear that their effort would not be a piece of thinking but an anticipation of their literal and philosophical deaths in the form of an ode to truths already assembled. Very reasonably, this was Deleuze and Guattari's preoccupation in their last years.

Not so reasonably, this is also the decadent preoccupation, but right from the beginning. Decadence *starts* with the fear that a book or a life will come to be about accumulated knowledge sitting in the past instead of the philosophizing to come. For that reason, and from the very first philosophical word written, decadence denies that any book will be a last one by insisting that books aren't about anything more than going on and generating others.

When that insistence happens, a circuit of fear is completed. It started in French Nietzscheanism as the fear of losing truths: Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. Then it converted at the end of two lives together into the fear of losing thinking: the presentation of *What Is Philosophy?* as a book resisting philosophical mortality. Finally, in decadence, the fear returns to the beginning as what guides *all* philosophy books, as what lets any book *be* philosophy.

What kind of final drafts will decadents write? Along a single axis of this knotted question I've been discussing two possibilities. One is a monograph, a smooth flowing, almost seamless set of steps from one point to the next. The other is a collection of aphorisms, discordant pages of intellectual splicings and divergences shattering disparate ramifications. While every book certainly mixes both, the various mixtures can nonetheless be arranged along a continuum: Plato's dialogues, Hegel's *Phenomenology* (at least theoretically) and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* aimed toward monographic coherence; the later Nietzsche along with Deleuze tended

toward the other extreme as a condition of their intellectual infatuation. With respect to decadents, I won't be able to make a solid determination about which orientation should describe their manuscripts. That doesn't matter, though, because it's the question that will move this chapter forward. What connects French Nietzscheanism with decadence, what's in both and allows the passage from one to the other, is a route toward the decision to write either monographs or aphorisms.

The route is curved; the decision between monographs and aphorisms is reached by way of a related question Jean-Paul Sartre addressed in *Literature and Existentialism* when he asked whether writers should choose a rhetorical style and let their subject unwind from that or whether the process should go in the other direction. Sartre answered unambiguously. For him (and, according to Sartre in one of his more polemical moments, "for all good writers"[25]) the subject comes before the style; authors determine what they will write about and why, and following from that questions concerning how they will write get settled. French Nietzscheans and decadents agree with Sartre here. For all of them, the decision between monographic or disparate writing traces back to an earlier question concerning what they're writing about and why. For all of them, rhetorical style or form simply reflects substance or content.

With respect to French Nietzscheans, I've already illustrated the reflection. Their substance is the intense desire for truth, which is subsequently manifested as Nietzsche's disjointed ramblings and the chaotic *A Thousand Plateaus*. Moving over to decadence, what needs to be explored now is how their version of intense philosophic desire will lead to a preference for monographs or aphorisms.[26]

Starting with monographs, the advocating claim—the reason it should be selected as the decadent way of writing—is that this rhetoric stimulates thinking more than the other. The assertion is that the most aggressive philosophizing is derived from the intellectual force requisite to bending incompatible ideas into smooth continuity: forming a graceful development of words and the ideas connected to them does more for thought than merely juxtaposing ideas no matter how provocative or insightful each one may prove individually. Now, if this premise is accepted then decadents will disdain the slothful collecting of unrefined understandings and absolutely refuse to be satisfied by a sentence, by a paragraph, by a chapter that doesn't follow as an almost organically natural result of the previous. If a certain paragraph doesn't *grow* out of what

came before, the determination will be, then it will be written—thought through—again. And then rewritten and rewritten until it settles back comfortably into the preceding words. Stronger, every cluster of sentences must be reworked until it becomes the *same*. This doesn't mean a gathering of simple repetitions which would be the pure rhetorical form of "That's it for me," but a set of paragraphs moving forward so seamlessly that it almost seems like a mistake to separate them with indentations. A truly coherent philosophic monograph, one going even further than Hegel's *Phenomenology* or the *Tractatus*, would structurally resemble Thomas Bernhard's novel *Wittgenstein's Nephew* which is composed from only one (long) paragraph. Surely, that novel is an admirable model for decadent writers. It is because the entire book flows ahead so gently, so inherently as to render divisions of any major kind unnecessary, and that tribute to continuity must have required a nearly inhuman labor; writing the book must have presented an intellectual task on the rhetorical level almost as daunting—enthralling—as the Medieval theological assignment of proving God. The writing demanded a maddening respect for even the smallest detail and a secluded determination to obsessively edit until every literary edge and transition faded into imperceptibility. Every word must have been sounded out to prevent clumsy rhymes and inexpert alliterations. Innumerable sentences must have been cut down while others were lengthened to create the literary rhythm that wards off monotony and readers' fatigue. Metaphors must have been aligned and returned to with regularity. Along with all that, the thoughts each sentence carried must have been tuned to resonate with those around them until the entire narrative progress reached an orchestrated imperceptibility.

Marcel Proust, a constant flatterer of nearly endless paragraphs, provided the necessary optimism and hope for this kind of writing when he asserted this about poets, "The tyranny of rhyme forces them into the discovery of their finest lines."[27] By "the tyranny of rhyme" (which, in a different context Strauss called "logographic necessity"[28]) Proust meant to indicate the poet's frustration after finding *the* word for the climactic moment, the collection of letters holding the right explicit meaning along with all the connotations and suggestions the immaculately structured poem requires and then also finding that the word holds too many syllables. Or, it ends with the wrong one. Even so, Proust maintains, a still better word and consequently the "finest line" will come. With enough work it *must* come because the pressure of enforced continuity impels

poetic thinking to its purest and most productive severity. And when it reaches that severity, the finally and indisputably best word will be encountered for this reason: what's to be thought and written is *already* described in the lines coming before. It's not only in the content of those lines, what they signify, but also—for the poet—in their structure, in their already instantiated linguistic logic. The act of thinking as writing, therefore, is defined as an act of tyrannical filtering until the word that must be is. As for that filtering, I imagine we all know how it works. Though few of us are poets, we know simply as speakers what Proust is getting at because frequently we don't understand our own thoughts until we've said them in the right way. This is one of the reasons informal conversations among philosophers can be so valuable, they give us a chance to try one articulation and then another and then still another for our ideas until we manage to formulate the arrangement of words that capture—that let us legitimately think through—what we mean. Then, when we finally know what we mean, disappointment often follows: "Oh, so that's all I was trying to say." Occasionally, though, disappointment doesn't follow. Either way, the major problem and intermittent cause of despair for thinking as Proust envisions it is that we don't know the right articulation for an idea until the words have already been pronounced. But, that doesn't leave us in a nearly hopeless situation; the words will come with patience and with the appropriate reverence for the tyranny of rhyme because they're already inscribed in the sentences we use to introduce the idea, they're in all the articulations and statements preceding it.

Functioning underneath this conception of thinking as composing coherence with words there exists a theoretically broad definition which Borges articulated succinctly. "To think," he wrote, "is to forget a difference."[29] For Borges (at this moment), just producing ideas or truths—the French Nietzschean practice of inciting divergent inspirations to insane incompatibility—is not thinking at all, it's intellectual silliness. Real thought is the diligent work that comes after distinct inspirations; it's the labor of refining words and ideas until their incongruities are nearly imperceptible. Plato's Socrates agreed; in the *Republic*, as I've already noted, he taught that what "invites or excites intelligence" is the opportunity to eliminate contrasts like those dividing fingers, stubby or elongated, callused or delicate. It follows that for both Plato and Borges thinking means rigorously overlooking differences as tangible and real as the dis-

tinction separating those who work with their hands for a living from those who don't. Moving this back to the question of decadent writing, the most thoughtful (in the literal sense) composition of a book is not a jarringly structured collecting of bright and unpredictable insights but a painfully disciplined extracting of every sentence and idea that doesn't belong in the book, along with the addition of those that do belong but aren't there yet, until what remains can be read from one paragraph to the next and then the next almost without the realizing the movement. Extremely thoughtful writing is a narrative without interruption.[30]

But composing narratives *as* sharp interruptions also incites thought. Thinking requires the fomenting and aggravating of incompatibilities because it's from those that new ideas surge. And authentic thinking is the production of excessively new ideas, not the boring modification of what's been articulated in previous paragraphs. So, the most thoughtful books veer away from predictable developments and foreseeable conclusions; thoughtful writing constantly diverts authors from where they expected to go and knocks readers off the track of any developing narrative.

This kind of constantly interrupted writing is the literature that the French anti-Borges, Roland Barthes, had in mind when he wasn't killing thought with his "That's it for me" and was instead provoking it by describing the sort of novel that attracted him more than any other:

> The pleasure of reading Sade clearly proceeds from certain breaks: the noble and trivial, for example, come into contact; pornographic messages are embodied in sentences so pure they might be used as grammatical models. Two edges are created: an obedient, conformist, plagiarizing edge, and another edge, mobile, blank which is never anything but the site of its effect: the place where the death of language is glimpsed.[31]

What Barthes glorifies in this citation—with a characteristic French flourish about the death of language—is the cracking of readers' expectations. The crack isn't provided by nonsense, Sade's prose doesn't break down into the kind of near inscrutability that pops up in, say, *The Waste Land* (Twit twit twit/Jug jug jug jug). Instead, sentences pushing toward language's death are those that leave readers puzzled in the most profound way: they're perfectly clear, but their meaning seems entirely dis-

tinct from what would naturally fit there. Such troubling juxtapositions, as Barthes points out, constantly recur in Sade. In *The 120 Days of Sodom*, the strange group of aristocratic friends repeatedly discuss in various lucid and sophisticated ways their preferences for certain fruits or attire or philosophies and then in the next clause continue in the same mannerly tone and with the same elegant decorum but on the subject of sexually abusing children or the carnal delights of flesh-ripping pain. When that happens, for Barthes, language dies. It dies because what we ostensibly employ in the name of mutual understanding gets perverted into the frustration of orderly, comprehensible communication.

With the death of language located, Barthes goes on to recommend a reaction to it. The death doesn't call for healing (the extensive editing of Sade), and it doesn't call for mourning (the burial of all his books). In accordance with Barthes's penchant for the abruptly unpredictable, the death calls for "bliss."[32] More, the death opens the way to bliss by allowing readers to seek constructive challenges to understanding. This means something very French Nietzschean. The challenge emerging from disastrous juxtapositions—in Sade, the orthodox subjects of refined conversation set beside the aberrant ones—is not to fold one of the two into conformity with the other. Instead, what Barthes finds blissful is the possibility of interpreting Sade in a third way obtrusively distinct from either of the two options clearly proposed. What Barthes wants to avoid in Sade is, for example, comprehending the discussion of typical subjects (diet, dress and so on) as historical realism and, following that lead, going on to grasp the discussion of aberrant sexual preferences as exaggerated realism, as Sade trying to communicate aristocratic degeneration through inflation of their misdeeds. While this leveling offers a quick reconciliation of the uncommon conversations' apparently incompatible subjects (one is realism, the other exaggerated realism), and while it rapidly alleviates the tension quivering in Sade's sentences, Barthes rejects it because he doesn't want any alleviation. He wants aggravation; he reads to preserve dissonance. Within the example I've been following, a rudimentary but illustrative strategy of preservation works by casting both levels of discussion as their writer's insane daydreams. There's nothing about realism or its inflation in the conversations Sade depicts, only a fantastic story referring to Sade's addled mind and not at all to the real world of aristocratic tastes and licentiousness. What merits underlining in this (abbreviated) reading is that we understand the author's mind as addled pre-

cisely and only because the discordant subjects are portrayed in juxtaposition. It's not, in other words, that we think of *120 Days* as a depiction of insanity because the aristocratic friends talk about mundane subjects or because they talk about perverted ones; the book's author is insane because the aristocrats talk about the two in the same stream of well-regulated discussion. As a result, it's not something *in* either of the subjects of conversation that leads to the understanding, it's something outside of but inspired by both. With that stated, it must be acknowledged that this is an excessively flat and abridged discussion of the extremely engaging subject that is Barthes's intersection with Sade; still, it works sufficiently well here to set in relief how dissonant juxtapositions can stimulate thought. There's stimulation when conflicting movements in a paragraph aren't pacified and reconciled but maintained to produce a direction for reading distinct from the clashing ones.

A definable conception of what constitutes real thinking operates underneath Barthes's strategy for reading (and also his implicit recommendation for writing since the book I've cited from, *The Pleasure of the Text*, is a collection of unhinged aphorisms). Real thinking, according to Barthes, happens when incongruities are not eradicated but aggravated as a stimulant to unforeseeable understandings. In terms of truths, they don't develop from *forgetting* differences, they're produced *by* grating differences.

Thinking—the production of truths from differences—happens between the differences. I don't mean "between" as the average or a Solomonic mediation, instead as drawing energy from what cannot be made similar or the same. Deleuze states this rule of thinking from the middle very clearly: "Between things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away."[33] I used Barthes and Sade to construct a basic instance of this, but readers of French Nietzscheans will know that there's no shortage of more sophisticated and better examples. Starting with the founder, the *Genealogy* proposes and then circles around two fundamental kinds of morality. At one location physical meekness joins unqualified submission underneath the ideal of forgiveness (Christian morality). Across from that, and according to Nietzsche's unflattering psychological portrait of humanity, tingling lusts for abhorrent violence and the infliction of pain delineate your and my natural response to others. Next, with these two incompati-

ble moralities in place—with the rules of Christian forgiveness set against those of naturalistic violence—Nietzsche wedged his thinking and his writing into the space between and drew out a third idea sparked from the conflict: morality is a mask for imposition and power's expression. Switching from the philosophy of morality to philosophy and literature, Deleuze's *Proust and Signs* sets up the obvious distinction raised in *Remembrance of Things Past* between the author's bedridden present as a writer and his (somewhat) actively lived past. Then, Deleuze backed away from any reading of Proust as trying to reconcile the past with the present by proposing that *Remembrance* is not the story of an author trying to overcome the separation between the two times; instead, Proust created a third time distinct from the past of a life lived and the present of a life being written. This third time, which only exists in and as the novel, is filled with the material events constituting the author's past (his devotion to his mother, his summers in the south of France, his dinner parties), but the events receive sense and significance in the author's present because all the judgments about those past events (which are important, which superfluous, what each meant for the events that followed) get decided by the sentences being written. With that established, Deleuze went on to affirm that it's this awkward temporal juxtaposition between past and present that opens a place for, and further brings into existence the literary protagonist named Marcel. And if this is Marcel's origin, then the key to following his story through its time lies in understanding that he exists outside the author's past *and* present by participating in both simultaneously. What Marcel's existence displays, following Deleuze's reading, is that Proust's string of novels doesn't diminish the separation between two times, it preserves the separation to stimulate something else, a distinct identity who shares the author's name but not his years.

As is evident, when Deleuze read Proust he wasn't captivated by the idea that "the tyranny of rhyme forces the poet's finest lines"; more likely for Deleuze the tyranny of rhyme will force a line having nothing to do with those coming before and after. There is another part of Proust that certainly did captivate Deleuze, however: the love affairs. Specifically, the way they sprang from the engaging conversations Proust so expertly portrayed. What no reader can avoid noticing about the strands of erotic dialogue is how rarely they're pleasant and amiable, how infrequently they draw one to another through exchanged kindnesses and gradually revealed things in common. In Proust, kindness and things in common are

what brothers and sisters have. What lovers have, what Swann and Odette and most of the rest of the ardors share is an origin in verbal encounters tinged, even dominated, by lies, double meanings, slights, embarrassments. In fact, it's difficult to read Proust's novels without wondering whether an estimable lover can be won at all with friendly exchanges of agreeable sentences. It doesn't seem like it. It seems like it's spitefully agitated disparities, it's conversation rocked by undercurrents of threats and hostility that charge passion. For Deleuze, so too real writing and real thinking: they erupt from harsh incongruities; they are them and never alleviate them.

For that reason, Deleuze insisted that there was no "amicability" in his philosophy and, as a thinker, he wasn't looking for "friends."[34] He wasn't because his philosophic work advanced when divergences between people and their words were not smoothed over but irritated. An irritation:

> Every time someone puts an objection to me, I want to say: "Ok, Ok, let's go on to something else." Objections have never contributed anything. It's the same when I am asked a general question. The aim is not to answer questions, it's to get out, to get out of it. Many people think that it is only by going back over a question that it's possible to get out of it. "What is the position of philosophy? Is it dead? Are we going beyond it?" It's very trying. They won't stop returning to the question in order to get out of it.[35]

While it's unfortunate that certain people were so impudent as to actually object to Professor Deleuze and, worse, to ask him general questions, these critics and questioners do deserve some muttered thanks because they allow two further and distinct articulations of how thinking generates from hostility. The first circulates through Deleuze's penchant for responding to those voicing objections not with agreeable interaction (the offering of clear answers and explanations) but by insultingly ignoring them and "going on to something else." A generic example of this going on can be outlined within a general formulation of the question Deleuze is referring to in the above citation, which is immediately recognizable as one of the most bitter and factious animating philosophy at the time of this interview—1977—and still today: on one side are arrayed all those intellectual dinosaurs (or, members of the avant-garde to come) who still

believe in some kind of absolute or at least objective truth and, on the other side, those pursuing only ephemeral and subjective interpretations. Now, faced with this divide and the questions delineating it about who's right ("What's the position of philosophy? Is Platonism in every form dead? Are we going beyond it?"), a pacifying answer—one that fosters amicability in philosophy—would be any response bringing these debating philosophers together by using arguments both sides recognize as valid to decide between them. That's just the kind of response Deleuze refuses to give, however, because it requires "returning to the question"; it requires, in the simplest language, answering the question about which side is right by respectfully answering the question. In place of that, and because he wants no amicability and isn't looking for friends, Deleuze determines that it's best to simply turn his back on the entire debate. In this book, the most immediate and extended demonstration possible of a way to carry out that maneuver *is* this book: no longer are philosophic divisions understood in terms of truths—Truth versus truths—but in terms of any truth's ability to accelerate thought. The old question about what tells the most truth is abruptly replaced by one about what does the most for thinking. Put differently, and in terms of the hostility Deleuze advocates for philosophy, the conflict about the position of philosophy today is not to be resolved or alleviated, it's to be heated up (as it has been in our time) to the point where the only certainty is that no reconciliation will ever happen and *for that reason* philosophy is freed to move off in another direction, the decadent one. So, in this book read as a Deleuzean project writing happens from the midst of a factious question, but instead of seeking to pacify by responding in a way that's satisfactory for both sides it sharply and irritably cuts away, "Ok, Ok, let's go on to something else."

The second determination about philosophical thought allowed by Deleuze's constant need to go on to something else relates to attention spans. Deleuze has a short one. As constantly needing to go on he has little time for lingering, for working over ideas, he's even bored by protracted studies and refining labors and speedily rejects that work as clumsy ballast trapping him in what's already been considered. For the impatient Deleuze, this means, real thinking veers away from cautious and slow progress not only because he doesn't like working cooperatively with philosophic friends but also because he's possessed by a rambunctious eagerness to incessantly think in directions not yet explored. As

demonstrations of this eagerness my references to *A Thousand Plateaus* could be repeated here. Added to those pages there are also many of the ones Nietzsche wrote as he, at least sometimes, shared Deleuze's hyperactive definition of thought. "Does a matter," Nietzsche asked, "necessarily remain ununderstood and unfathomed merely because it is touched only in flight, glanced at, in a flash? There are truths that are singularly shy and ticklish and cannot be caught except suddenly—that must be surprised or left alone."[36] In rhetorical terms, Nietzsche's shy truths that must be surprised or left alone belong to his aphorisms, to his quick references and abbreviated asides; they belong to dashes of words leaping away from their context. The cost of that dashing, obviously, is writing's continuity; what's gained, however, is a specific, vibrating energy. As an example of that gain, in Section 13 of the *Genealogy*'s first essay there's a brief paragraph about how individual identities ("little changelings") are formed that's surely more arousing than a shelf full of admirably scrupulous and detailed commentaries on the subject. Now, this isn't the place to explore exactly why it is that less can be more, it's only important *that* it can be as may be witnessed by simply noticing that a hundred years later philosophers keep going back to those few sentences for a charge of inspiration that simply can't be found in the hundreds and hundreds of pages since written about them. Another example of the vigor sometimes packed into impetuous thinking can be found in *The Birth of Tragedy*. About a single, short paragraph in the seventh section Walter Kaufmann remarks that "it is doubtful whether anyone before Nietzsche had illuminated Hamlet [the character and the play] so extensively in so few words."[37] What should to be added to the note is that the force and excitement of Nietzsche's sentences derive at least partially from the fact that there are so few of them; the idea's brightness is powered to some extent by its presentation as a brief interruption in the flow of *The Birth of Tragedy*. And, again, the why question is less important than the fact that Kaufmann was engaged, he was captivated. Moving this captivation and excitement forward to Deleuze's incessant need to go on to something else, what drives the need is a Nietzschean conception of thought that's not so much about cautiously molding truths, reforming and defending them, but about flashing them and getting away. What drives Deleuze is a conviction that energetic thinking happens when philosophers are impatient, when they rapidly get bored and constantly want to grasp at something else.

Bringing all of this back to the question about the kinds of final drafts—monographs or aphorisms—that decadents will endeavor to write, the answer remains irrelevant. What can now be repeated, though, and with greater clarity is this: *how* the decision gets made is critical. It's made in the same way French Nietzscheans made the decision which was in accordance with what they wanted more than anything else. For decadents, consequently, the decision is made as a judgment about which kind of writing adopts to and facilitates legitimate thought. If thinking, real and accelerated thinking, implies the persistent force of bending differences into similarities, then the philosophic task is to compose meticulously edited, slowly developing arguments. The kinds of books we will aspire to author and choose to read will be narratives that slide forward as exhibitions of spellbinding rhetorical and intellectual necessity. If, though, real and accelerated thought implies the fervid production of truths incompatible with others then the philosophical task is to strike with spiked, violently dissonant insights. The kinds of books we will aspire to write and choose to read will be unsettling challenges to all placid orders and especially the domesticating rigidity of rhetorical and argumentative continuity.

Nausea crosses from contemporary philosophy to decadence just as a yearning and a fear did, and just as the question about ways of writing did.

In Nietzsche's *Genealogy*, nausea is presented as the bodily response to "the flight from reality."[38] Nietzsche meant that he couldn't avoid feeling sick when he saw thinkers denying the material world they endured in favor of dedication to some other and imaginary one like Plato's ephemeral and ideal reality. To be healthy, the frail instigator of today's philosophy insisted, we need to do the best we can with the only world that really exists, the palpable one you and I live through each day. Nietzsche's French readers agreed and sometimes went a step further; on those occasions, the illness wasn't only an imagined utopia but any philosophic practice sealed off from broad social concerns. Nausea, in practical terms, resulted from philosophy as failing to get outside—as failing to have effects outside—the university library. With that definition of nausea in mind, Deleuze wrote that "the ultimate aim of literature is to set free this creation of a health or this invention of a people, that is, a possibility of life."[39] Healthy literature, Deleuze meant, and whether it's fiction

or philosophy, is strong enough to do more than simply accept and digest common reality, it also participates in that reality and the people's lives filling it. I'll explain this more fully, but before I do it must be noted that Deleuze's gesture toward the public realm is extremely delicate. His readers will know that he along with most French Nietzscheans sway back and forth over the characterization of their work as to some important degree intersecting with typical members of ordinary societies. In this book so far, as is evident, I've been emphasizing the sequestering tendencies of their writings. Here, however, I'm swinging over to the ambiguity's other side, though not at all to finally determine whether French Nietzschean philosophy should be understood as a private or public practice; not at all to make that determination because I'm less interested in aligning French Nietzscheanism's various and sometimes conflicting elements than I am in seeing where the various elements are going.

In the immediately preceding discussion of the rhetorics guiding academic books, numerous examples were drawn from the field of philosophy and literature. That was natural, I was writing about writing. There was also a second reason, however, for going in that direction. It was to prepare for this discussion of nausea; it was to prepare the discussion by provoking the French Nietzschean version. The provocation is that there aren't many fields of study as manifestly ailing as those devoted to exercising theory on novels. For instance, when considering Barthes's discussion of Sade I remarked that it pointed toward an intriguing direction for investigating a particular sensation of readerly bliss. Definitely, Barthes's discussion does that, but really, how many people who read Sade find themselves compelled to close the book at various moments and surrender to the reverie of discovering that "the pleasure of reading clearly proceeds from certain breaks. . . ." Further, how many readers interrupt their movement through Sade to celebrate the death of language? Further still, how many are prepared to even begin understanding or caring about what that death means? The answer "not many" is probably too many if it's taken to include more than a clan of professional academics laboring in their cramped offices and interchanging the publication of essays in journals that only other members of their minute group read. About those essays, while there's no reason to doubt that they're frequently expert and engaging for experts, it's also difficult to avoid sensing a strong current of a flight from reality flowing through their specialized exchanges. It's difficult to avoid perceiving a dedication of professional

labor to questions that have almost nothing to do with what goes on in places where people glance around for a dictionary when hearing a sly comment about *jouissance*. The same goes for Proust and theory, at least it does if my own experience is at all indicative. When I read *Swann's Way* before taking any philosophy classes I was barely concerned about different levels and conceptions of time, I read the novel more as an engaging set of memories of things that happened to someone who wasn't me. Further, I have to admit, when I reread the book today that's *still* what I do. In fact, it's only when I'm trapped in the office or in front of a class of graduate students (who hope to spend a lot of time in the future trapped in their offices) that I get excited about unrolling layers of temporality and defining them and relating them to Nietzsche and Deleuze and so on. Now, I'm certainly not trying to found an argument against theoretical interpretation, I'm only giving some reasons why it seems to me that advanced studies in philosophy and literature can upset the stomach of French Nietzscheans, even when those studies are directed *by* French Nietzscheans. They upset stomachs because they verge on inapplicability to reality; they present tasks and result in accomplishments that have trouble climbing over the university's walls.

Gilles Deleuze recognized this debility and, as a healthy Nietzschean, sought to inoculate himself against it. That explains why two of the three defining imperatives he listed for writing and reading novels in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* explicitly aimed for something more than esoteric discussions. The first imperative didn't, though, and that made Deleuze's case especially urgent. Deleuze began circumscribing his notion of minor literature—what it is and how it should be read—by maintaining that its authors use ordinary words and expressions in unorthodox, nearly unrecognizable manners. One of the many common ways of doing that is poetry: "If there were world enough and time. . . ." Not quite so evidently, but nearly as efficiently, there's slang, as in this example from an eccentric author who, correctly (though absurdly) found it necessary to actually define the words he wrote into his own novel: "'Grassed on me he did,' I said morosely. (Note: Grass is English thief slang for inform.)"[40] What holds these pieces of poetry and slang together, for Deleuze, is that the words "world" and "enough" and "grass" are perfectly mundane, but a standard dictionary won't tell you what they mean. Next, and with these fairly straightforward ways of problematizing ordinary words indicated, the problematizing can be raised up to the reflexive lev-

el, it can be raised to incorporate Deleuze's theory of the minor as the way *it* is written. For instance, the poetry or slang (depending on your sympathies) of Deleuze's writing includes the terms "minor" and "concept" and "difference" that everyone understands but that philosophers understand differently. It follows that right from the start and both in Deleuze's theory as well as in the articulation of his theory there are streaks of concentrated and concentrating isolation, streaks of it made visible as a craving for words that only function the way they should for limited communities of readers.

There's also, however, and within Deleuze, a resistance to isolation; after straying from the quotidian Deleuze immediately tries to get back to it. His next two imperatives for writing and reading correspond to that volition, "In minor literature, everything takes on a collective value" and "Everything in minor literature is political."[41] Certainly, these statements don't necessarily carry philosophy and literature into broad society as there are shared values and shrill politics within university philosophy and literature departments that don't make sense to anyone who's not a professor. Nonetheless, theory's involvement with values and politics does signify the *potential* to get out to the general public, and that's a potential Deleuze sought to actualize when he went on to assert that minor literature "is the revolutionary force for all literature"[42] and, further, "literature is the people's concern."[43] In strictly linguistic terms, what Deleuze meant is that marginal meanings for words ("world enough," "grassed," "concept," "difference") are sometimes destined to be included in the Oxford English Dictionary. And, in broader terms, writings composed with a substantial number of marginal words sometimes reach beyond subterranean readers. More, that literature can mobilize its readers, it can organize them and allow them a single voice that speaks for an expansive community, that presents a set of values and political orientations attributable to the community, and that, eventually, may even extend to cover those members who don't spend much time reading.

To illustrate what he means, Deleuze discusses Kafka's relation to the Jewish community trapped in Prague between the world wars. The socially oriented components of Deleuze's theory come forward somewhat less ambiguously and more recently, however, in Latin America around the figure of Gabriel García Márquez. A Deleuzean consideration of García Márquez begins by stating that he wrote (the now massively read) *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as an irregular kind of novel freely mix-

ing fantasy and reality in a way initially unrecognizable to the general public and also much of the theoretical one. Subsequently, the book was widely disseminated and a community formed around it, a community of readers who understood what Magic Realism meant and the literary rules it followed. Next, and with those understandings firmed up, it became possible to search back in time for the sources of García Márquez's kind of writing. Most of those searches pass through Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* which has, despite its author's protests, now been thoroughly incorporated into the current of literary history that peaks as *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Following that—following the delineation of a kind of literature and its history—a society, a culture, a people may come into existence. This community isn't composed only of authors and readers but also of all those who are potentially the subjects, the protagonists of the literature. These are the people we imagine the novels were based on and grew out of: they and their descendents actually live in the mountainous regions of Columbia (García Márquez) and on the plains of central Mexico (Rulfo); they erect monuments to their presumed native sons and, more importantly, look to them for *political* as much as literary guidance. The conviction supporting García Márquez as a political figure (and also Rulfo to a lesser extent before his death) follows from the determination that he speaks for an *us*, with the us defined as everyone and everything drawn into the drama of Magic Realism: authors, readers, places, events, protagonists and the real people they obliquely refer to. It's this convergence of the literary with social reality that explains, within a Deleuzean framework, why García Márquez's comments about elections and civil wars and crime in Columbia can be found on the front page of newspapers in that country and are as relevant and influential as the declarations of presidents and business leaders and so on. (This also explains, within a distinct literary history, why Mario Vargas Llosa could mount a nearly successful bid for the presidency of Peru.) Going on by moving the same process across national borders, Magic Realism can be conceived as playing an important role in transforming Latin America from something that simply wasn't the United States and Europe into a cultural unity still distinct from the United States and Europe but now defined autonomously as a society that emerged (obviously, not exclusively) through García Márquez's literature. As one very tangible effect of that reality, today, a growing number of serious American and European students of literature are traveling to Latin America to study.

As was the case with the first imperative of minor literature, the second and third—the socially, culturally, politically oriented ones—merit much more and much more cautious attention than I'm giving them.[44] What I've covered does allow the following, though. Deleuze's literary theory starts with queasy, intellectual isolation but it immediately seeks to overcome that by proliferating through reality with the word reality understood to mean what it commonly does for ordinary people.

So, in the vicinity of nausea Deleuze works through philosophy and literature in two directions. One is sequestered and specialized, the other, popular and expansive; the first direction is ill, the second healthy. That's the theory. It's definitely not, however, the book. As I've already begun indicating by drawing attention to the idiosyncratically defined terms Deleuze used to communicate his ideas, his book *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* is indisputably and unequivocally sick. Maybe (probably) Deleuze didn't want it to be that way, but that doesn't change the fact that his pages—no matter how collective and politically activated they may aspire to be—have not penetrated deeply into our culture; they haven't exhibited much power to form the vibrant and broad communities they contemplate. In the most immediately substantive terms, that means whether you happen to be in Paris or Latin America, you won't hear many secretaries and construction workers chatting about Deleuze during their coffee breaks. Advertisers, lawyers, bankers and doctors don't discuss him either. Almost no one does, in fact. And it hardly needs to be noted that if someone, say myself, tried to change that, the most likely result would be frustration. As opposed to García Márquez who actually does spearhead the notion of a certain *us* that exists in Latin America and therefore holds tangible political power to effect elections and win popular support for legislative proposals and so on, if I tried to run for public office with a campaign animated by the values and convictions emerging from Deleuze's philosophy of minor literature, I wouldn't win many votes. I'd probably get a some from professors, graduate students and a few others whose wardrobe is composed primarily of black garments, but that's about it. Some of the reasons are obvious. Deleuze wrote his book as a complicated academic tract assuming highly specialized knowledge on the reader's part. Above that, there's his active employment of a misleading vocabulary, there's Deleuze's affection for words that mean one thing within the university and something else everywhere else. Whatever the reasons, though, one of the glaring results of *Kafka: Toward a Minor Litera-*

ture is that its existence in our world actively disputes the socially oriented aspects of the theory it presents. In Deleuze's defense it should be noted that there's no absolute requirement for philosophy books to apply their own lessons, but that doesn't change the fact that while Deleuze insisted writing should go both away from and toward common existence, his doesn't.

Because it doesn't, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* as a collection of pages circulating (limitedly) through our society marks Deleuze's own position within the divide he opens between the marginal and the public. It marks Deleuze's book as bending away from collective, political action and toward literary theorizing with no aim but acceleration in a secluded world of intense academic labor. Writing that more directly, the energy Deleuze's book generates finds few outlets except the one provided by other theorists as they produce books like the one you're reading now. Which means *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* moves in the direction of French Nietzscheanism choking on itself. Insofar as French Nietzschean nausea is felt when theory abandons public interests, Deleuze nauseates.

On the other side, what makes decadents nauseous, what turns their stomachs in the same way that contemporary Nietzscheans get sick when they see their own work twisting away from the extensive social reality they want to embrace is the vision of theory paraded about in the name of sweepingly incorporative communities. What's sickening is literature and theory constrained to actively engage the general public's preoccupations.

The reason literature and theory isn't the people's concern for decadents and, more, the reason literature conceived that way is sickening can be set in just about the sharpest relief possible by leaving Deleuze and French Nietzscheanism for a few paragraphs and considering this remembered episode offered by Wayne Booth in his *Rhetoric of Fiction*:

> I had an exhilarating hour once talking with my son's fellow fourth graders about the rhetoric of fiction. "How do you tell the good guys from the bad guys?" I asked, and the kids were off and running.[45]

Booth ends an almost five-hundred page endeavor of blisteringly informed structuralist theory with this, with a quaint anecdote meant to stir

up belief in the utility of literary theory for everyone. While it must be recognized that his project has a superficially commendable ring, decadents concentrate on the fact that underneath the exhilarating hour something much less admirable took place. Booth betrayed his own book. He betrayed it because his *Rhetoric of Fiction* works best when it's *not* read and discussed by everyone and instead studied by other theoretical professionals who share Booth's impressive familiarity with Western literature and the long tradition of thoughtful approaches to it. Put differently, while there's nothing intrinsically wrong with Booth finding his own way to make literature and theory the people's and children's concern, there is something wrong with ending a book of specialized, elaborate and cautious reflections that way because it negates the message underwriting every one of the preceding pages, which is that they deserve to be studied precisely because they present ideas about literature that are superior to the kinds of ideas children and the untrained generally have about reading. If that's right, it follows that the interpretations the children ran after were not so much invitations to a future with literary theory as Booth presumably hoped, they were contrivances; reading in terms of "good guys and bad guys" isn't so much an introduction to theorizing as an artificial distraction from the real condition of Booth's more serious and less compromising words. Even so, Booth ended his scholarly project with this scene of childish literary study. That means—and we must be honest here—that Booth actively denied his theoretical interpretations the *right* to do what they were made for. He denied them the right to energize work on the level belonging to the exhaustively trained and exhaustingly dedicated.

Still more troubling than that denial is an implication it carries: theoretical work may be constrained to the humiliation of denying its origin. When Booth tried to raise the value of his interpreting by gesturing toward fourth graders he disgraced his own labors by renouncing where they came from and by repudiating what made them possible. As for where they came from and what made them possible, one way of briefly summarizing all that is a set of questions Booth doubtless asked to guide and impel the work he titled *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. The familiar questions include: does the writing incorporate other highly specialized books? Does it demonstrate a learned mastery of them as well as a thorough understanding of the profession's rules for interacting with and against them? Does the book present an original argument? Will it interest other

professors? Will it persuade, will it prove durable in tense debates and under the pressure of the most expert scrutiny? These and similar questions are the foundational conditions of critical theorizing, they get theory going. They also keep it going because, as experience teaches, they rarely yield solid answers. Instead, the answers are customarily flimsy and that has the effect of sending authors back to their offices to work on modifications and adjustments. The questions stationed at the beginning of theoretical work, in other words, tend to return to drive still more theorizing. Concretizing this, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* I'm citing from is the second edition which was composed from the first along with an afterword added as a response to criticisms the first edition generated. That afterword was written, my point is, because Booth remained loyal to the uncertainties impelling his writing from the start; the questions Booth first asked kept getting asked as his thinking about literature continued in the same way it began. Booth's loyalty did not, however and unfortunately, *entirely* fill the time separating the two editions. Between them, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* was also delivered to an elementary school classroom and when it was the original concerns making the book possible were interrupted. Stronger, the questions underlying Booth's work in literary theory were denied by others that had little in common with those responsible for initially driving the sophisticated, academic investigating. These denying questions are asked by fourth graders (Are the book's ideas about fiction fun?), and by their parents (Are the ideas wholesome?), and by an elementary school teacher (Is Booth's presentation compatible with the lesson plan? Am I going to have time to teach the day's math segment if Booth visits?). No matter what the answers are, they negate—they betray—*The Rhetoric of Fiction's* origin and what occurred there. They debase advanced work in literary interpretation by obliging Booth's book to respond to and therefore serve questions besides the sharp investigative ones first motivating it.

Then things get worse. Booth also concluded this near the end of his second edition of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*:

> I can remember feeling, in the exhaustion and exhilaration of the final months before publication of the first edition that I had quite possibly succeeded in laying out the general subject and that what remained to be pursued were only the infinite possibilities of application to stories I had not mentioned.[46]

The exhaustion Booth refers to here is double and easy to explain. It's first intellectual fatigue and second exhaustion in the sense of completion: the completion of literary theory as it had at last done all it needed to do. On the other hand, it's not easy to explain—in fact, it's inexplicable—the exhilaration that Booth claims to have felt. Inexplicable because the completed *Rhetoric of Fiction* explicitly meant the *termination* of critical labors, it meant the end of what Booth had dedicated his professional life to, the end of what he had been doing every day for years. And not only the end for him, the end for everyone else too because all Booth left for us was the opportunity (if it can be called that) to robotically apply what he'd established. This means that while Booth's findings about the general subject of literary study may be conceived as theoretical accomplishments, they cannot escape also implying the lamentable submergence of critical interpreting in indignity. Booth's conclusions about literary study reduce to zero any autonomous value that theorizing—its practice along with the capabilities wrapped into it—may have once held because no more theory is necessary. Further, the reason that reading can now go on without reflecting on how it should go on *is* the reflecting: the original and disciplined thought that drove Booth to do theory and write his book about it ends up eliminating the need for more theorizing and theoretical books. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, consequently, is a betrayal of its own founding conviction that the act of theorizing is valuable. Of course, Booth's work can be defended here. Against the charge that Booth ruins theory with theorizing there's the argument that at least he was wrong. What can be said in Booth's favor is that he didn't lay out the general subject and therefore failed to bind others to nothing more than mindless applying. But, to the extent Booth is evaluated in terms of the *dignity* and *value* of theorizing, that is in ethical terms, this defense won't work because ethical considerations dictate that what actually happens is subordinated to intentions, and therefore the fact that things didn't work out as Booth planned is not exculpatory.

Returning to French Nietzscheans, to their great credit none of them endeavored to strip everything away from critical thinking. In the case of Deleuze, his first imperative toward the minor—relentlessly disorder the orthodox—strongly resists the tyranny of any final structure for understanding and consequently protects his interpreting from reprehensibly terminal conclusions like the one Booth drew in and about *The Rhetoric of*

Fiction. Still, this is only a modest consolation and it cannot undo the damage wrought by Deleuze's second imperative to the minor. It can't undo Deleuze's insistence that literary theorists read with an eye toward the people's concerns and their collective interests because that simply repeats—in the language of late 1960s French populism—Booth's error of ending his *Rhetoric of Fiction* in a fourth grade classroom. It repeats the error of evaluating tightly strung literary theorizing with the criteria of those who aren't doing and have little interest in advanced theory. Then the error repeats in Deleuze's third imperative when he determined that novels and stories should be read in terms of their ability to formalize and mobilize political unities. Along this line, Deleuze even mentioned the possibility of assembling a "national consciousness"[47] from minor literature. While what exactly a national consciousness might look like is not entirely clear (a definition of, say, García Márquez's Columbia or Latin America would obviously be difficult to formulate rigorously), there is a saddening hope in Deleuze that this consciousness will produce an "active solidarity" extending far beyond—and distracting attention from—the intense labors animating reclusive seminar classes. In any case, and no matter what a national consciousness combined with an active solidarity is determined to be, what it will be more than anything else is another way that thinking about literature gets debased by concerns that have little to do with the grinding work that made beginning to think possible.

Actually, that last line was mistaken. There is *one* way that a national consciousness could be formed so as not to burden the concentrated labors of specialists. That would be a national consciousness of literary theorists; it would be an entire society devoted to studying literature on the highest level. If this were to actually come about, however, then there's still another problem: Deleuze's first imperative for reading, the one rallying against all institutionalizations. Because this imperative demands the relentless undermining of all established orders, it will have nowhere to turn but against the broad society of literary interpreters that presumably allows the communally-oriented exercise of Deleuze's thought without also humiliating his sophisticated thinking. As this internal conflict makes evident, things rapidly get extremely knotty inside the world of minor literature. We should be careful, though, not to let a fetish for complexity block our view of what's really wrong with Deleuze's literary theory. What's really wrong is that Deleuze the slick French Postmodern makes the same mistake as Booth the stodgy American.

Both find ways to degrade their work by forcing their results to serve social purposes foreign to the refined practices of producing those results.

It can only be extremely difficult to understand *why* certain workers in literary theory came to direct their efforts toward reality removed from theorizing; it's not clear how the reading of thoroughly trained academics got distracted by effects beyond the intensification of penetrating and rarified inquiring. Regardless of any answer, though, there's no doubt that the process leads to a denial, to a betrayal of the focused intellectual desires and capabilities that initially catalyze advanced investigating. Consequently, and within the academic world as decadents experience it, shame—a sickening, nauseating shame—envelopes those who study literature for any reason removed from the production and further generation of concentrated studying.

Then more shame is needed. More is needed to spread beyond theory directly denying it's origin and cover the myriad indirect ways theorists forsake their responsibility for their practice's inaugural desires and abilities. One of those indirect ways involves choosing novels to read. The choice is shameful when it's made without regard for which writings best accelerate work in professors' offices and seminar classrooms; a shameful choice ignores the duty to acceleration by selecting a particular novel before others for some reason outside it's potential to facilitate advanced thought. To cite an outside reason (one echoing the betrayal of theory already demonstrated in Booth and Deleuze), there's the decision to privilege a book because it offers pragmatic, socially improving lessons. A novel frequently singled out for just those lessons within the U.S. literary tradition is Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* which, despite its ephemeral literary and theoretical value, often gets recommended to ordinary American readers from fourth graders all the way up to "the people" since it tends to yield interpretations serving life and lives outside classrooms. The recommendation of the novel for that reason, it must be admitted, is sound. The book does admirably edify amateur readers who employ literature for their own enviably theory-free existences. Further, while these readers surely merit reproach for exploiting the act of interpretation when they read (since they interpret without examining the rules of interpretation), it should also be noted that their preference for certain books instead of others on the basis of the goodness, the social utility of the lessons provided, is at least understandable and reasonable.

What's not so understandable, however, what's only tenuously reasonable and truly nauseating is when *philosophers* interested in literature participate in this. When philosophers—those presumably granted the purest intellectual charge within the university—blatantly disregard theory's intensification by preferring and recommending novels because the resulting understandings are easily and felicitously transferable to what's going on outside the university's walls, they effectively cram their reading list down the throat of those few theorists who can legitimately take pride in what they do, which is focus attention on specific books for the sole and benevolent and commendable reason of helping themselves and others like themselves energize their shared discipline.

As a glaring example of a philosopher constructing a reading list without worrying about whether the selections will clog theory, there's Richard Rorty who offers the following guideline for privileging certain, and consequently rejecting other, literary works:

> Narratives that help one identify oneself with communal movements engender a sense of being a machine geared into a larger machine. This is a sense worth having.[48]

Certainly, this was a sense worth having in the late sixties and early seventies. For those of us who don't have tie-died shirts hidden in the back of our closets, though, things can't be so clear. What is clear in any case is that once the relation between thinking and truth has been reversed, philosophy and literature reduced to gathering together and feeling good can only be sickening. Of course, what's sickening isn't the gathering and feeling—there's nothing wrong with that—but there is something wrong with what it excludes. It excludes narratives that may not produce good sensations but that definitely incite philosophical investigations around literature. For example, Nietzsche, when considering the unpleasant subject of criminality, wrote:

> The testimony of Dostoyevsky is relevant to this problem. This profound human being lived for a long time among the convicts of Siberia—hardened criminals for whom there was no way back to society—and found them very different from what he had expected: they were carved out of the just about the best, hardest, and most valuable wood that grows on Russian soil.[49]

Dostoyevsky's writing about criminals is one of those narratives that cuts Rorty clean away from decadents. Rorty, very pragmatically, strikes Dostoyevsky off his reading list because his descriptions of individuals ("hardened criminals for whom there was no way back to society") explicitly do not facilitate communal movements and therefore fail to yield a particular sensation worth having. Decadents, following a very different lead, eagerly read Dostoyevsky hoping that his words will fertilize diverse explorations of where writers can find inspiration and how they can weave their sentences from it, and then how reading can work on the produced narrative to organize and comprehend it, and finally how all that can lead back into the theoretical (as opposed to communal) machine that produces still more writing and still more reading. And, with respect to the Rortian objection that the initial explorations drag thought into a world of hardened criminals, for decadents that's only a tangential concern. As a point of caution here, it must be added that it's not *delinquency* that powers decadent investigating. There's no valorization of crime underwriting decadent work, and surely no seconding of Norman Mailer's bizarre idea that dangerous criminals should be turned loose if they can write in interesting ways about their experiences. Just the opposite, decadents resemble Rorty in believing that criminals should be deposited in Siberia, or in jail, and left there until the certainty is reached that they won't interrupt what's important. It's just that what's important is different. For Rorty, it's fostering communal movements. For decadents, it's fostering the progress of theoretical work, a progress that violent crime interrupts in the most abrupt way. The result is a disagreement between Rorty and Deleuze that's sharply limited to a dispute about what should be done with incarcerated criminals, their violent existences and the narratives they provoke. Rorty counsels us to ignore them. Decadents hope that even the most rancorous stories will be produced and read *if* that will contribute to the effort of philosophical considerations about and incited by literature. The decadent relation, that means, with delinquents is theoretical in two senses. First, criminals should be freed theoretically (through literature) but not literally. Second, they should be freed theoretically only if they help the cause of theory. On the other side, Rorty's relation with delinquents is not at all theoretical: criminals shouldn't be freed in any way until they can contribute to communal movements. That's pragmatic. It's also the theft of a possibility for thinking.

The line called Dostoyevsky that separates Rorty from decadence can be developed again, this time in slightly different terms and in greater detail in the area of the *Notes from Underground*. About that abbreviated novel, Rorty testifies that it's the story of a "machine chewing itself to pieces."[50] As the protagonist attests, Rorty's interpretation is clearly right: "Do you ask why I tortured and tormented myself? The answer is that it was too boring to sit and do nothing."[51] Now, this not exactly uplifting response to the boredom all of us occasionally face begins to explain why *Notes from Underground* isn't recommendable for someone interested, as Rorty is, in improving our ability to trust and cooperate with each other as it's manifestly difficult to trust and cooperate with someone bent on tormenting himself. Even if, however, the self-obsessed and self-flagellating bitterness consuming Dostoyevsky's underground man could be overcome, quite a bit more psychological help would be required for him to gain Rorty's approbation since social cooperation requires not only individuals capable of something besides abusing themselves but also a respectful and open attitude toward others and, unfortunately, the underground man's natural response to his peers is not opportune: "I abominated them, although I was perhaps worse than they were."[52] Anyone who's read the novel knows the "perhaps" should be changed to "definitely." Even without the change, though, Rorty's response to Dostoyevsky's narrative is predictably curt; he crisply chastises its "individualist, Stoic vocabulary charged with ironic resignation"[53] and then shoves the *Notes from Underground* aside. The first reason for the dismissal, as I've related, is that the novel doesn't engender the sense of being a machine geared into a larger, communal machine. There's also, however, a second reason for purging Dostoyevsky's novel from the pragmatist's reading list; it reiterates the first but with a much higher charge of philosophical energy. The *Notes from Underground*, Rorty asserts, shouldn't be read because it's unfit for "*moral deliberation*."[54] What I want to underline here is that this unambiguous insertion of moral considerations into the dismissal of Dostoyevsky is critical for both Rorty and decadents. For Rorty, it's critical because it emphasizes how everything in his work revolves around promoting descriptions of ourselves in a world with others that help us all function together. For decadents, the moral reprobation of Dostoyevsky is critical because it couldn't be more misguided. What's truly morally unfit for decadents, what's even unfit for moral deliberation, is any preference by a philosopher for one novel over another for any rea-

son besides its ability to generate theory. It follows that the dubious morality Rorty cites in calling for us to shun the *Notes* in favor of reading other novels that teach socially enriching lessons must not only be rejected, it's sufficient to warrant the decadent call for Rorty's writing about Dostoyevsky to be burned, all of it, everything sickening it is along with everything nauseating it stands for. Admittedly, this is a brawny claim, one that strikes hard against at least one of the values most of us—and surely Rorty—embrace: the individual freedom to express ideas in an open community of mutual respect. But, what needs to be realized is that it's Rorty who's *already* curtailing our freedom to do philosophy and literature, he's the one slowing down thought's velocity by shackling its labors to extraneous concerns. And it's Rorty who's already ruined the environment of respect; he's the one belittling the dignity of the primary desires instigating philosophizing about literature by censoring Dostoyevsky. In the end, it's Rorty and not the decadent insistence on burning his pages that brutishly corrupts morality, that ruins the only freedom and the only respect that matters in philosophy and literature.

First conclusion about nausea. Like desire and fear and reasons for rhetorics (monographs versus aphorisms), nausea is an integral component of both French Nietzschean and decadent philosophy; it's just that the distinct causes of the shared illness must be carefully distinguished. For French Nietzscheans nausea is evoked by a condition of truths. Nausea is a symptom of literary interpretations incapable of participating in the formation of collective values and everything involving a broad community. For decadents, nausea is evoked by a condition of thinking. Nausea is what decadents sense when their labors of reading are subjected to concerns not strictly about the perpetuation of the advanced theory initially impelling their efforts, and nausea is what decadents inescapably feel when the books they study aren't the ones driving specialized inquiries fastest. Put in the broadest terms, decadent nausea in philosophy and literature comes from the discipline's enabling desire getting stripped of its dignity by being forced to serve anything that's not the generation of still more disciplined thinking.

The second conclusion is that this particular bodily discomfort can be followed from recent Nietzscheanism to decadence because both versions exist in the single philosopher who more than any other wavered between the contemporary Nietzsche and one of its destinies. Gilles Deleuze felt a queasiness rising from his first imperative toward the minor in

literature, the imperative to feverishly undermine instantiated understandings of Kafka and of all literary writing. Left to it's own devices, this imperative restlessly leads to truths serving no purpose beyond instigating still more thinking because every one is erected as material for thought's continuing and critical efforts. Faced with that vicious (for decadents, virtuously generating) cycle, the cures Deleuze proposed were the second and third imperatives of the minor, the directives to channel interpretations toward the formation of publicly incorporating values and political mobilizations. This led to a Deleuzean conception of philosophy and literature as compatible to a significant extent with Wayne Booth's submersion of theory in the concerns of an elementary school classroom and Richard Rorty's banishment of narratives obtrusively not fostering felicitous community involvement. It led, in other words and for Deleuze, to his philosophic thinking's surging toward broad participation in common reality. Deleuze called this surge, this expansiveness, health. Decadents, however, see it as enfeeblement. They see it as devitalizing Deleuze's first imperative to the minor in literature and therefore as debilitating the remarkable desire Deleuze felt to *produce* philosophy about literature that made everything he did possible. Decadents see, consequently, that Deleuze's cure for nausea doesn't treat the disease, it is the disease.

A note about philosophy and literature as a field of scholarly investigation tending toward decadence. Studies involving philosophy and literature naturally edge in that direction because the field is not corrupted by engineers, it's not corrupted, I mean, by professionals assigned to converting academic accomplishments into practically beneficial knowledge. Setting this in context, the practice of engineering is probably most refined within the physical sciences where an only infrequently divided line can be drawn down from sophisticated and abstract laboratory investigations to technological improvements you and I palpably benefit from when, for instance, we buy a new car and find it emits less pollution than the old one. Moving from the physical to the social sciences, professors of sociology also expect their discoveries may eventually be engineered to work practically for, say, criminologists and then in police departments. And, theoretically oriented psychologists hope to see their findings applied to treat common adolescent misfits and the like. Moving from the social sciences to the humanities, leading art historians are sometimes contracted by museums to leave their specialized interests behind and

help organize coherent and accessible exhibits for public display. Similarly, philosophers interested in ethical and political theory but with an activist inclination are occasionally recruited to help formulate tight arguments that help rally public support for initiatives concerning euthanasia, the death penalty and so on. But pure philosophers of literature, they don't have many professional intermediaries. Almost no one's employed to connect what they do with what others are doing.

For that reason philosophers including Deleuze and Rorty occasionally find themselves sucked toward a very particular and describable void. It's not an unanswered demand as though there exists a clamoring for philosophy and literature engineers that's not being satisfied; instead, it's the deeper emptiness of little supply and even less demand. Nearly none whatever. Unfortunately for Deleuze (in his weaker moments) and Rorty this nearly perfect absence sometimes functions as a vacuum, as a force pulling them into the futility of trying to fill a space that doesn't exist by vociferously answering questions no one's asking. So, Deleuze found himself describing how it is that "literature is the people's concern," but the fact is "the people" aren't concerned. And Rorty announced that "Narratives helping one identify with communal movements engender a sense worth having," but no major book stores are going to reorganize their shelves and devote a section to "Philosophy of Narratives Facilitating Communities and Sensations Worth Having." While there are distinct sections devoted to applied sciences, applicable psychology, accessible art history, practical political theory and so on, popularized philosophical approaches to narratives promoting the people's concerns, communal movements and good sensations—that's not going to happen.

Which is good. Better than good: if workers in philosophy and literature can just resist the tugging inclination to fill the nonexistent need to engineer their work for broad, social reality, then they won't be commanded by any need except their real one, their original desire to do theory at the highest possible level. They will be freed, that means, to serve the desire that makes them what they are and that lets them do what they do. For that reason, philosophy and literature, when it's done right, can be the dignified and admirable academic pursuit of our time. Potentially, it's the one most cleanly remaining faithful to its origin and maintaining the vibrant health of disciplined thought.

A note about the nauseating as a category of truth. The blunt opposition decadents cut through it—nauseating interpretations don't purely serve philosophy's acceleration while healthy ones do—eclipses a far less clumsy set of classifications. While this isn't the place to work through them all, even if they could be worked through, what can be quickly marked here are three outer limits that would direct the endeavor. These limits are boundary truths, they're kinds of understandings that stabilize the larger, somewhat Aristotelian project of dividing and collecting philosophic claims as they exist for decadents.

The first two boundaries are subcategories of the nauseating and the first of those is marked by purely pragmatic affirmations. These are truths desired *exclusively* because they serve some practical purpose. While introductory examples are furnished by Rorty's way of reading literature, there are starker instances and for clarity and brevity's sake I'll go straight to one of those: Socrates's noble lie, the contrived belief that everyone has an innate vocation as ruler, warrior or worker within the city to which they naturally belong. As is obvious, at least for those who hold some sympathy for Plato, this assurance can prove pragmatically useful since the civil order and nationalism it fosters are steps on the way to a politically perfected republic. Paradoxically but not contradictorily, the truth is also wrong. Socrates admitted it was a lie. Next, and with respect to the patriotic doctrine's generative power for thinking, it doesn't promise much. It promises almost nothing, actually, because within a society where the lie is applied it only works in the practical way it should when it's not scrutinized; it only functions when it's simply established to be accepted and nothing more. The result is that purely pragmatic assertions are pragmatic. But they're also wrong. And they fail to stimulate more philosophic thought.

The second subcategory of nauseating truths is the purely correct. These are right but not pragmatic and not catalysts of philosophical thinking. Two examples. "The statement *p*: 'All sentences are false,' cannot be true because if *p* is true, it is false"; "Descartes published his *Meditations* in 1641." As is evident, within the territory of their reasonable application each of these sentences represents the world faithfully, each corresponds with reality. The sentences are, in a word, correct. They aren't, however, pragmatic; they're hardly functional because except in scattered instances it's difficult to see how "The statement *p* . . ." or the *Meditations*' publication date could be mustered to, say, galvanize a society

and lead us to a better collective reality. It's difficult to see, more generally, how the assertions could help us do serious things in the tangible world we share with others. Going on in the direction of philosophical thinking, it's equally difficult to see how these two truths can be anything but inert. While "The statement *p* . . ." is a kind of intellectual curiosity and the *Meditations*' publication date a solid certainty, the first rapidly dissolves into triviality and the second into indistinguishability from the rest of the virtually infinite number of simple facts available in any encyclopedia. Neither statement, consequently, promises to yield much more than nods of agreement among philosophers and then calls to change the subject.

So, at the extreme, pragmatic truths are useful but wrong and not intellectually stimulating, and correct truths are right but useless and also not stimulating. Unsullied decadent truths, by contrast and at the last of philosophy's outer limits, aren't pragmatic and aren't right but are definitely stimulating. For instance, *Everything's interpretation*. Manifestly, this declaration isn't pragmatic; we don't want police officers, judges or politicians believing it. Further, it's also manifestly wrong as it directly contradicts itself. Nonetheless, the conviction that everything's interpretation has driven the last century's most powerful and exciting work in philosophy. More, the conviction along with any other truths stationed at the decadent extreme of philosophy *must* seek to drive that work. Since they won't gain value by being substantially helpful or legitimately right, the only aspiration they can hold is to reach for the one word that more than any other commands academic respect in our time. Purely decadent truths can only gain value by being *interesting*.[55]

The conclusion is that at philosophy's edges there are two distinct ways truths can be nauseating and one way nausea can be entirely escaped. These are only boundary cases, though, and the boundaries are rarely reached. In reality the best decadent understandings—the ones pushing thinking hardest—are nearly always those that persuasively claim to be practically useful or right. As examples, Deleuze occasionally and Rorty consistently asserted that their descriptions of experience may function well in the public realm, but that hasn't stopped dedicated readers from critically exploring their work without sharing their authors' social preoccupations. And Descartes among countless others justifiably claimed to be correct about at least some things, but that hasn't stopped philosophers—Deleuze, for instance—from using Descartes's books to

help generate work moving in anti-Cartesian directions. It follows that for decadents there's nothing *necessarily* misguided about philosophy leading to results that are socially beneficial or right or both. Still, there is something in that philosophizing that should be felt, uncomfortably, in the stomach.

A reversal hovers above nausea, reasons for rhetorics, desire and fear as they move from French Nietzscheanism to decadence. The reversal is first a culmination for this chapter as a global description of those movements; it names the route they all follow from one to the other kind of philosophy. The reversal is also a streak of irony embedded in the passage: a specific notion of philosophic reversal both originated French Nietzscheanism and turns back against it to produce the movement's end in decadence.

"To reverse Platonism," Deleuze wrote at the dawn of French Nietzscheanism, "is how Nietzsche defined the task of his philosophy or, more generally, the task of the philosophy of the future."[56] That future is behind us now and, like most things past, susceptible to rudimentary but not mistaken summaries. This is one of them. Plato claimed that philosophical desire begins with absorption in the curiosities inhabiting quotidian experience (how can two distinct fingers both be fingers?). From there, the desire progresses to broader and more striking paradoxes: how can a human body and a sleek mathematical proof both participate in the idea of Beauty? The answer to these and related uncertainties, Plato continued, are to be sought, ultimately, outside experience. With that, philosophy lifted into the metaphysical and the desire for resolutions to specific problems became a need for sweeping and perfect knowledge. As Plato admitted, this last and highest wanting can only be mad; no one but the insane would try to undo earthly confusions by finally appealing to something outside space and time. Sensing (appropriately) a need to rescue his particular insanity from the category of ordinary mental illnesses, Plato determined that his intellectual derangement must be "divine." Whether the adjective is merited or not, it effectively organizes the Platonic notion of philosophic progress; the reasonable desire to understand concrete experiences surges into an irrational but noble craving to grasp every experience. Or, following the analytic appropriation of Platonism which replaces universality (a literary, poetic term) with objectivity (a scientific one), the reasonable desire to form a convincing understanding of a cer-

tain occurrence surges into the aspiration for a perfectly objective understanding and, consequently, the outlandish pretension that's neatly captured by a title Thomas Nagel chose for one of his books: *The View from Nowhere*. In either case—whether Platonism is understood philosophically or analytically—Nietzscheanism reverses it, with the word reversal understood in very a strict sense. Reversing does not mean simply doing the opposite, it means twisting forces intrinsic to a particular way of thinking from inside, it means ruining a philosophy with its own practices and desires by wrenching them back against the grain of their founding purposes. In the case of French Nietzscheanism, its leading practitioners accomplished this by appropriating Platonism's uncontrolled philosophic wanting while bending the urge away from its orthodox aim and back toward specific earthly experiences. What Nietzsche set loose as his "philosophy of the future" was an infatuated—divinely mad—pursuit of temporal truths. Nietzscheanism happened when the concrete questions and answers Platonism located at philosophy's beginning were picked up and set at the end where they intersected with a metaphysically agitated but no longer metaphysically oriented desire.

Because this reversal happened in the midst of Platonism, it's a mistake to envision the French Nietzschean infatuation with perspective interpretations to have come storming over the horizon of thought as a "beast prowling about avidly in search of spoil and victory."[57] Doubtless, Nietzsche enjoyed writing this thrilling description, and he probably liked imagining that it accurately depicted himself and his work. That's understandable; it is amusing to imagine oneself as an intellectual barbarian pillaging the halls of academy and sending doddering old professors shrieking toward the security of their dusty offices. Still, the reality wasn't so dramatic. There wasn't so much attacking and ravaging as creeping and modifying. From the beginning. From the very beginning because Nietzscheanism was always inside Platonism as the basic components of that philosophy waiting to be rearranged and redirected.

Moving on to decadence, the same rearranging and redirecting. Decadence reverses what developed from a reversal by applying the French Nietzschean maneuver to its founders. Elements of recent philosophy are preserved but twisted. Without having explicitly formulated this critical process, I've already explained in some detail what I mean. Reviewing, French Nietzschean desire for truths bends into desire for thinking; it's the same desire but different destinations. So too fear, where it had arisen

before the possibility of losing truths possessed it's contorted to exist before the possibility of losing thought's momentum. The same goes for reasons for rhetorics; the *way* French Nietzscheans decide between monographs and aphorisms crosses over to decadence, but not the specific reason for choosing one or the other. Finally, nausea exists in both, but with divergent causes. Now, what's important here and what I'm adding to the already written is that those pages weren't only about their specific subjects, they were also anticipatory repetitions of what I'm currently writing. They demonstrate how the practice of reversal developing French Nietzscheanism can also be used to develop decadence.

Pursuing the demonstration, I'll reverse one more critical element of French Nietzscheanism, an element of indifference. The indifference started in contemporary thought as a willingness to use uncritically and indiscriminately *whatever* thinking is necessary to reach a truth. For Nietzsche in the *Genealogy* the indifference meant veering from strict logical progressions (Essay 1, Section 3) into satire (the parody of Plato's cave in Essay 1, Section 14), into history (the cruel citation of Saint Thomas Aquinas in Essay 1, Section 15), into name-calling ("I am told they are simply old, cold and tedious frogs," Essay 1, Section 1), into philology (Essay 1, Section 4), into readings of Shakespeare (Essay 3, Section 17). The haphazard list goes on. Then it extends forward through Nietzsche's French readers. To note a single, glaring case, Deleuze and Guattari add so many items to the catalog of manic plurality in their *A Thousand Plateaus* that it would be an affront to the quantity to even begin listing them. Better to write that the book cascades over a number of reasoning techniques, fertile allusions and intellectual acrobatics so far removed from any conventional limit that it becomes a mockery of any attempt to sort it all out. Still, the absence of limits (and the mockery) can be illustrated and illustrated very intensely with only a single tiny sentence. It's four words long and requires no reference to context or any elaboration at all about what it might mean. Just its existence is sufficient to demonstrate Deleuze and Guattari overrunning every discernable boundary for thought on the way to their conceptual understandings. They wrote: "God is a Lobster."[58] What they wrote implicitly with this jolting sentence is that it doesn't matter whether it emerged from one of the multiple manners of perspective seeing that Nietzsche exhibited or from a structure for thinking built by some other figure in philosophy's history or from one of Deleuze and Guattari's own invented intellectual tools for conceptualizing

or from too much wine or not enough sleep or whatever. The truth just came from somewhere, it doesn't matter where. Or how. It *can't* matter where or how because there is no institutionalized—that is, widely recognized, accepted and practiced—manner of thinking in philosophy (it's not necessary to add the usual qualification here, "as far as I know") that could possibly lead to "God is a Lobster." If an attempt was nonetheless made to trace the reasoning leading to this aquatic proposal, it would rapidly swirl into an imitation of the image set on *A Thousand Plateaus*' first page, the finger-wrecking "Piano Piece for David Tudor." As for that zany sheet of music, it would be as difficult for a pianist to actually follow as it is for philosophers to follow Deleuze and Guattari's logic. Their detractors giddily enjoy pointing that out. The critics, however, shouldn't be so dismissive with their charges of incoherency and irrationalism because the abuse of formulaic thought streaking through *A Thousand Plateaus* is not a sign of weakness. While it's impossible to deny that strict rules for the development of conclusions are rarely presented and even then only occasionally obeyed in the book, there's a more positive way to articulate the same observation: organizing rules for philosophic labor are incidentally disdained as the authors maneuver in whatever direction they can to create their truths. After that articulation, the absence of stiff guidelines for thinking in *A Thousand Plateaus* rapidly becomes irrelevant since there's nothing wrong with ignoring every rule for thought if perspectives and concepts are *why* there's thinking. As long as interpretations and concepts are getting made, and as long as that's what's important, concerns about how they're getting made can't be anything more than distractions. For Deleuze and Guattari, as is utterly clear, the concerns aren't even distractions, they're suppressed entirely. And that suppression clears space for this. The twenty-five-hundred-year philosophic tradition of wanting truth at any and every cost is, in our time and in *A Thousand Plateaus*, touching perfection, touching a wanting so purified that it completely overwhelms concerns about thought.

The end of concerns about thought is especially blatant in Deleuze and Guattari, but it goes further to form a notable habit in philosophy. The habit could be exemplified by reference to just about any major figure, but it's clearly visible in the current reception of Deleuze and Guattari's work so I'll stay with them. With respect to that reception, while the number of journal articles and books devoted to elaborating and multiplying the conceptual truths they came up with is growing exponentially,

very few pages are being devoted to *how Deleuze and Guattari worked together*, to what paths for thought they followed, and to the ways their thinking (not what they thought) distinguishes them from other philosophers. Further, when attention is focused on these questions, it's not only customarily fleeting but also—and fairly reasonably—largely negative; what's normally remarked about Deleuze and Guattari's philosophizing is that it's undisciplined ("nomadic" in their terminology) and little more. As a result, while no one conversant in recent theoretical discussions can avoid having some idea of what the word "truth" meant for Deleuze and Guattari, even a specialist in contemporary Continental philosophy fresh out of graduate school would seriously hesitate before beginning to produce a discussion of thinking as related to these authors. Going on by applying this reality in the history of philosophy, since it's ordinarily traced through devotion to truth, the way Deleuze and Guattari's work is being received generalizes. Professors claiming expertise in Plato, Augustine, Descartes, Kant or any other pivotal thinker are normally expected to be able to explain the word truth efficiently and clearly as defined by their chosen master-thinker, but if they're asked how thinking is understood and practiced by the same philosopher there would probably follow some long moments of uncertainty. And no one would count that against them.

The question about thinking is a manageable one, though. Even when addressed to philosophers as chaotic as Deleuze and Guattari it can lead—if it's stated correctly—to a significant response. Beginning with how the question shouldn't be stated, in the area of Deleuze and Guattari it shouldn't be about a specific method, not about what constitutes an acceptable premise and then how the premise may and may not be developed toward conclusions. As I've already related, the question can't be asked this way without immediately destroying any hope for an answer since the routes Deleuze and Guattari follow to their concepts are as numerous as the pages they wrote. The question about thought for the authors of *A Thousand Plateaus*, therefore, can have little to do with the one appropriately addressed to Socrates or Descartes. More sweepingly for Deleuze and Guattari as philosophers whose love of truth reached the uncontrolled intensity it did, the thinking question should not be formulated in terms of boundaries, in terms of constraints, in terms of what is and what's not allowed. Instead, it should be written positively in terms of possibilities and innovations. It's not what can't be done but

what can be; it's not what the limits are but how limitations can be surpassed. With that positive orientation established, this is one (admittedly open-ended) way to phrase the question about thought as it should be posed to Deleuze and Guattari: what stimulated, quickened and electrified their pursuit of concepts? What are some of the ways they tried to think that worked for them and that might work for others? While, again, a full range of answers is not immediately attainable, anyone who's studied Deleuze and Guattari with some moderate care should be able to compile a number of at least tentative indications almost as easily as they can compose adequate descriptions of "assemblages" and "concepts" and similar truth words. In the following, I'll carry out a tentative compilation by listing four indications about thought that can be extracted from Deleuze and Guattari's writings. Each one tells us something substantial about what thinking is for them.

First characterization of thinking. It's incited between individuals and from their interaction, but not through consensus. As Deleuze and Guattari portray it, energetic thinking with another is not a labor of sympathy with participants first seeking to comprehend each other and then follow the reasoning lines the other had worked down with the hope of pushing a little further in the direction already established; instead, consensus—though not cooperation—was casually spurned as they did philosophy: "When I work with Guattari," Deleuze reported, "each of us falsifies the other, which is to say that each of us understands in his own way notions put forward by the other."[59] Communal work for these authors, the claim is, charges thinking with mutual but contorted understandings. Deleuze and Guattari listened to each other because each wanted to go on and say something that the other impelled, but not something that the other guided or could predict or could even recognize as their own thought reflected in the other. Like a philosopher finding fuel for reflection in something removed from the discipline—Kafka's literature or Klee's painting or Debussy's music—Deleuze the philosopher and Guattari the practicing psychoanalyst interacted without blending, without abandoning their distinct interests and experiences and routes for theory. Thought, that means, picked up speed between them not by participating in what the other was doing but by warping the other's ideas into the entirely distinct context of another life and imagination.

Another way to write this: Deleuze and Guattari listened to each other with the hope of *widening* the gap between them. Which doesn't mean

Deleuze and Guattari's relation as cooperative without seeking consensus was, at bottom, a kind of repulsive consensus; it's not that they first agreed about some things and then tried to get away from their unanimity as though they were each worried about the other's influence. There's no anxiety here as Harold Bloom uses the word, no worries about simply reiterating what someone else has already said. In place of that, Deleuze and Guattari believed that thinking quickens when worries about being the same *or* different from another are cleared out of the way, just as a writing philosopher inspired by music isn't worried about being the same or different than the music. With that in their minds, though not as a result of a pact between them, Deleuze and Guattari established that thinking best together happens with mutual influence but without the burdening requirement of agreements and disagreements. As a tangible way of illustrating this—of showing how cooperative thinking can work not as uniting but separating two theorists—there's this simple problem: How do you respond to someone telling you to "be spontaneous"? The solution that fits here isn't to be or not be spontaneous, it's to move in a direction distinct from either of the command's two directly proposed responses. Deleuze or Guattari's reaction, therefore, to the other's mandate to not accept mandates would be to cut away from the responses contained within the limits of agreement and disagreement by, for example, asking a question, possibly one of these: What does the word spontaneity mean? Is it possible to be spontaneous? Have you or I ever been that way? In what situations? Would someone want to be spontaneous? Why? And so on.

Indication two about thought concerns the kind of writing that impelled Deleuze and Guattari. How, the question is, did they write together to catalyze their thinking together? Not by organizing a progression from the general to the specific. Their writing didn't begin with a thesis statement, move to a complex outline for a book and then to the outline's division into contained segments of argumentation and finally to the distribution of assignments with one author responsible for the odd numbered chapters and the other the even ones or something like that. In fact Deleuze and Guattari wouldn't even consider this to be writing, for them it's typing; correspondingly, the act of so composing a book would not be one of thought but of manual labor. On the other hand, the kind of writing that invites real philosophizing, according to Deleuze and Guattari, goes in the direction Deleuze indicated when he reported that

"Each morning during the composition of *A Thousand Plateaus* we would wake up and write five lines here, ten there."[60] And, "We took turns at rewriting things."[61] So, within the practice of these authors, thinking as operating through writing means composing lines here and there and rewriting now and then and from *that* process something larger emerges. The kind of writing that works with and stimulates thought, it follows, is not one that conforms to a book already envisioned but one that generates a book not foreseen by forcing writing and thinking to move along but without moving toward a preestablished destination. Repeating, Deleuze and Guattari didn't write and think under the auspices of a certain book; it was because they thought by writing in a certain way that they ended up with one.

Indication three about thinking. What kind of reading incites it? Did Deleuze and Guattari concentrate on a few canonized texts within a narrow field of interests, or was their reading a collection of vagabond studies across disciplines and genres? "We read a lot,"[62] Deleuze tells us, and a cursory examination of *A Thousand Plateau*'s index proves he meant not just a lot of authors but a lot of authors concerned with vastly divergent subjects. A few of them: Paul Adam, aesthetics, Afrikaans (as a language), agriculture, Alembert's equation, Eric Alliez, Louis Althusser. Next, *how* did Deleuze and Guattari read? Did they scrutinize and try to master entire books or skip through them with opportunistic eyes? As no one could possibly thoroughly cover all the authors and subjects listed in *A Thousand Plateaus*' index, the answer can be deduced. Nonetheless, Deleuze and Guattari provide the confirmation; they read "not whole books, but bits and pieces."[63] So, for them, thinking was not stimulated by reading as focused attention and grinding application but by literary diversity and bursts of pages stripped out of their contexts.

Indication four. What method of communication between authors stimulates thought: an ordered exchange of well-crafted ideas patiently addressed back and forth or freewheeling, impulsive discussions? Either one. "Guattari and I decided to work together," Deleuze remembered. "It started off with letters. And then we began to meet from time to time to listen to what the other had to say. It was great fun. But it could be really tedious too. One of us always talked too much."[64] The next step would be to explore these two forms of communication—letters and freestyle conversation—with the idea of discovering which kind pushes thought harder, and under what conditions. Further, how can those con-

ditions be modified, how can slow-moving letters be composed to keep the subject of discussion vibrant and active through the interims of waiting for a response? Correspondingly, how can face-to-face discussions be organized to avoid the intellectual stalling of someone excitedly talking too much? More, is there a middle ground between letters and speech (electronic mail)? Or, are there effective and less effective mixes of the two possibilities? The questions go on.

And they go on not only in the area of thinking's relation with communication but also as addressed to the previous three indications about thought. On the subject of reading, we can ask whether Deleuze and Guattari's practice of focusing on bits and pieces of diverse books could be improved—charged with more thinking energy—by increasing the diversity still further or by decreasing it modestly. On the subject of writing, we can ask whether the two authors of *A Thousand Plateaus* could have fortified their efforts by associating with a third author, a fourth, a fifth. On the subject of seeking cooperation without consensus, we can ask whether consensus should always be avoided or only at certain moments or only as supplemented by direct conflict. To these questions, some responses could be formulated and a few more pages added to this book, but the pages would, more than anything else, be distractions because the answering isn't very important. What's really important is the fact of the questions and how different they are from the ones normally circulating through philosophy; what's significant is the center of gravity of this and the immediately preceding paragraphs. They've revolved around concerns about how two philosophers worked together and not what kind of truths (universal, objective, limited, interpretive, ancient, modern, contemporary) they were working for.

I lifted most of the citations guiding the last paragraphs from brief asides and passing comments made by Deleuze and Guattari in interviews. Because they tended to be more pious than decadent—thinking was for truths for them—they invested little time in an effort to organize and directly present their findings about just why it was they worked so energetically together and what factors might have facilitated, hampered or entirely frustrated their labors. Still, their mentioned beginnings spark additional questions for posing to philosophers whose primary interest is their thought's velocity. Some of the most immediately evident circulate through political conditions; for example, if the aspiration is to provoke the flintiest theoretical labor, what degree of governmental participation,

oversight and imposition is desirable? One response could be organized around Leo Strauss's demonstration in *Persecution and the Art of Writing* that the pressure of censorship has squeezed some of the tradition's best work forward. Plato, Descartes, Spinoza and Rousseau could all be gathered as witnesses to support the developed claim that thought flourishes in repressive environments. On the other hand, an argument could also be made that it's the absence (or collapse) of monitoring authority that invigorates philosophical labor. Referring to the near-anarchy of 1968 Paris and the scent of liberation following it, Foucault determined that "Without the political opening of those years," he "would perhaps not have had the courage" to pursue his boldest ideas.[65] Deleuze and Guattari seemed to share the feeling: "May 68," Guattari reported, "came as a shock to Deleuze and me as to so many others; we didn't know each other, but this book, *Anti-Oedipus*, is nevertheless a result of May."[66]

Another series of questions about conditions driving or impeding thought is economic. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf argued that money which could pay for privacy was a requirement for the best writing. Plato and Aristotle would certainly have concurred and further affirmed that a lot of it was necessary to buy the leisure that contemplative, philosophic authoring requires. To this list of money-based thinkers Montaigne along with many others could be added, but that doesn't mean all the West's best writers and philosophers have afforded high levels of privacy and comfort. Augustine constantly complained about his economic plight while nonetheless producing what he did.[67] Closer to the present, Georges Bataille was a librarian which hardly implies financial excess. And, dropping still further down the wage scale, there's no shortage of contemporary philosophers whose living conditions could be (significantly) improved by giving up teaching and getting a job in the local library. Another argument against abundant wealth—and implicitly in favor of modest means as stimulating minds—is invisible: we'll never know how much work has been lost by the drowning of great talents in the indolence of overflowing luxury. On the other hand, it's also true that we'll never know how many books didn't get written because the potential author was busy washing plates to pay the rent.

A third line of questions about conditions facilitating or hindering thinking is directly social or interpersonal. On one side of the possible answers Deleuze and Guattari join Socrates in instantiating that direct human interaction—talking about philosophy with others—fosters

thought. On the other side, it's difficult to imagine Nietzsche working productively with someone else. It's not even clear that he *could* have worked with someone else given his constant refrain that his would have to be "posthumous" books since no one in his time could understand what they were trying to convey. And even if that weren't so, it's still difficult to imagine Nietzsche finding agreeable inspiration in the company of others as he was so bent on detesting them. "How hard it is," he moaned, "to digest one's fellow men."[68] For Nietzsche, it appears, being antisocial was a prerequisite of life devoted to philosophizing.

With a political, economic and social framework erected above the question of thought's acceleration, more factors can be added with a set of pryingly personal (or, somewhat less intriguingly, biological) inquiries. How do, for example, habits of diet and sleep facilitate or impede thinking? As one indication, Deleuze approvingly cites a character in a novel who occasionally refused to eat because it "made him heavy and distracted him from his study."[69] On the other hand, thinkers, like everyone else, have to eat sometime. Deleuze also recounted that he worked on *A Thousand Plateaus* in the morning when, presumably, he was most sharp and alert.[70] That doesn't close off another possibility, though: philosophizing progresses fastest late, during those tired hours when we let our guard down and write whatever comes to mind with the idea that tomorrow it can all be cleaned up. Beyond diet and work schedules, there are also medical factors to consider. Starting with the well-known case of Proust, could he have dragged himself away from the frivolous pastimes of Parisian drawing rooms, locked himself in a cork-lined chamber and composed his nearly endless string of novels had he not been too ill to socialize? Moving over to philosophy, Nietzsche was not exactly a sought after guest for elite drawing rooms, but the question about whether he could have achieved what he did without illness (and the freedom from teaching it allowed) can still be put to his biographers. It's doubtful that a certain answer would emerge. There is a certain answer in the case of Foucault, though. His terminal illness slowed and finally extinguished his labors. Next, there are questions about thinking and age to consider. Starting with literature again, could Kerouac have written the greater part of *On the Road* in a single amphetamine-driven splurge had his body already endured sixty years of life? In philosophy, Plato implies an answer at the start of the *Republic* (the exchange with Cephalus) when he insinuates that just as accumulated years dull sexual desires, so too the aged

have an increasingly hard time getting going intellectually. On the other hand, Kant did some of his finest writing in a rocking chair and Deleuze and Guattari believed their *What Is Philosophy?* could only have been composed on the threshold of the end.

Another personal question, a curious and unexpected one that shows how broad the field to be considered is, was raised for me by the now deceased Kant scholar Salim Kemal. He occasionally interrupted his eminently sober and clear-headed conversation with the surprising insistence that he couldn't write with a computer. His work, he said, literally flowed along with his fingers and hand when recording ideas with a pen, but when pecking on a machine he couldn't connect the thoughts, one notion didn't lead to another, each one seemed final, like an insuperable obstacle to any more progress that day. He couldn't ultimately convince me that I'd be better off writing my first drafts the old-fashioned way, but his insistence is worth taking seriously for two reasons. First, Kemal was no eccentric aesthete; during the years of his life it was difficult to find a more rigorously strict advocate of coldly rational opinions and therefore if *he* really believed that his hand's graceful motion facilitated theorizing—and he certainly did—then it's difficult to dismiss the possibility as idiosyncratic pretentiousness. The second reason is more important: Kemal's practice, along with the other examples I just listed involving age, disease, sleep and diet together translate into the claim that thinking is not an abstract mental process divorced from a specific physical body. Instead, thought resembles truths as Foucault discussed them, it takes into account "the body, the nervous system, nutrition, digestion and energies."[71] Any study, the assertion is, of intellectual work that follows Descartes in denying the body also leaves something crucial out of the subsequent report on thinking.

In the last few paragraphs I have not presented a report on thinking. But I've tried to show how one could be organized and list some of the subjects it could include. This proposed essay, it should be underlined, would express no interest in telling the *truth* about thought, it would only be interested in elaborating some ways to exercise and strengthen it. Or, writing the same thing again on a less elementary level, the essay would have an interest in telling the truth, but only to facilitate thought (truth serves thinking).[72]

Regardless, actually finding sufficient raw material to go through and write the essay would obviously be difficult. Still, and as I've outlined, the

case of Deleuze and Guattari provides sufficient leads that could be followed, and with an extended effort a coherent set of pages elaborating philosophic thinking as they practiced it could be assembled and submitted for consideration by one or another of the main academic journals in philosophy. I doubt it would get accepted anywhere. Stronger, the essay almost certainly wouldn't be accepted for publication if it explicitly stated that the *reason* for detailing how Deleuze and Guattari worked together was limited to facilitating more philosophical labor. And the chances for acceptance would drop even further if the essay aimed—as it would in accordance with complete devotion to thought—toward *indiscriminately* facilitating more philosophical labor. The submission, I mean, would almost surely be rejected everywhere it was sent if it stated that Deleuze and Guattari's manners of thinking were being presented as guidelines for investigating in any direction, including those contradicting Deleuze and Guattari's orientation, including those compatible with, say, Plato or Kant. Worse yet, the submission wouldn't only be rejected, it probably wouldn't even be considered legitimate as the reviewing editors who received it wouldn't find much of anything in the pages to associate with the profession. After receiving the essay and seeing the names Deleuze and Guattari in the title, a typical board of editors would immediately begin searching for the "concepts" or "assemblages" it articulated. Then they'd look for arguments in favor of Deleuze and Guattari's truths, they'd want a convincing demonstration that readers will get more telling understandings of experience from the ideas announced in, say, *A Thousand Plateaus* than they'll get from reading Plato or Nietzsche. Next, most editors would expect at least gestures toward interventions in active debates; they'd anticipate a resolution to a topical issue in philosophy or a defendable solution for one of our discipline's perennial uncertainties. If, however, the pages manifested complete indifference to all that, if the only thing that could be found in the submission was a Deleuze and Guattari instruction manual for invigorating philosophic labor without paying any attention to where the work might lead and the kind of truths it might tend to support, then a letter would almost certainly be sent back with the following verdict: The submission, while very interesting and certainly deserving to be published, isn't, unfortunately, compatible with the themes already established for the next few issues. There's also the possibility that the response wouldn't be so diplomatic.

However expressed, the verdict would be right and arrived at for the right reasons. The fundamental criticism would be that Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy isn't about the thinking leading to their truths but the quality and persuasiveness of the truths emerging from their thought. Stronger, the routes, mechanisms and intensity of any philosopher's labors are irrelevant. How Deleuze and Guattari worked together, how they wrote together, what and how they read before they wrote, what their political, economic, and social conditions were, what their personal, bodily conditions and habits were—none of that counts, none of it plays a role in validating or disqualifying their results. Further, anyone who *does* understand those things to play a role is not contributing to French Nietzschean studies for two interlocked reasons. Contemporary Nietzscheans are evaluated solely in terms of the interpretations they produce and, correspondingly, no important differences exist between the ways philosophers produce except one: the best thinking is just whatever yields the most valuable truths. Decadence reverses French Nietzscheanism right here. Philosophers evaluate each other in terms of the thinking they incite, and they refuse to acknowledge any important differences between the truths philosophers come up with except one. The best truth is just whatever generates the most subsequent philosophizing.

The reversal of French Nietzscheanism requires maintaining something of it but twisting it back ruinously. What's maintained: the structure of division between thinking and truths, one is for the other. What's reversed: the relation between the two, which one goes forward through the other.

Conclusion. Reversal is the broadest move from French Nietzscheanism to decadence because it works at two distinct places. First, this chapter has shown that reversal governs what happens *inside* contemporary Nietzscheanism as aligned toward its decadence. Inside, French Nietzschean desire is maintained but converted from wanting truth to wanting thinking. Connected with that, decadence maintains the French Nietzschean fear, but converts it from anxiety about losing a particular truth into anxiety before thought's stagnation. Next, decadence maintains the practice of letting desire and fear determine whether it's monographs or aphorisms that will be written, but doesn't necessarily share the French Nietzschean tendency toward aphorisms. Decadence also maintains French Nietzschean nausea, but transforms the diagnosis from bodily disease as a symptom of theory denying our common world to the

disease as a symptom of philosophy made to function in the common world. Finally, decadence maintains the French Nietzschean practice of reversing the immediately preceding tradition, even if the tradition is one of reversal, even if it's Nietzsche's.

Because the tradition is Nietzsche's, the second place the reversal works is on the edges, at the limits of beginning and ending. When Deleuze wrote, "reversing Platonism is how Nietzsche defined the task of philosophy," he meant that the Ancient to Modern tradition effectively facilitated its own end by gestating all the elements required to make something else. To make something else—to redirect philosophy in the French Nietzschean direction—all that needed to be added was the idea of reversing what Platonic history offered. Nietzsche contributed the idea. His best readers followed it through. Now, and as their combined labors near exhaustion, everything is much easier. To redirect philosophy again, this time in the decadent direction, there's no need for anything to be contributed at all. The necessary elements (desire, fear, reasons for rhetorics, nausea) and their arrangement (as a reversal) have already been provided. Which makes this book inevitably internally disappointing. Almost no philosophic thought was required to write it.

A definition of the word decadence is contained within French Nietzscheanism's reversal; the reversal provides a context for decadence that restrains, that limits the word's meaning. The restraint is valuable for this book because, as Richard Gilman has demonstrated in his book audaciously titled with the word alone, decadence's definition has swayed so precipitously through history that writing it threatens to undo any author's intention. And even if the historical warning signs weren't heeded, the term's contemporary uses are equally unsettling. As is evident, today decadence spills over most every boundary of signification and, like that other notorious word which I haven't weeded entirely out of these pages, Postmodern, mingles equally comfortably with thoughtful theory, vacuous twaddle, noisome music, fattening deserts, whatever. Nonetheless, decadence can be sharpened into a useful linguistic instrument. To reach that point, a brief, preliminary distinction followed by a discussion of the word's etymological meaning culminating in a definition stabilized by the notion of reversal.

The preliminary distinction: decadence is a form of French Nietzscheanism that, from the French Nietzschean perspective, appears

weak because it's insufficiently dedicated to explaining experience, misguided because it's directed toward thought instead of truths, and corrupted because it's a misuse of French Nietzschean accomplishments. The word decadence, therefore, should be understood to project sternly theoretical implications as opposed to a set of vaguely disconcerting aesthetic tastes. Decadence, I mean, has little to do with preferences for specific colors (burnt orange) or cuisine (the Argentine Alfajor) or a certain artist's paintings on the walls (Bosch, Gustave Moreau) or a particular lifestyle (attenuated). In fact, it's almost the opposite of those things. It's a way of doing philosophy that, in the moments of its application, seals out everything but what only the most staid academic would even consider to be a coherent style of living. Whatever the lifestyle may be, though, it's not what this book is about.

With that ungainly element of decadence's meaning removed, a more cautious refinement begins with the term's etymological root which is the tenth part. This leads decadence's definition into one of philosophy's most venerable questions, the one about how parts relate to the whole. There are three structurally different ways of comprehending the relation and the last belongs to decadence. The first two provide contrast and the first of those is reductive: the part is the whole reduced to one-tenth of its former vitality and completeness. As a tangible example of this particular decimation, there's Augustine's repeated complaints in his *Confessions* about aging, there's his frustrating discovery that, as years passed, everything in his body diminished; he was constantly less agile, less alert, less able. Insofar as he's taken to incarnate this reductive conception of parts and the whole, reality *had* to be that way for Augustine because within it understanding a present condition always happens by reference to a fuller past, to how things were before diminishing, before loss. Understanding happens, in other words, inside the boundaries of a memory of what was. Understanding ultimately becomes, that means, a form of sentimentality.

The part as less than the whole and its corresponding logic of sentimentality subsists not only in Augustine's remembering and longing for his body's past but also in philosophy as longing for what it once was. Going straight to a specific manifestation, in France in 1991 in a collection of essays titled *Why We Are Not Nietzscheans*, Alain Boyer responded to the frustrating loss of solid, reassuring certainties in contemporary thought by determining that "the most interesting debates, the subtlest distinctions, the most fertile oppositions" are to be found "inside the

Modern, rationalist and universalist transcendental."[73] Back in the Modern era of transcendentals, we are told to remember, back before the inconveniences Nietzsche and his students injected into philosophy, things were better because there were "truths in themselves,"[74] truths without the contamination of subjectivity or, put more directly, truths without that extremely bothersome element, people. "If man had never existed," Boyer recalls, "it could nevertheless have been true that the camel was, and the snake was not, an animal bearing mammary glands."[75] About that, he's surely right. But there remains the problem of the question; the problem, that is, of the sweeping question Nietzsche and then his readers conscientiously set before any assertion claiming to escape the limitations of place and time and individual perspective: while no one doubts that a camel could be a mammal with or without anyone saying so, can it still be true if there's no one to ask? The right answer is that it's best not to worry about that since sentimentalism not only teaches a longing for the past but also an overlooking of its difficulties. That's a notable advantage, in fact, of this particular relation between parts and the whole in philosophy; it coyly and convincingly promises that what we used to have is better than what we have now. And that promise leads immediately to an eminently reasonable and easy cure for the aches and imperfections of contemporary theory. Go back to unadulterated rationality, back to things in themselves, back to the nineteenth century, the eighteenth. Back to Kant and the transcendental. Back to what's clear and distinct. Back to . . . . Finally, back to Plato. All sentimentality eventually traces to him because his philosophy explicitly *is* sentimentality; it's literally about remembering the Truth, Justice and Beauty we all knew a long time ago.[76]

We don't need to spend our time reminiscing, though, because the part's relation to the whole isn't necessarily a reduction, it's not necessarily less than the whole. There's also a tenth part that crystallizes the whole, that *becomes* it, that may even be more than the whole and that can, therefore, escape the depression of sentimentality. Illustrating by reference to philosophic writings, sometimes a collection of paragraphs extracted from a book isn't so much a frail indication of what the entire book wants to say but a capturing of everything with greater clarity and force. With respect to Nietzsche, for example, a reader may be more affected and educated by reading selected portions of his *Gay Science* (that would include, say, Book 5 with the exception of paragraph 357 and would not include the poems) than by working through the entire book. Or, in De-

leuze's philosophy it's sometimes prudent to recommend that students read the first and third chapters instead of his entire book on minor literature. Further, a seminar class devoted to Deleuze may get more done in the same number of hours—or possibly in any number of hours—by discussing the introduction and just one of the internal chapters of *A Thousand Plateaus* (maybe "The War Machine") than it would by wading through every page of the prodigious book. I could go on with specific instances, but better to draw attention to a single, broad category of writings endeavoring to instantiate this crystallizing link between parts and the whole: anthologies. The anthologist's difficult task is to present contraction without loss, it's to challenge the whole with sharpness and impact but not with essential content. The anthologist's part, in other words, never tries to present its own thing but the entire thing more explicitly. It tries to become stronger than the whole while remaining within it and loyal to it.

Like the sentimental relation between parts and the whole, this anthological relation may be developed slightly further by formulating it as a response to the debilities and excesses burdening philosophy today as represented by French Nietzscheanism. The difference is that working within the anthologist's relation implies confronting the present and all its problems as opposed to retreating. Starting with a contemporary problem, Deleuze is frequently and rightfully accused of being needlessly opaque, as he is here: "Is it not necessary to retain a minimum of strata, a minimum of forms and functions, a minimal subject from which to extract materials, affects, and assemblages?" Deleuze is also criticized for occasionally tripping over the edge of absurdity. "God," he wrote, "is a Lobster." Now, these two sentences *are* difficult to explain and defend for Deleuze's sympathetic readers. They can be efficiently managed, though—within this conception of parts and the whole—by cutting them out, by not considering them to be part of Deleuze's collected writings. That's not to concede, importantly, that something of Deleuze is being cut out; the editing isn't some kind of readerly violence against him or his books. Instead it's the first maneuver of a defense of both under the idea that the part can be better than the whole, with the word "better" defined by the whole: the part is better because it presents the whole more firmly and cleanly than the whole itself. Another example of anthological thought mustered in defense of the present begins with this criticism of Foucault. "When asked why he never sketched a utopia, Foucault said, 'I

think that to imagine another system is to extend our participation in the present system.' Foucault was a lot better than this unfortunate remark would suggest."[77] What this commentator believes is that Foucault would have been *more* Foucault had he not made the remark. It's not certain. It's certainly possible, though, that advocating French Nietzscheanism—or any intellectual movement—in its late stages doesn't call for reading everything, the books, articles interviews and whatever else can be found and then pasting it all together as an awkward block of philosophy to be comprehended and upheld. Instead, advocating French Nietzscheanism in our time calls for carefully distinguishing and highlighting the strongest parts. And cutting the rest.

The third relation between parts and the whole is the decadent one. For decadents, the part relates to the whole in two ways. First, it participates in the whole; without that, it's not a part, just something else. Second, it contorts the whole into something different. Instead of referring to what the whole used to be and instead of standing for everything it can be, the part twists within the whole and rearranges everything it has been and is. I've already demonstrated this twisting within French Nietzsche-anism under the title of reversal and with these parts: a desire, a fear, a reason for a kind of writing, and nausea. What I'm adding here is that these parts rearranged into philosophy as dedicated to thought don't only reverse French Nietzscheanism, they also become its decadence as strictly defined. Not at all ambiguous and ephemeral, decadence's solid meaning is erected and braced by the reversed relation between parts and the whole. The fixed definition of decadence *is* the parts and whole *as* reversal. It's also this entire chapter.

Decadence's relation between parts and the whole guides a third response to our time's most controversial theoretical movement. The first took the parts as less than the whole and drifted backwards in sentimental reminiscence. The second construed the parts as standing for the whole and maintaining it; this is the anthologizing of French Nietzscheanism, it's firmly refusing to go back or move forward by defending the best of what we have as all we have. The last response is the parts as more than the whole. They cross through the whole, remake it and drive it ahead. As in this entire book.

Notes

1. Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, p. 80. (*Genealogy of Morals* Essay 2, Section 13.)
2. Fitzgerald, *The Crack-Up*, p. 271.
3. Kaufmann in Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 238.
4. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 22.
5. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 270.
6. Deleuze assembled numerous theoretical justifications for the noisy incongruity of his paragraphs. One of them is that a philosophy about constructing new conceptual ways of thinking calls for resistance to conformist developments of philosophic arguments. A book about thinking unconventionally, in other words, should be written unconventionally. [Deleuze, *Negotiations*, pp. 26-27.] This is plausible, but it doesn't explain why he chose this *particular* form of unconventionality. Postmodernism as uncontrolled obsession with truth does explain that.
7. Foucault, "Nietzsche Genealogy, History," pp. 53-54.
8. Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. 129.
9. Juan Rulfo as quoted (my translation) in the Mexican newspaper *Excelsior*, "La Cultura al Dia," 11 January 1986, p. 1.
10. Kaufmann in Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 1.
11. Kaufmann in Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 15. As for Nietzsche's pleas, see the end of his preface to *Daybreak*.
12. Kaufmann, in Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. xvii.
13. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 37. (Preface for the Second Edition, Section 3.)
14. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 271. (Book 4, Section 338.)
15. Deleuze, *Negotiations*, p. 171.
16. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 24-25.
17. Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text*, p. 7.
18. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. xi.
19. Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* p. 1.
20. Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* p. 2.
21. Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* p. 2.
22. Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* p. 2.
23. Writing this kind of book doesn't mean, for Deleuze and Guattari, writing something completely different. (If it were that, then an intellectual gift of the third age would mean a philosopher becoming a novelist or something similar.) Instead, it means referring to books already written like I referred to Deleuze's consideration of Descartes in the last chapter. It means taking parts of established concepts or books, extracting them, rearranging

them and putting them together with something else to construct a different concept or book irreconcilable with the previous.

24. Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* p. 2.

25. Sartre, *Literature and Existentialism*, p. 26.

26. There are other rhetorical axes that could be examined in the space between French Nietzscheanism and its decadence. To cite a single possibility, instead of discussing monographs versus aphorisms, "you" or "I" or "we" or "one" or "he or she" could map the shifting predominance of pronouns in certain academic writings with an eye toward determining why certain authors decide to write "I believe that . . ." instead of "One would think that. . . ." The idea would be to locate what, if any, fundamental aspects of the philosophy being done controlled how the author wrote that philosophy.

27. Proust, *Swann's Way*, p. 25.

28. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, p. 121.

29. Borges, *Ficciones*, p. 115.

30. The requirements for this kind of writing are not satisfied by simply papering over differences which is what, for example, Kant did when he introduced vague terms like "schematism" and "lawfulness" into his philosophy at points where he simply couldn't make two aspects of his thought fit together. It's also not satisfactory to simply unite ill-chosen words under a rigid structure of unity's absence: the free verse of the poets. It's also not satisfactory to present a contrived justification for any irregularities that will occur in a writing as Burroughs did when he—very conveniently—characterized *Naked Lunch* as "detailed notes on heroin sickness and delirium." [Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. ix.] After that introductory claim, if, for instance, a character doesn't do what his previous development suggests he should, then Burroughs can simply explain that the contradiction is not a pothole in the narrative's development but an effective illustration of the way heroin affects its addicts. Transferring Burroughs's cleverness back into philosophy, the same literary indolence can be detected in Wittgenstein's preface to his *Investigations*. There, Wittgenstein wrote that his original plan was to assemble pages where "thoughts proceeded from one subject to another in a natural order and without breaks." He continued, however, by informing us that "after several unsuccessful attempts to weld my results together into such a whole, I realized that I would never succeed." Next comes this flaccid pretext: "The best that I could write would never be anything more than philosophical remarks; my thoughts were soon crippled if I tried to force them on in any single direction against their natural inclination. And this was, of course, connected with the very nature of the investigation."[Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. v.] Of course it wasn't connected with the nature of the investigation. What it connects with is Kant's schematism and free

verse and Burroughs's presentation of his novel as the notes of an addict. What all these maneuvers against incongruity have in common is that, at bottom, they're only ruses; they're only excuses for not having to think.

31. Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text*, p. 6.
32. Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text*, p. 7.
33. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 25.
34. Deleuze, Gilles, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 145.
35. Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, p. 1.
36. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, pp. 344-45. (Book 5, Section 381.)
37. Kaufmann in Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, p. 60.
38. Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, p. 96. (*Genealogy of Morals* Essay 2, Section 24.)
39. Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, p. 4.
40. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p. 4.
41. Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, p. 17.
42. Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, p. 19.
43. Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, p. 18.
44. Providing one of the many important details that I'm leaving out of my discussion of Deleuze, he asserts that the formation of communities activated by minor literature happens in this specific way: it's not that the books in question say what everyone caught in their current was already thinking as though the words were simply waiting for a vehicle for their popularization; instead, it's that the written pages function retroactively. They bring communities into existence as those words that were waiting to be said. In terms of literary history, this translates into the qualification of *Pedro Páramo* (1955) as a novel on the way to Magic Realism only *after* the publication of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). Put differently, it's not that *Pedro Páramo* had to wait twelve years to finally be recognized as what it was; instead, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* made it be what it was and if García Márquez had not written then *Pedro Páramo* may well have been made into part of a distinct literary history, or it may have been simply forgotten altogether. Repeating the point about retroactivity in terms of specific social groups, those that a minor literature galvanizes—Colombians, Latin Americans—they hardly existed, and when they were brought into existence by literature they arrived as what had been waiting to be expressed. This doesn't mean, though, that the wait can be measured. It wasn't long or short; instead, the wait had no duration because it was produced by the same startling literary force that made the community.
45. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, p. 457.
46. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, p. 402.
47. Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, p. 17.
48. Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, p. 163.

49. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, Section 45. Taken from *The Portable Nietzsche*, pp. 549-50.

50. Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, p. 163.

51. Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground*, p. 26.

52. Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground*, p. 68.

53. Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, p. 163.

54. Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, p. 163.

55. This discussion of unsullied decadent truths could have been presented slightly differently and around this affirmation: within the range of strong decadent truths, the statements "Do unto others . . ." and "Don't do unto others . . ." and "2+2=4" and "2+2=5" are all indistinguishable since they're nothing at all.

56. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 253.

57. Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, pp. 40-41. (*Genealogy of Morals* Essay 1, Section 11.)

58. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 40.

59. Deleuze, *Negotiations*, p. 126.

60. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 22.

61. Deleuze, *Negotiations*, p. 14.

62. Deleuze, *Negotiations*, p. 14.

63. Deleuze, *Negotiations*, p. 14.

64. Deleuze, *Negotiations*, p. 14.

65. Ferry and Renaut, *French Philosophy*, p. xix.

66. Deleuze, *Negotiations*, p. 15.

67. I believe Augustine's students have not paid sufficient attention to his poverty and to the related question about whether the relatively comfortable life that the Catholic Church could afford him played a role in his final decision to become a Christian.

68. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 320. (Book 5, Section 364.)

69. Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, p. 13.

70. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 22.

71. Foucault, "Nietzsche Genealogy, History," p. 89.

72. A third and somewhat devious articulation of the same idea. If I actually formalized the essay about thinking I just outlined by adding the requisite number of footnotes, explanations, recognizable (for academic professionals) allusions, conclusions and possible criticisms of those conclusions, the finished product could easily be passed off as a piece of writing devoted to truth. Even though the essay's intention would be to provide instructions for speeding thinking, that intention could easily be hidden from the view of most readers with, say, a misleading thesis sentence and a few other cursory modifications. In the specific case of Deleuze and Guattari and

what I've cited from them, a falsifying thesis sentence could be formulated as a question: how does their working relation define the two as individuals? With this stationed at the essay's beginning, everything in the writing could be subsequently transformed into a fairly conventional argument about subjectivity. In line with standard French Nietzscheanism, the claim could be that Deleuze and Guattari were who they were because they did philosophy as they did. That is, instead of asserting that Deleuze and Guattari's identities came first and then were expressed by the styles of thinking they employed, they thought in certain definable ways and for that reason came to have definable identities. Next, and extending from that premise, a typical, contemporary affirmation of subjectivity's radical contingency could be formulated: *who* we are is as mutable and multiple as the various activities we undertake. Going on, the affirmation could be supported by referencing the first sentences of *A Thousand Plateaus*: "The two of us wrote *Anti-Oedipus* together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd." [Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 3.] And further support could be drawn from Foucault's insistence that "Nothing in man—not even his body—is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition." [Foucault, "Nietzsche Genealogy, History," p. 87.] And, just outside philosophy, more support could be added by John Barth's short story "Life Story." The accumulation of evidence could continue, but the basic idea won't change. It's that the essay I'm proposing about Deleuze and Guattari's thinking could easily be made into a highly orthodox piece of philosophy. The essay's principal elements ("Each of us falsifies the other," "Each morning during the composition of *A Thousand Plateaus* we would wake up and write five lines here, ten there," "We read not whole books, but bits and pieces," and so on) could all be presented as part of the accumulated knowledge gathered near Deleuze and Guattari on the question of what it means to be them. The resulting essay would be, consequently, a piece of Deleuze and Guattarian truth: it would tell the truth about who they were in a way sympathetic with their philosophic convictions. At the same time, though, the essay would do that as a concealment of its original and basic purpose, that of providing a set of guidelines to be taken and used as catalysts for working with *any* philosophic assertion including those antithetical to Deleuze and Guattari (including, as an extreme example, the assertion that individuals' actions reflect a fundamentally unchanging and knowable self). The essay, finally, would be superficially an accumulation of truth compatible with the ones normally arrayed near French Nietzscheanism and underneath that a recommendation that *all philosophers* laboring in the area of *whatever* truths should seek to energize their thinking by working with others in the ways Deleuze and Guattari demonstrated.

A similar strategy of deceit could be applied to Michel Foucault. The process starts by pressing his life through the political, economic, social, dietary, medical and physical forces that I've listed as intersecting with philosophizing. Then, a report first written to indicate how the forces could be channeled to stir up thought may be converted, with only minor modifications, into just another of those engaging maps Foucault and his readers consistently churn out, maps of the various forces and factors that combine to shape the way we understand the world's occurrences. In this case, the map would present a comprehension of Foucault in a certain context; it would explain some of what allowed him to produce the philosophic books he did in the way he did ("Without the political opening provided by the events of May 1968, I would not have had the courage . . ."). The essay would become a chart, in other words, of what afforded *Foucault* courage and opportunities instead of a recommendation that *all* philosophers seek, among other things, unstable political environments to energize their labors.

I could go on, but what's important about the essay I'm proposing is that it can easily be transformed; with only slight changes a writing composed to fuel philosophic thinking can be painted over in truth-centered colors.

Bringing this long footnote to a close, the reason for the transformation's ease is everything I've covered in this chapter; it's that philosophy in the name of truth and philosophy that has truths in the name of thinking cross through each other, they borrow each other's basic components and therefore, in practice (though not theoretically), can be nearly indistinguishable.

73. Ferry and Renaut, *Not Nietzscheans*, p. 17.

74. Ferry and Renaut, *Not Nietzscheans*, p. 17.

75. Ferry and Renaut, *Not Nietzscheans*, p. 17.

76. The first two pages of the introduction to Thomas Nagel's *The Last Word* are so highly sentimental that I cannot cite them without arousing the suspicion that I'm putting words into his mouth.

77. Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. 129.

Chapter Four

How Does Decadence Emerge from Objections to French Nietzscheanism?

It's not only critical elements of French Nietzscheanism that usher the philosophy to its decadence, the passage is also indicated and assisted by the increasingly strident objections the movement currently elicits. This chapter shows why; it shows how mounting denunciations press French Nietzscheanism toward the reversal between thinking and truth.

The passage to thinking and truth's reversal joins scholarship on Deleuze—and scholarship on the contemporary thought he represents—at the following already cited lines:

> Every time someone puts an objection to me, I want to say: Let's go on to something else because the aim isn't to answer questions, it's to get out.

How are objecting questions gotten out of? Not through resistance but by accepting the objections, by accepting them and then heightening and applying them so relentlessly that they go past their stated purpose and catalyze a reformation of what they meant to attack and terminate. In the area of French Nietzscheanism I'll apply this reformative strategy four times. Four times I'll honor Deleuze's imperative to not answer objections leveled against contemporary philosophy so much as get out, with the getting out going to decadence.

The first objection to French Nietzscheanism is that its suspicion of universal truth ends up ruining every possible truth. The total ruination happens because once someone gets on the slope down from perfect comprehension toward narrow, perspective understandings, there's no way to halt the reduction. The argument is that after rejecting any absolute truth for proving too abstract and hard-edged in the real flow of continuous reality, the same logic forces us to drop any certainty about, for example, Uruguayans this year. Then any assertion about Montevideans

in February falls apart. The localization could be pushed further, but at some point it becomes clear that each step down into specification isn't so much a refinement of understanding as the heightening of futility. For that reason, even the most stubbornly determined contemporary interpreter ultimately cannot avoid getting backed into this recognition: the same skepticism, the same suspicion that oriented theory away from universal and objective representations of the world will—if consistently applied—end up wrecking even the most cautious, qualified and subjective claims too. Every one of them. The unleashed Nietzschean offensive against Platonism rushes forward as the demonstration that even the most supple and localized descriptions still don't adequately cohere with even the slimmest experiences. One of the last stands comes as a retreat to Barthes's "This is how it is for me, now." All that does, however, is provoke more taunting: who are you and when was now?

This increasingly desperate situation is a theoretical construction. It's also a reality, one Richard Rorty witnesses in politically charged intellectual circles in America. "The Nietzscheanized left," he observes, "tells the country that it's rotten to the core, that it's a racist, sexist, imperialist society, one which can't be trusted an inch, one whose *every* utterance must be ruthlessly deconstructed."[1] Only one part of this perception needs to be modified. It's not hyperventilating political ideals left over from the late sixties and early seventies that drives the interrogation of every utterance, it's suspicion applied consistently. For French Nietzscheanism *to be* consistent, for it to avoid simply resenting the truths that happened to be current at the movement's birth—the metaphysical version as Hegel's Spirit, the end of history for Marx, the immutable secrets of the unconscious for Freud—for French Nietzscheanism to be more than hatred of that idealistic triangle, every one of its own claims about experience must be subjected to the same relentless scrutiny already applied to late Modernity's principal representatives. In social and political terms, this repetition immediately leads to a reality that has quite a bit to do with Nietzsche's legacy but not so much with the political left (or the right or the center). The reality, as Rorty testifies, is one where no utterance can be trusted. No matter how carefully crafted and limited, every assertion must be ruthlessly undone. And undone and undone again.

How should philosophy respond to this criticism of French Nietzscheanism as caught in a spiral of futility? I've already related Rorty's suggestion. Calm down. While it's apparent, for example, that sexism clogs

interpretations of what it means to exist as someone in the United States, the situation, as he would see it and put it, seems clearly better than the one Iranians endure. More generally, while no truth about a society, no interpretation of the divisions that organize it and no description of what roles should be assigned to which people seems flawless and perfectly defendable, that doesn't mean no description is better than another. Some are better, Rorty claims, and we should cling to those with only moderate suspicion. So, in response to the crumbling of Modern truths that grows into a contemporary avalanche wiping out everything all the way down to "That's it for me" and keeps going, Rorty's mellowed suspicion counsels that we simply stop theoretical criticizing—at least momentarily—when we reach an understanding of social premises and organization that seems preferable to the ones we've got. We should do that, Rorty pragmatically maintains, even in the face of the accusation that it's theoretically inconsistent because it's better to be wrong than doomed to constantly tear everything down.

With Rorty, decadents agree that there's a fatal problem inside any philosophy constantly insisting on ruining its own accomplishments. They respond differently, however, to the spiral of futility. Instead of defensively trying to alleviate it by slowing or pausing critical thought at selected points, they refuse to calm down, they reject Rorty's advice to allow some controlled inconsistency into their thought by driving toward one further understanding of reality still more compact and qualified than the previous. Then, and no matter how far an understanding has been refined, they yet again subject it to the test of unrelenting skepticism. Which has the effect, as the process churns on, of repeatedly raising and accentuating the level of hopelessness accompanying each increasingly fragile understanding until, finally, the desperation gains the force required to convert the ceaseless and self-inflicted ruination into—this is the decadent moment—the success of philosophy. The attitude emerging from the swell of hopelessness is that philosophy *must be* succeeding as it goes on because there's no other explanation for the fact that it keeps going, and keeps going while acknowledging the overwhelming discouragement attached to every new conclusion. All that needs to be explained, now, is exactly what the success is. The success is in liberating truths. Truths are liberated in the sense of an extremely prudent French saying that no one has a responsibility to try the impossible. That goes for French Nietzschean interpretations of experience. Their blatant inca-

pacity to maintain themselves or to be maintained, their constant collapse under the weight of the logic that allowed them, their inability to accomplish much of anything beyond stimulating the demand for still more critical labor in the midst of decreasing confidence in the resiliency and value of the results, these factors ultimately converge to free the interpretations from their impossible responsibility to tell the truth. And that opens the way for interpretations to serve some other purpose. Stronger, it opens the way for their unreserved dedication to the only purpose they can serve when the philosophy of suspicion is pushed all the way. The interpretations are dedicated to and exist exclusively to incite the next round of philosophizing.

The answer to the intrinsic, internal futility of French Nietzscheanism—the answer to the criticism that French Nietzscheans constantly need to undo every one of their own conclusions—is not to get trapped within the problem by temporarily postponing it with deep breathing exercises and flaccid pragmatism. Instead, it's a staunch refusal to resist the criticism. More, the answer is an unwavering determination to accept and then press the criticism relentlessly and to its fullest extension. Then, when it's fully extended what appears is not the termination of contemporary thought in a morass of futility but a way out of what French Nietzscheanism currently is. Finally, when that way out is taken—when the posed problem is used as a way of going on to something else—the going on goes to decadence.

Relentless French Nietzscheanism is the uninterrupted application of the logic of distrust to the philosophy of distrust. Every utterance, every interpretation, every concept no matter how localized and transient must be scrutinized under the same harsh light that Nietzsche first shined on the precedent tradition. The critical moment comes when mounting doubts and the accompanying frustration put philosophy's fundamental premise into question. It has been put into question. I mean, it's not that we *might* be at the point where we no longer believe in truth as something substantial and valuable apart from thinking, and it's not only that the devaluation of truth before thinking *could* be worth considering because an unavoidable theoretical problem inside French Nietzschean theory points in that direction or, more concretely, because the devaluation lets us explain a certain social situation that Rorty mistakenly attributed to leftist politics. Going beyond those theoretical and hermeneutic maneuv-

ers, there's also blunt reality; there has already been an explicit, unambiguous and documented diagnosis of contemporary philosophy reaching its acute stage.

In 1997, the Institute of Philosophical Investigations at the Mexican National University organized a conference on Donald Davidson. The main participants were front-line analytic theorists: Richard Rorty, Barry Stroud, Carlos Pereda. Akeel Bilgrami was also there and he contributed a breathtaking commentary on Rorty's discussion of Davidson's relation to Quine, Wittgenstein and Tarski. Among the more dazzling passages: "In Rorty's paper, Quine's view that indeterminacy in the realm of intentionality is over and above the underdetermination of physical theory is presented as carrying a prejudice against the intentional. Rorty says it is a way of denying factuality to the intentional, and. . . ."[2] The greater part of Bilgrami's presentation was consumed by similarly opaque sentences about a philosopher's relation with the relation between other philosophers, but, near the end, the rhetoric suddenly changed. "Intentionality," "underdetermination," "factuality," all those kinds of words along with their automatic substitutions here and there beneath one name and another suddenly got replaced with ordinary language, with words that expressed conviction more than technical challenges to understanding. What the replacement displayed is that near the end of his commentary Bilgrami actually began reflecting with some care on what was going on around him, he began honestly reflecting and drawing conclusions that he really believed in and wanted to present as clearly as possible.

What was going on around him, Bilgrami sensed, was—and is—French Nietzscheanism in critical condition. He said:

> I think it's urgent, especially in the academy today, to say that truth is, at least implicitly, a value. The sense in which truth is a value is not at all in the straightforwardly moral sense in which truth-telling is a value. It is a value which is much more abstract. Its abstractness lies in the fact that the liar who violates the moral norm of truth-telling also values truth. In fact, it is partly because he values it in this sense that he tries to conceal it or invent it.[3]

The reason, Bilgrami proceeded to relate, for his urgently insisting on an abstract value for truth was a disturbing encounter he apparently had, one with others who "fail to value truth in this more abstract sense."

Who, he continued by rhetorically asking, are these others? "The common sort of person in our midst, the bullshitter." And where, exactly, can these bits of intestinal waste in our midst be found? Among those participating in "the rampant and uncritical relativism of Postmodern literary disciplines."[4] Next, and after pausing at that stiff conclusion, Bilgrami continued by underlining that these Postmoderns aren't reprehensible *because* they're caught in a relativist current:

> Though I don't doubt that literary people in the academy have recently shown a relativist tendency, I wonder if that is really what is at stake. The point is analogous to the one I just made about the liar. The relativist also does value truth, in the abstract sense that I have in mind, even if he has a somewhat different gloss on it from his opponents. In fact, he too, precisely because he does value truth in this abstract sense, wishes urgently to put this different gloss on it.[5]

So, as opposed to, say, Rorty who esteems truth highly in the sense that he doesn't want to let vain aspirations for any final and best description of experience interfere with his endeavor to make better ones, the relativism Bilgrami sees going on around him and infecting universities today delineates a space for theory and theorizing that attributes *no* inherent value to *any* truth, not even the inverse value of something to be denied in its strongest form in order to clear space for weaker, descriptive affirmations. The relativism Bilgrami sees, in other words, isn't so much a displacement of firmly objective truths by tentative ones, but a crude disrespect for both, an obliviousness to the conviction that what should be sought before anything else is one or another kind of truth. Which means that the lesson to be learned about the contemporary academy

> is not that relativism is rampant in Postmodern literary disciplines but that very often bullshit is quite acceptable.[6]

When that happens, as Bilgrami perceives, truth has collapsed. It's not desired, it's not despised, in certain circles at least, it simply loses all innate value because no one cares about it. As is understandable, this reality—the realization of this reality—made Bilgrami extremely unhappy. It also led him to insist that at least *he* still believed in truth and further that

everyone assembled to hear his presentation did as well. More, according to Bilgrami's presentation, the belief "defines the possibility of philosophy as we are doing it in this room."[7]

Actually, the belief explicitly denied the possibility that philosophy happened in that room. For two reasons. The decadent one is that philosophizing is what happens just after the devaluation of truth before thought, so the maintenance of Bilgrami's "abstract value of truth" is the refusal to even begin doing philosophy. The other reason doesn't directly concern truth; it concerns questioning. Philosophy, *all* philosophy whether it's defined decadently or not, first asks about sacrificial desires, it asks what you want and what you'll give up for it. Those were Socrates's primary questions and our discipline has not and will never escape them. In the particular case that Bilgrami represents, the specific form of the perennial sacrificial question is: If contemporary theorists don't want truth, then what do they want, and why? Put differently, if truth holds no intrinsic value then any assertion philosophers develop and present can only be for something else. What's the something else? Unfortunately, Bilgrami wasn't able to get far enough away from his situation to ask this question; he wasn't able to see contemporary reality dispassionately enough and objectively enough to explicitly wonder what had taken truth's place at the core of our discipline's desire. Even so, Bilgrami did have the ability to identify contemporary theory reaching its critical stage. And that's important; it is because it demonstrates that while decadence emerges from an insuperable problem in the kind of thinking Nietzsche instantiated, the *existence* of that emergence isn't a speculative conception about what could be happening around us. The existence of theorizing that's not for truth isn't some kind of tentative and limited French Nietzschean interpretation, it is—and Bilgrami would be pleased to read this sentence—a fact.

Like all facts, this one only becomes substantial when set at the right place. The place for this fact is at the end of the following reasoning. First, consistently suspicious French Nietzscheanism twists back against its own truths; every assertion no matter how restricted always needs more work. Second, the inexhaustible need for more work weakens and eventually collapses any truth's claim to autonomous value. Third, this ruination of truth doesn't necessarily ruin philosophy, it can also indicate a way for our discipline to go forward. Fourth, the forward direction is truths *receiving* value by being set into the service of thought; it's truths

existing only to incite more thinking. It's decadence. Fifth, decadence *has* to be *the* direction for those caught in the wake of French Nietzscheanism because it's the only way to keep doing philosophy without absurdly denying the relentless suspicion that got everything going in the first place. Finally and after this reasoning there comes a cold, practical question. Does the reasoning firmly attach to contemporary reality or is it only innocuous speculation? To show that it connects with reality I briefly sent this book to a place where the rhetorics of "intentionality," "underdetermination," "factuality" and "bullshit" are calmly and knowledgeably exchanged; I sent this book, in other words, as far away as possible from the language, temperament and labors of French Nietzscheanism. I did that to get an independent observation of theory's condition in today's universities. The report I found is confirming evidence that what a basic problem inside French Nietzscheanism forces to happen *is* happening. What's confirmed is that "it's urgent, especially in the academy today" to see that while philosophizing is going on, philosophy's traditional devotion to truth isn't.

The second problem rising alongside French Nietzscheanism is that it's hard to kill God. In the most literal, theological terms, it's hard because satisfying the central Nietzschean desire for divinity's termination requires an even more metaphysically powerful and imposing Assassin. Alternatively, if God is represented Platonically then affirming death means simply exchanging "There's Truth" for "It's True that nothing's True." The flat contradiction, it hardly needs to be noted, means this attempt to murder God gets botched to the point of philosophic suicide. The suicide repeats in another version of the mortality problem, the one understanding God as a guarantee for rationality: a rational argument constructed to nullify God actually nullifies the argument and an irrational argument simply assumes what it's trying to prove. Further examples of mismanaged executions could be listed, but through all of them there winds a single, plain error. In one way or another, direct attempts to dismiss God, Truth, Rationality and so on end up reinforcing them. Driving this conclusion into the heart of contemporary philosophy, since it begins with God's end, the mortality problem threatens Nietzsche and his advocates from the moment they get started.

To this threat, there are three basic responses. The first is surrender. Nietzsche's founding premise is hopelessly damaged and philosophy

should retreat to Plato, Augustine, Descartes, Kant, Hegel and so on. The second and standard contemporary response is Lyotard's celebrated distrust of metanarratives, it's that recent philosophy isn't set directly against God but only works from the suspicion that He doesn't exist. As facilitated by this suspicion, our time's leading thought can go on while fending off the sharpest edge of the mortality problem since noncommittal doubt replaces an explicit and absolute assertion that needs to be proven and can't be. Still, simply deciding to think without God doesn't vanquish the problem, it only delays any final judgments.

The third response isn't a direct reply but a clean escape from the entire difficulty; it's a way out of the mortality problem lit by the one claim that permanently lays it to rest. The claim is that *it doesn't matter* whether God lives or dies. We need to be careful here, though, because it won't suffice to simply and bluntly assert this irrelevance. The direct assertion's not enough because it implies that philosophy is trapped in the problem, it implies that the assertion of irrelevance is negative and reactive and depends on the previous existence of the question about death. To avoid the mistake, the claim that it doesn't matter whether God is or isn't must be presented as nothing more than a secondary effect; it must be a byproduct, an afterthought of a distinct and positive affirmation. The most directly positive affirmation fulfilling the requirement is decadent, it's the imperative to accept and employ *any* truth that can be channeled into philosophical thinking's acceleration. With this imperative activated, the judgment about God alive or dead—the decision to do philosophy in the shadow of Plato or in consonance with Nietzsche—will necessarily be made as a simple effect of another decision, one about thinking. As a result, and since the decision is made to make the decision about God in terms of whether He effectively impels philosophizing, the mortality problem ends. It's not resolved but it drops toward the inconsequential since the question about God is no longer primary and controlling; the primary and controlling questions concern what He can do for the discipline if He's taken to exist and how the discipline can prosper if He's presumed dead. So, where God used to be maintained at the beginning of thought either as what we're for or as what we're against or as what we doubt, now, He's no longer the beginning (or the end), God is just another truth that gets crossed along the way. Along the decadent way, that is, out of the mortality problem.

Certainly, it's not necessary for philosophy today to follow this route. Still, the pressure of the mortality problem, its weight and stubbornness increased by its troubling location at the center of French Nietzscheanism agitates for the decadent release.

The mortality problem opens a separate route toward decadence by displaying a tangible advantage of philosophy that wants thinking over any philosophy that wants truth. The advantage emerges from the version of the problem undermining the notoriously—though in practice only incidentally—wrong French Nietzschean mantra that since God is dead there are no facts, only interpretations. The qualification "incidentally" is, in my experience, appropriate here since I don't know anyone who fails to see that "Everything's interpretation" immediately contradicts itself. Most of the people I've heard employing this or similar phrases don't mean them as universally and objectively right; instead, they're used as orienting beginnings for investigating and writing. Then, later on when the investigating is done and arguments need to be tightened up to publish an article or book, the contradiction is neatly erased by adding a few hesitations and switches into the subjunctive. It's *so* easy, in fact, to make these little changes that capable thinkers, it seems to me, sometimes don't bother. They simply go on without getting bogged down in explaining—for the hundredth time—that they really only *suspect* nothing's perfectly true and therefore everything's interpretation. Correspondingly, I believe that when most fair-minded readers cross through one or another version of this assertion, they don't stop to mutter accusations of incoherence, they simply continue reading by implicitly making the elementary adjustments necessary to hold ideas together. The evidence, however, indicates that my assumption about how fair-minded readers deal with the various forms of "Nothing's true, everything's interpretation" is not entirely correct. I don't know how else to explain why so many anti-Nietzscheans take so much trouble and amounts of their readers' time to ponderously explain that and how the proposition refutes itself. For example, guardians of our discipline's promotion of meticulous, unblemished certainty can only be grateful to Alain Boyer who offers this remarkable articulation of the mortality problem:

> The proposition *a* is logically equivalent to the metalinguistic proposition "'*a*' *is true*" (Tarski). To say with Nietzsche that "there is no

> truth" is to say "It is true that nothing is true," which is not, *stricto sensu*, paradoxical, but equivalent to the statement *p*: "All sentences are false," which cannot be true (because if *p* is true, it is false).[8]

While it's not a metalinguistic proposition and I can't appeal to Tarski, it's nonetheless reasonable, I hope, to assert that Boyer wouldn't have published these not entirely elegant but nonetheless highly logical and persuasive sentences (assuming a metalinguistic proposition can safely be inked onto a piece of paper) if he didn't have a very good reason to suppose the existence of theorists who have trouble figuring out that "There's no truth, everything's interpretation" can't be true. Wherever they are, they locate a place where Boyer's argument deserves respect and cautious attention.

What's important about this respect and attention is that it catches French Nietzscheanism in a predicament more serious than the verifiable incorrectness of the movement's guiding slogan. The deep difficulty, in fact, doesn't even occur on the level of verifiable reasoning, it occurs on the level of Nietzschean desire. There, as I've related, the only dubiously controlled yearning for even the narrowest sliver of knowledge vivifies the "Nothing's unequivocally true, everything's interpretation" rallying cry and subsequently fills the pages of Nietzsche's books, Deleuze's, Foucault's, Barthes's and so on. Boyer, as is clear, rejects all those books, and that brings us to the start of the predicament: in accordance with the desire that makes them, French Nietzscheans don't have any choice but to embrace Boyer for the rejecting. This doesn't mean Nietzscheans have to admit that their kind of philosophy starts from a contradiction. As I've already noted, sidestepping that accusation is a rudimentary maneuver. Still, and on the level of desire, because French Nietzscheans want every shred of understanding they can possibly reach as fast as possible, they're forced to recognize that what Boyer's doing is legitimate, even valuable. They're *constrained* to recognizing and accepting those things because Boyer's argument is admirably tight, seamlessly presented. And that recognition brings the predicament into full view. The desire driving French Nietzscheans forces them to embrace triviality as long as what's trivial happens to be right.

Decadents don't have this problem. They even can't have it because trivial reasoning—no matter how impeccable—slows thinking down. Making the slowing concrete within the Boyer example, if an undergra-

duate considering taking a philosophy class came to me and asked what kinds of things we'd be doing during the semester and I replied that we'd be studying metalinguistics and Tarski and Boyer's adept use of them in "The proposition *a* is logically equivalent to . . ." the student would take a moment to fight through the language, eventually determine what was being said and promptly decide to seek intellectual challenges elsewhere. As for the jargon (metalinguistic, *stricto sensu*), if the prospect of learning new and different words seemed attractive, better to enroll in a Spanish course. As for the truths, what they teach in geography is more demanding than "The proposition *a*. . . ." With these conclusions reached, any student really interested in studying would immediately dismiss my class; more, the student would be freed from any intellectual or academic responsibility to even consider enrolling in it. Next, and moving the example upward theoretically, decadents have the same freedom. It's a tangible freedom marking a substantial advantage decadent philosophy holds over French Nietzscheanism and any theorizing directed toward truth: just as any student would perfectly reasonably and entirely justifiably skip a mentally calcifying class in favor of some other, so too decadents can shamelessly skip over Boyer's argument and go on to other readings that better stimulate their primary and guiding desire to philosophize.

This advantage can be restated on a more human and more telling level, that of simple pride. Starting at the beginning again, the difficulty philosophers primarily oriented by the desire for truth face is that they have no choice but to seriously consider Boyer's argument; they have no option but to respect it. And that implies occupying themselves with it which means *belittling* their own capacities. Next, this belittling can be effectively gauged if you happen to have teenage children and try explaining to one of them that part of your job is to make judgments about "The proposition *a*. . . ." If you do have a teenage child and try that, you will very quickly find yourself (still further) reduced in your progeny's estimation. Decadents, on the other hand, don't have to endure this particular humiliation. In accordance with their privileging of thinking's acceleration over any truth's instantiation, they can offer a good reason—a rationally coherent reason—for removing any consideration of Boyer's sentences from their job description.

To broaden the point, this predicament Boyer set in front of current Nietzscheanism is, I believe, a specific version of a thick, practical obstacle occasionally blocking all philosophers: what can be done with con-

ference presentations, journal articles and books that are right and persuasive but perfectly obvious, painfully belabored? Surely, we want to dismiss them, but how can we *justify* that? How can we establish as something more than bored impatience the refusal to read beyond the first pages of, say, Thomas Nagel's *The Last Word* after determining from those pages that the book will amount to little more than a multiple chaptered repetition of Boyer's already monotonously prolonged argument? Within philosophy conceived as love of truth, it's difficult to satisfactorily answer that question; it's difficult to justify the decision to ignore what's right. It's not at all difficult for decadents.

The third objection to French Nietzscheanism is probably the most frequently repeated. The complaint, elicited by social preoccupations, is that if everything's just an individual's interpretation then there's no firm ground on which a philosopher or anyone else can stand before others to argue for resilient and broad definitions of words including good, bad, right and wrong. Occasionally theorists attempt to minimize this debility—and minimize it without entirely suppressing individual initiative underneath an immutable and repressive code of regulations—by accepting rules for action proceeding from the consensual agreements of a rational community. Killing another, to take a stark instance, is established as wrong and regardless of how the culprit understands the act not because it intrinsically is wrong but because we citizens have soberly deliberated and firmly agreed to construe it that way. This softened version of contemporary theory, however, leaves behind the task of telling the truth about what exactly constitutes a sober and firm rational agreement, and that's one of the main things French Nietzscheans, especially as represented by Michel Foucault in *Madness and Civilization*, fear we can't get entirely straightened out. Fortunately, the forces of social order are almost never assigned to read Foucault and equally rarely instructed to understand that everything's interpretation so we don't have to worry too much about violent criminals roaming the streets.

Or, at least that's the way it should be. The real problem comes when the French Nietzschean respect for individuals' unbounded freedom to interpret their own actions strays off campus. When that happens, according to Alain Renaut and Luc Ferry in their *French Philosophy of the Sixties*, the ideas commonly associated with Foucault and his generation can only elicit strong objections based on fear of disastrous chaos in the pub-

lic realm. Now, as was the case with the two problems raised by recent theory that I've already covered, I'll recognize these social concerns not with the hope of dispatching them or alleviating them, but to show how decadence emerges from them. In the following paragraphs, which focus on Foucault as Renaut and Ferry audit his legacy (and which could easily be transferred to other leading French Nietzscheans), decadence will emerge from the tense space between Foucault's extremely liberating theoretical ideas and the grating realties of life with others as it goes on outside the university's placid confines.

Inside the university, Renaut and Ferry methodically document, Foucault's sophisticated and for that reason sometimes oblique adherence to the suspicion that everything's interpretation[9] was manifested as a steadfast effort to protect individuals' freedom to *be* interpreters. One of the notable effects of that effort was a strong resistance to any social institution's domineering intrusion upon individuals' liberal construction of their identity. As an example of such an intrusion that, admittedly, overlooks Foucault's subtlety but nonetheless captures the main idea, a judicial system working through inscribed laws may inspect the actions of my body and rule that they are criminal; then it may move on to persuade me that *I am* that criminal: the judge offers to reduce my sentence if I admit guilt and say I feel guilty. After the admission, the result is, I know myself. The knowledge, however, doesn't reveal my powers to form an identity so much as it reflects a functioning judicial process. Further, and this is the aspect of institutional power that elicited Foucault's most critical attention, that process may abruptly change its mind about me and for me if, for instance, the accepted understanding of a certain law gets modified. Me as a low criminal may abruptly convert into me as an adept professional responsibly serving the human needs of others if I happen to be a medical doctor and if the meanings of legislative dictates concerning euthanasia are revised. As is obvious, the revision could later be sent back the other way and drag a subsequent reconversion of my identity along behind. Regardless, the central idea is that it doesn't matter what particular bodily act gets inspected and it doesn't matter what social institution renders judgment, what matters is the imposing process of defining who I am and the fact that it restricts or entirely usurps my power to do the defining. This imposing process is called "subjugation"[10] by Foucault, and one way to broadly summarize his philosophical writings is as pages of resistance to it.

To effectively resist subjugation (at least within the arid world of philosophy), the theoretical rules underpinning its functioning must first be identified. On that front, Renaut and Ferry present a sweeping, two-part review of the basic mechanisms Foucault spotted for subjugation's action. First, according to Renaut and Ferry's Foucault, the individual can be imposed upon by regulations for understanding that don't belong to the flesh and blood person and that don't belong to any flesh and blood person. The obtrusive symptom of this imposition is alienation from myself as well as everyone else as occurs, for instance, with Kant's demand that we make ethical decisions in accordance with universally applicable and never contradictory imperatives. The considerable advantage of such imperatives belonging to no one is that they enjoy immunity from any greedy self-interest. The disadvantage is the consequent subjugation of individual bodies underneath dictates that don't have anything to do with those bodies because I am who I am—I'm the one who does or doesn't do what I should—as determined by a set of perfectly inhuman standards. The second broad way that subjugation functions is by pushing an individual seeking to know him or herself through a representation of that self, through a model that can be held in our hands as though it were a doll or anything else that may be costumed in one way or another. The euthanasia example I outlined just above fits within this scheme, but a more scholarly reference is Freudian analysis which dives into a person's thoughts, yearnings and memories, delivers them into full view and then organizes them in accordance with a particular analyst's training to form a diagnosis of—an identity for—the patient. Now, when subjugation is in effect this diagnosis isn't cut to fit the patient, it's tailored to a model of the patient; it fits a representation formed not so much from the particular individual's unique expressions (recollections, problems, seemingly trivial remarks and so on) but by recourse to rigidly preestablished ideas like the Oedipus complex. Even so, the diagnosis and corresponding identity is applied to the particular individual who's subsequently constrained to conform to the model. In directly practical terms, one of this imposition's results is patients trying to please their psychiatrists by being healthy and sick in the ways they're told they're healthy and sick. ("Yes Doctor, I *have* always felt an unspeakable curiosity about my mother.") Next, subjugation heightens as Freudian frameworks for understanding selves are uncritically administered to increasing numbers of patients. At

the worst extreme, a single, inflexible model is popularized until it covers all patients.

For my purposes, it won't be necessary to consider these two often discussed structures of subjugation at greater length. Rendering them neatly before going on, in one case Kant as an individual is lost in rules that by definition come from beyond the realm of individuality: he and the rest of us are all subjugated by what is not anyone. In the other case, Freud's, he's lost in rules that do come from tangible experience (surely someone once really did suffer something like the Oedipus complex), but the rules develop into inflexible, abstract models as they're applied with decreasing precision to an increasing number of people: we all come to be subjugated, the maximum result is, by what was someone but now belongs to no one. In either case, what Foucault continuously and vehemently rejects are dictates—whether they're imposing universal laws or compelling models transferable from one body to another—that curtail our freedom to understand ourselves and our experiences. In fact, Foucault does more than reject these two mechanisms for liberty's negation; as an authentic product of the hyperbolic Parisian year 1968 he stamps them with the word "catastrophic."[11]

With the catastrophe of subjugation defined, Renaut and Ferry next consider some of the things Foucault was doing when not in his office contemplating the horrors of being someone. One of the things he was doing, they gleefully point out, was drafting his own declaration of human rights.[12] More, they note, this wasn't an isolated lapse. Foucault, when outside the university, was frequently involved in social and political causes that often seemed to operate by doing just what Foucault spent his time in his office despising. Specifying within a declaration of human rights, it's difficult to see how such a proposal could have any practical value in the real world without being a subjugating force of one of the two kinds listed above. No matter how nuanced the declaration may be, no matter how carefully elaborated to protect your and my liberal ability to define our own form of life, it still seems that either these announced rights must be inspired by some reality beyond individuals and therefore subjugate you and I under something that's not anyone, or, they must come from one of us but to be *human* rights, to be enforced generally, they need to shed that individuality. The latter possibility is, obviously, the applicable one here, but either way and following Foucault's own reasoning a declaration of human rights—*any* declaration of human rights—

wavers near catastrophe. What Renaut and Ferry hurry to point out is that, in this case, the catastrophe is for Foucault because he "so ardently cultivates inconsistency."[13] Their verdict, whipped as it is across a location as tender for Foucault (for reasons his biographers have chronicled) as human rights, is sufficient to summarize Renaut and Ferry's final judgment about this particular French Nietzschean.

With that stated, it can be added that to Renaut and Ferry's credit their writing isn't limited to punishing a dead philosopher who enjoyed tremendous success; their elaboration of Foucault's shortcomings also opens the way to an important line of general debates. The first of those debates surrounds this question: can someone simultaneously disdain subjugation as Foucault along with the other leaders of his generation's philosophy did *and* defend political positions in the real world in a way that we may recognize as effective, as broadly applicable and tangibly firm? Renaut and Ferry's sharp response, it hardly needs to be stated, is no. To answer yes "cultivates inconsistency."

The swift resolution of that question leads to another. Which part of Foucault (and, according to Renaut and Ferry, one or another form of this divisive question could be cut through most of the major figures associated with French Nietzscheanism) should be preserved? Do we keep the philosopher's repulsion for subjugation or the social activist's advocacy of human rights? The rights, Renaut and Ferry propose. Their argument for that—which has the advantage of letting them go in the direction they want while also tarnishing the brilliance of their predecessor—is potentially powerful, but also entirely negative. It has two parts. One, Foucault's philosophy was unoriginal, he copied most of his ideas: "Foucault" Renaut and Ferry assert, "equals Heidegger plus Nietzsche."[14] Two, Foucault's academic books were frequently and simply wrong; his characterizations of history, for example, are demonstrably mistaken: "The interpretation," Renaut and Ferry find, "that should be made of the phenomenon of incarceration during the Middle Ages is the opposite of Foucault's from every point of view."[15] From these two conclusions Renaut and Ferry form the broader argument that since what Foucault did in his office was significantly flawed, if we're going to follow his lead then we should probably follow when he's leading toward something other than strict philosophical investigation.

Foucault's academic books speak for themselves and he hardly needs me to defend him. In any case, I'm not interested in detailing and then

trying to overturn Renaut and Ferry's verdict concerning Foucault's philosophical merit; I want to stay centered on the problem Renaut and Ferry present in order to indicate one of the things that happens when Foucault gets pushed, hard, by it. To be as clear as possible here, the problem stated again: Foucault inside the university rails against subjugation while, apparently incompatibly, Foucault outside the university makes an appeal for human rights. Faced with this divergence, there are three clearly visible responses. First, follow Renaut and Ferry by getting rid of Foucault's philosophical efforts and keeping the rights. Second, we can try to alleviate the problem by carefully reading Foucault's philosophy books and his declaration of rights with the idea of reconciling them. The third response is the decadence of Foucault. Get rid of the human rights and keep the philosophy.

I don't mean we should get rid of human rights generally and reconsider the lives of Lincoln, Stalin, Gandhi and everyone else solely by reference to their philosophic acumen; what I mean is that the problem Renaut and Ferry attach to Foucault in their philosophy book is eliminated if *as practicing theorists* we simply don't evaluate ideas with respect to the social effects they might have in the world beyond university libraries. If Foucault's intellectually stimulating labors on the question of subjugation finally bend him into a posture that cannot fit together with a defense of fundamental rights then that happens, but the posture doesn't effect the way we think about Foucault's books insofar as they're considered within the university and as a function of their ability to participate in academic philosophy. It must be added here that this irrelevance of social concerns shouldn't be conflated with the sourness of a failed revolutionary whose frustrations finally harden into callousness, and it's not a childish delight in scandal as there's no desire to exasperate other professors or society here. Instead, the dismissal of social considerations derives from and is a secondary—though inescapable—effect of the tunnel vision closing around all those who reverse the relation between thinking and truth. The dismissal is an incurable symptom of decadent myopia; it's nothing more or less than a consequence of the imperative to read books *exclusively* for their capacity to excite philosophers to do more philosophizing.

Empirical evidence proves that Foucault's investigations of how individuals can be and are defined powers highly sophisticated and meticulous philosophizing; a quick check in any academic library will turn up publication after publication dedicated to cautious elaborations, modifica-

tions and extensions of Foucault's theories. It will also turn up—problematically for the decadent appropriation of Foucault—social and political involvement. I mean, if you actually take the trouble to go over to the library and begin reading through some of the numerous books and articles Foucault's work has inspired and supported, it won't take long to discover that many of their authors are explicitly concerned about human rights and related questions; they're overtly interested in how Foucault's writings can be employed to better actual lives in real societies.[16] In fact, Foucault has become a magnet for university professors actively (occasionally overbearingly) interested in social justice theory, critical legal studies, practical ethics and a constantly expanding list of mobilizing titles implying ideas for transmission over the university's walls and into protest marches, judges' chambers and legislative hearings. That, like the fact that Foucault's truths fuel intense philosophy, is clear to anyone who bothers to look.

It's also and equally clear that these academic transmissions are frequently too garbled to have predictable effects. While a number of recent philosophy's leading names and most intriguing words—Foucault's power/knowledge along with some of Deleuze's jargon and probably most obtrusively Derrida's deconstruction—have reached the educated edges of mainstream conversations about our society, the way the names and terms are actually bandied about in those exchanges is about as good a proof as we're going to get that everything really is just interpretation. To underline that, pages of citations from widely circulating newspapers and magazines could be accumulated here, but reading them would be so painful that compassion recommends the examples be limited to one. One I recently happened to scan in the *Washington Post*: "It's Eric Scholar's muck-and-Big-Mac-raking task in *Fast Food Nation* to deconstruct the food-industrial complex."[17] Moving on, it's not difficult to ascertain the reason sentences like this pop up with some frequency when newspapers directed toward mass readership invoke contemporary philosophical scholarship. It's that philosophical scholarship is virtually impenetrable for most people who write for newspapers and also for most of those who habitually read them, and, more generally, for most people who actively participate in substantial real-world discussions. This isn't to assert that accomplished newspaper reporters, their readers, committed workers in non-government organizations, justice advocates, successful politicians and so on are all dull-witted; it's simply to note an immediate conse-

quence of an important requirement for academic manuscripts. The requirement involves time and starts with this fact: when you or I devote the hours necessary for reading the largely untested pages of a contemporary we need to take the same hours away from other pages, from those written by Plato, Augustine and Descartes just to begin. I doubt any of us have read everything even these three authors left behind, though all of us would like to have read them completely. For that reason—because we haven't done the reading and want to—every contemporary publication is necessarily thrust into a battle against tremendous odds; time for an unproven book published yesterday versus time for one of the best books ever published. Those odds need to be cut down. Which means, among other things, that today's authors can't explain every little detail of what they're doing. To take the readily available example of this book, I had to take it for granted that most readers have a general idea of Foucault's theories. If I'd mired this chapter in a seventy-page explanation of Foucault's notion of subjugation from the ground up then you wouldn't be reading this sentence. With that in mind I covered the Renaut-Ferry-Foucault question of subjugation in only a few paragraphs. Maybe that was too much. In any case, I expect most of us can agree that this uncertainty represents one of the most difficult aspects of academic writing: striking a balance between explaining things as clearly as possible in order to incorporate more than fifty readers in the world and at the same time not explaining so much that the fifty best readers (those who produce the most fecund criticisms and extensions) summarily deposit the book in the trash can. Of course it's *possible* to get the fifty best along with comprehending attention from a broad swath of the rest, but authors who do that are exceptional; they evidence the rule more than working against it. The rule is that academic writing turns its back on any broad readership. To publish a book, even one that enters the most topical and widespread debates about our society's condition, most professional theorists need to sacrifice direct engagement with the general public and therefore the possibility of effectively participating in those debates.

If that's right, then the situation you and I find ourselves confronting every day in our offices parallels the one Renaut and Ferry set up next to Foucault. Which direction: philosophy or social involvement? Rewriting the question in terms of decadence, what kind of truths: ones that breed incestuously by stimulating interested and interesting responses from other academics or accessible ones useful in the public realm?

The impulse is to say both, to make an attempt for both no matter how daunting the task may appear. In most cases, that's the right response. But this is where Renaut and Ferry come back: for them it's not the right response. At least it's not for philosophers working near the conflict between Foucault's vehement philosophy as resistance to subjugation and his publicly oriented ideas about human rights because, they argue, in that area it *can't* be both. It has to be one or the other since philosophical conclusions sympathetic with Foucault's hatred of subjugation cannot aspire to public application—they can't be enforced in any practical way—without threatening to become impositions upon individuals and therefore undermining their own effort. Taking one further step within Foucault's rejection of subjugation, since any endeavor to shape a society (or guide it or control it or whatever other word might be inserted here) immediately becomes a euphemism for intolerantly denying individuals the right to uninhibitedly make sense of themselves and their experiences, the only way philosophy can surely avoid disabling itself is by not inspiring those, by not even connecting with those who make decisions projecting broad social effects. As a result, choosing philosophy within Renaut and Ferry's bind, choosing to use Foucault to do philosophy also and unavoidably implies the following somewhat comforting, somewhat discomforting acknowledgement. There's no reason to want conclusions that circulate among those actively seeking to effect palpable lives in quotidian communities. Philosophic writing that's clear and comprehensible in the eyes of outsiders is emphatically not preferable to writing that's not clear and comprehensible for them. More, theorizing within the confines Renaut and Ferry build around Foucault implies wanting ideas that *don't* circulate; to avoid the risk of disabling itself, theorizing should deny the very idea of philosophy's dissemination through the public realm. So, in the end, deciding to join the philosophizing Foucault instead of the defender of human rights Foucault implies two related consequences which are also two conclusions about our discipline's labor. First, the decision reserves philosophical work for philosophers. Second, any impulse to write in ways that are accessible and comprehensible for those who aren't like us is suspended.[18]

This suspension is not a form of elitism. Elitism means that when our books refuse to engage a wide public of readers we understand the refusal against a backdrop of sheer ability; the refusal communicates a doubt about whether others will prove able (will be smart and wise

enough) to understand and correctly employ our paragraphs. This doubting isn't what Foucault and philosophic work concerning Foucault lead to, though. Instead, they lead to a question about whether there's any reason *why* people who don't spend a lot of time in front of the library shelves where Foucault's books and those concerning him are stored would want to read and understand those books regardless of whether they're readily comprehensible or not. The answer Renaut and Ferry force is no. It must be no because treating Foucault as a philosopher is simply incompatible with trying to interest those who have any interests beyond the most personal and sequestered philosophical investigating. This, finally, is decadence as it emerges from Renaut and Ferry's objection to Foucault and, more sweepingly, it's decadence emerging from their objection to him as a representative of French Nietzscheanism. What emerges is an opening in contemporary thought toward the possibility of pursuing inquiries in the social vacuum of silent libraries while leaving the truths that result from those inquiries sterile in common experience.

The word sterile in the last sentence needs to be removed from the idea of philosophy producing books that have nothing to do with common experience as no one could write a book like that; there wouldn't be anything to inspire it. For philosophizing to happen it must touch and share the vivifying elements of actual, common lives. Even so, philosophy can still be sterile in this sense: as subjected to thought, everything about actual lives is construed only as material for study. Instead of examining incarnated experiences to explain what real people do or should do in our shared world, things real people do are extracted and isolated in the name of decadent philosophy. Sterility as the word's used here, therefore, doesn't signify the absence of feeling, it implies that the sensations of our lives are unblushingly used to drive theorizing ahead.

Setting this drive within Renaut and Ferry's bind, if we're in it and if we use Foucault's books to do philosophy then you and I and others can't be invoked—we can't even *be*—in any other way.

Decadent others are those who exist for thinking, those whose substance is philosophy. It's just this kind of other—this way of conceiving of others—that Renaut and Ferry tried to get away from by denying Foucault's academic accomplishments. As I've reported, their denial was

double: Foucault's labors were plagiarisms (they equal Nietzsche plus Heidegger), and when Foucault wasn't copying he was wrong ("The interpretation that should be made of incarceration during the Middle Ages is the opposite of Foucault's from every point of view."). With these conclusions reached, Renaut and Ferry determined, Foucault *as a theorist* is cancelled; his work should no longer generate more cloistered labor and his discipline can stop conceiving of others as objects for thought while reconnecting with them as flesh and blood people. Philosophy can, as Renaut and Ferry put it, be "seduced" by the call of "responsibility."[19] As for that seduction—and the responsibility it entails for philosophers to engage constructively in discussions about serious problems facing real (extra-academic) communities—there's certainly nothing reproachable about it. Similarly, there's nothing obtrusively flawed in the reasoning Renaut and Ferry followed to reach it. The seduction does, however, have the power to distract readers of *French Philosophy of the Sixties* from a particular interruption on the way to Renaut and Ferry's hope for a post-Postmodern future of socially responsible theorizing.

Renaut and Ferry implicitly acknowledged the interruption when they wrote: "No doubt our book, in its rustic will to clarify debates, to identify positions, to reveal contradictions, will be called simplistic, an amalgam, and negative reaction will frequently limit itself to pointing out that things are not so simple, and that the questions are more complicated than they appear, and so on."[20] About their book, the authors were surely right. As anyone who's read it along with Foucault's theoretical writings knows, the questions *are* more complicated than Renaut and Ferry make them appear. Simplicity doesn't mean that an argument's mistaken, though, and, in any case, clarity doesn't interrupt philosophy's progress toward social involvement. What does interrupt that progress, however, is the following. Renaut and Ferry's disparagements of Foucault will, as much as anything else, contribute still more flammable pages to the academic fire drawing philosophy to him and therefore distract the discipline from its socially responsible future. Renaut and Ferry even stoked the distraction in the preceding citation, as they do throughout *French Philosophy of the Sixties*, by directly and somewhat condescendingly addressing Foucault's defenders. Their rhetoric, obtrusively aggressive as it is, seems formulated not so much to persuade as to elicit antagonistic responses, and the responses, besides being antagonistic, will tend to compress debate onto a dense theoretical (not at all socially involved) level. The com-

pression can be illustrated quickly around the specific arguments Renaut and Ferry set against Foucault. Starting with the first—Foucault criticized as being little more than Nietzsche plus Heidegger—it immediately elicits counter-writings about the relation between one set of ideas and two others; it induces demonstrations that Foucault's proposals amount to more than those of his predecessors or are at least distinct in certain substantial ways that can be carefully described. While it's difficult, obviously, to foresee the results of those studies, it's not difficult to see the following. They will happen at a remove from the kinds of questions philosophers would like to see considered when they're interested in bringing philosophy to the people. They will happen at a remove, for instance, from eminently practical questions about how Foucault's writings, say *Madness and Civilization* and *Discipline and Punish*, could positively influence contemporary public debates concerning insanity and delinquency (Does Foucault help us sort out when a malefactor should be allowed to plead innocent by reason of insanity, or does he guide us toward a decision about how the dangerously insane should be contained?). The studies will also separate from questions about Nietzsche and Heidegger and how their writings relate to, among numerous possibilities, the very real-world problem of anti-Semitism. Instead of these investigations—ones potentially and broadly useful for people who've never heard of Foucault or Nietzsche or Heidegger—what Renaut and Ferry instigate won't make any difference for people who aren't philosophers. Stated slightly differently, what Renaut and Ferry provoke are clarifications of where ideas come from instead of explorations of the tangible effects ideas may have; they prompt considerations of how Foucault's determinations relate to Nietzsche's and Heidegger's instead of concentrating attention on *whether* those determinations help us better understand insanity or delinquency or religious discrimination or, in general, whether Foucault's, Nietzsche's or Heidegger's affirmations should be adopted by you and I and most everyone else. The adoption question is, in a word, irrelevant. It can't be relevant because the philosophy Renaut and Ferry heat up is about and between theories, not about theory and theorists in the world. The result is that all three figures in question here—Foucault, Nietzsche and Heidegger—are little more than labels for thoughts. They are three people who are not you and not I and not even flesh and blood. They're decadent others. Their lives are for the production of undiluted philosophy in

the constricted area of thought about whether Foucault equals Nietzsche plus Heidegger.

A similar conclusion emerges from Renaut and Ferry's argument that Foucault's interpretation of incarceration in the Middle Ages is "wrong from every point of view." The conclusion that Renaut and Ferry don't bend philosophy toward social responsibility so much as incite work involving decadent others emerges because responses to their argument will concern a past that exits into contemporary reality only so that Foucault may be refuted or verified. The past that Renaut and Ferry invoke exists as little more than a narrow philosophical question about who's right. And if that's all the past is, if it's only a place we go to check and see if it's Renaut and Ferry or if it's Foucault who happens to be correct, then philosophy is turned away from a nearly limitless set of conscientious studies that could solidly answer Renaut and Ferry's call to responsibility. Philosophy is diverted from investigations including: how past events (practices of incarceration in the Middle Ages being the immediate example) can be folded into applicable lessons for making prudent decisions about incarceration today, and under what conditions, and with what qualifications, and for what specific social purposes and so on. By criticizing Foucault as they do, consequently, Renaut and Ferry effectively neutralize their project of carrying philosophy into the public realm. Worse (or better, depending), they do that in a specifically counterproductive way. Their objection converts those who lived in the past as well as their experiences and also those involved in considering them—Renaut, Ferry, Foucault along with we who respond to their disagreement—into the material of a debate that's academic in the sense that it's tangibly significant only in the academic world. Renaut and Ferry's objection to Foucault has the effect, that means, of reducing the past's inhabitants along with the rest of us to existing only as compositions of philosophically saturated concerns.

Finally, none of this is to assert that Renaut and Ferry are mistaken about Foucault. It's difficult to be certain about their Nietzsche plus Heidegger criticism and nearly impossible to be sure how incarceration in the Middle Ages should be understood. For us to accept Renaut and Ferry's reasoning, though, for us to arrive at their conclusions and consequently join them in turning away from Foucault's theory in order to turn our discipline toward substantial participation in important, public discussions, we'll first have to work on their arguments, we'll have to test them.

And regardless of where the testing leads, it will be an interruption in what Renaut and Ferry want philosophy to be. The testing will be philosophy about—and by—decadent others.

The testing will also be the teaching of a basic lesson about the reversal between thinking and truth. When Renaut and Ferry put philosophical conclusions that they considered to be plagiarisms and mistaken in a position to drive theory forward, their work immediately became a clear example of how nearly *any* truth—even hackneyed, repeated ones, even ones that are wrong—can potentially be directed into the generation of thought.

The directing is especially striking in Renaut and Ferry because it carries them so far away from where they claimed they wanted to go. From where they claimed they wanted to go instead of simply from where they wanted to go because it's not at all clear that Renaut and Ferry's stated intentions correspond with their conduct. I mean, if Renaut and Ferry had really wanted to activate our discipline's effective participation in society then they presumably would have done the activating, which implies two tasks in the area of Foucault very different from their particular assault on his theoretical claims. Starting with the obvious one, they would have shown how Foucault's activities outside the library—his declaration of human rights and so on—could work positively out there. They didn't show that in *French Philosophy of the Sixties*. That's only a detail, however. More important is the other task their sense of social responsibility implies: it's the dismissal of Foucault's academic endeavors without encouraging their reemergence as a center of purely philosophical debate and production. As I've related, Renaut and Ferry didn't accomplish this task either, but if they would have made the attempt they would've quickly discovered that the accomplishing is very easy. All that's required is to ignore Foucault's philosophy books. As a precedent and guide for this strategy of oblivion, if one's needed, there's the outline Kafka provided with "The Hunger Artist," his portrayal of the man whose subtle display of starvation with respect to food was finally surpassed by starvation for public attention. Transferring Kafka's short story over to Renaut and Ferry's philosophy, if they wanted to stifle the pernicious effects of French Nietzscheanism then all they had to do was follow Kafka's example. They didn't. They didn't ignore Foucault's academic writing which is to say they couldn't resist (there's no speculation here about *why* they

couldn't resist) doing and inciting philosophy in the area of truths that, within the boundaries of their own argument, hold no value as truths, that don't even tell the truth.

In the end, Renaut and Ferry's objections to Foucault move in two directions, then they confront us with a decision. Following their authors' ostensible intention, the objections free our discipline to be seduced by the call of responsibility, they free us to work effectively in the world everyone shares. Regardless of the intention, though, the objections also show the way to books stripped of any value except the one they hold for philosophers forging ahead in the company of only themselves and in accordance with their own specialized interests. The subsequent decision forced by the divergence is a stark one between two vocations. In this book, the decision won't be made. There's no reason for me to make it because I'm not trying to promote social responsibility or decadence. What I'm trying to do is determine where decadence comes from. In Foucault, it comes from Renaut and Ferry pressing him until a clear division opens between the seductive call of responsibility and what's most captivating, invigorating and original about *French Philosophy of the Sixties*.

The fourth objection to French Nietzscheanism is that it occupies the leading edge of philosophy's imploding range of widely acknowledged competence. It seems as though it must have been a very, very long time ago when our discipline's leader could, seemingly effortlessly, produce his time's pivotal ideas across the sciences, history, political theory, psychology, ethics, literature, rhetoric and the arts. Of all these fields the natural sciences, we know, were the first to entirely break away from our control. By developing a unique set of exacting rules for determining success and failure, a highly specialized language, a distinct group of major figures, a number of practical techniques for training the next generation's participants and the rest, scientists carved out an independent domain of competence within what used to belong to us. Subsequently, and repeating the pattern, nearly every new field of the social sciences and liberal studies has also marked a diminution. The establishment of distinct academic departments for political science, psychology, literature and other discrete areas of investigation are not only scenes of increasing specialization and intellectual advancement but also of philosophy's recession.

During pessimistic moments they're even scenes seeming to harbinger a final surrender in and to the university that used to be ours.

It's not Nietzsche's fault, or Foucault's or Deleuze's. It started long before them and, if the past provides any indication whatever about the future, the losses will continue accumulating even as their influence fades. Further and in defense of recent Nietzscheans it should be noted that Deleuze along with several other adventurous members of his generation and theoretical persuasion have resisted the seemingly perpetual withdrawal from authority by daring to push their work toward the most distant areas of philosophy's original dominion. For the most part, however, those were only tangential efforts and, in any case, far from encouraging more forays into ancient philosophical territory they provoked a backlash of criticism leaving behind the impression that a typical French Nietzschean's field trip to an advanced physics seminar or sophisticated chemistry lab would more likely result in a student protest march or noxious explosion than any new discovery.[21] The results have been different—both better and worse—with respect to history (Nietzsche, Foucault), cultural anthropology (Nietzsche, Bataille), political science (Nietzsche and nearly all his recent readers), psychology (Nietzsche, Deleuze along with Guattari), rhetorical and literary theory (Nietzsche, Deleuze, Foucault, Derrida). The results in these areas have been better because French Nietzschean labors seem to have had legitimately positive effects; they've been recognized as thoughtful contributions. The results have also been worse, though, because the result of the results hasn't been more responsibility for philosophy so much as a repetition of the Aristotle effect: professionals in other fields take from us what they can most directly use without bothering to learn about other philosophers or the discipline generally. While, say, contemporary literary theorists have all studied Deleuze's *Kafka*, Foucault's "What Is the Author?" and Derrida, it's equally true that Augustine, Descartes, Kant and most of the rest of philosophy's main figures have been left stumbling about near the edges of their peripheral vision. To the degree that's right, it's also right to conclude that the main thrust of the most serious work attributable to French Nietzscheanism fails to reverse the history of philosophy as contraction, as withdrawal from sweeping authority.

The contraction can be observed not only by counting the number of times our books get checked out of the library by students and professors who aren't working in philosophy departments, it can also be heard in

language. On that front, most readers of this book are like myself, I imagine, in that we occasionally fight through a journal article or book by an unrepentant analytic thinker because it's amusing to see how blatantly simple ideas can be rendered opaque, falsely profound and, in the most ridiculous cases, entirely impenetrable by the unique jargon of our discipline's most steely-eyed branch. "Quine's view that indeterminacy in the realm of intentionality is over and above the underdetermination of physical theory is presented as carrying a prejudice against the intentional. Rorty says it is a way of denying factuality to the intentional, and. . . ." Unfortunately, that entertainment goes both ways. There's a lot of comically bizarre language scattered throughout the pages of French Nietzscheanism and even throughout its most adept standard-bearers: "Is it not necessary to retain a minimum of strata, a minimum of forms and functions, a minimal subject from which to extract materials, affects, and assemblages?" Difficult is the right word here, as in difficult to imagine that someone who wasn't well versed in Deleuze could make much sense of this without finally laughing at the time lost in the effort. Obviously, the defensive response would be that *all* advanced studies develop their own obscure language. Even the basic Newtonian claim that Force equals Mass times Acceleration isn't readily comprehensible in ordinary contexts. What's the mass times acceleration of a forceful argument? While it's not easy to answer that, it nonetheless *is* easy to see the benefits the assertion's general form allows; they're palpable and perfectly comprehensible for all of us every time we cross a bridge or fly in an airplane. Philosophy, by contrast, doesn't possess many tangible, quotidian secondary effects to brightly reflect our achievements. For that reason any admiration we manage to evoke has to come directly from our words. This is part of what makes startlingly clear writers like Plato, Nietzsche, Richard Rorty in the United States, Carlos Pereda in Mexico, and Renaut with Ferry in France so valuable for our profession. It's also part of what makes certain pages of French Nietzscheanism so withering, so regressive, so frequently in front of philosophy's historical retreat from broad claims to competence and wisdom.

It bears repeating that the argument isn't against French Nietzscheans as the only philosophers in retreat. The losses started long before them and will probably go on after them. There is a particular area, though, where the contemporary Nietzschean contribution to withdrawal has been singular and remarkable. Since Socrates set Western philosophy

in motion one of our discipline's strongest claims to authority has been staked on the territory of strictly rational argument. Philosophers have been those who, more than others, have been willing to take any stranger as both their adversary and their judge as long as the stranger agrees to this rule of engagement: conflicts must revolve only around recognizably valid and clearly stated reasons. The physical strength of an antagonist is immaterial as philosophic reasons are immune to brute force; economic might isn't measured either since reasons can't be bought or sold; the flowery elegance of a discourse projects no influence; the number of people who can be mustered to stand on one side or another of a debate doesn't count. With these and similar factors eliminated philosophers have always been confident—have always insisted—that they'll be the ones most able to impress and persuade reasonable interlocutors. Until Nietzsche. Or, until French Nietzscheanism as presented by its detractors including Renaut and Ferry because for them the movement is perversely dedicated to "hating the practice of argumentation"[22] that Socrates pioneered and that contemporaries including Jürgen Habermas in Germany are nursing today. The allegation of hate, as Renaut and Ferry aim it, goes directly at the contemporary maxim that "Everything's interpretation" as pushed vigorously, as pushed out to Nietzsche's snide question: "What have I to do with refutations?"[23] And as pushed to Deleuze's impudent "I am not appealing for any man's verdict."[24] And to the "That's it for me!" extreme in Roland Barthes. And to Lyotard's sweepingly irreverent disposal of Habermas in *The Postmodern Condition*, especially the small book's last pages. The defiant references could be multiplied but what they all have in common, what they all trace back to, is the following core element of French Nietzscheanism. A particular philosopher's free interpreting is constantly privileged over the critical evaluation of the interpretations by others. The defiant references, in other words, all reveal a hatred of argumentation growing from a fear that willingness to take any stranger as a judge—the submission to universal reason and reasons—will hinder the liberal, individualized production of creative understandings steadily charging contemporary theoretical work. With that established, with intellectual individualism obstinately located at the center of French Nietzscheanism, Renaut and Ferry go on to assert that its representatives have no choice to but to retreat from the "public sphere of argumentation."[25] Or, better to write that French Nietzscheans simply do retreat as an inescapable effect of their unrelenting dedication to flagrant-

ly personal truths. However it's written, the result is an abandonment of what was, at the start at least and in the public square in Athens, the one certain place where philosophers could defend themselves and their discipline with tenacious, frequently irritating success. To the extent, finally, that the abandonment happens, French Nietzscheanism takes the contemporary lead in relinquishing one of philosophy's last serious strongholds: legitimacy in the eyes of reasoning strangers.

The end of appeals to those strangers elicits this version of the objection to French Nietzscheanism as collapsing philosophy's range of competence and authority:

> Nietzscheanized theory is extraordinarily self-obsessed and ingrown, as well as absurdly over-philosophized.[26]

There are two accusations in this sentence from Richard Rorty, both very specific. The first is that Nietzsche became extraordinarily self-obsessed and ingrown in Paris, which is significantly worse than weak and futile because philosophy has almost always been weak and futile in the sense that when we try to defend our work outside our section of the library, we usually end up being over-matched. In the natural sciences, for example, people who stopped reading Aristotle and spent their time mastering calculus turned out more able to predict the future locations of orbiting bodies than those bringing a textured and subtle knowledge of the ancient Greeks to bear on the problem. In similarly practical but more humanist endeavors, politicians and social activists have overwhelmingly proven that mobilizing support for their proposals doesn't require the distraction of some metaphysical truth or Kant's moral imperatives or the hope for an elaborately constituted rational consensus; instead, much more is accomplished by relying on the expertise found in advertising agencies. Consequently, while philosophy has been losing ground right from the start there at least has been a mild consolation stretching from one side to the other of the slow collapse: there probably wasn't much we could do about it anyway. That consolation is gone now. The description of French Nietzscheanism as "extraordinarily self-obsessed and ingrown" is the charge that its representatives have, at least frequently, turned their attentions entirely back into themselves. The losing fight for authority has

been replaced by not fighting at all; feeble resistance has decayed into outright resignation.

"I think," Deleuze said in an interview, "that there's a public for philosophy and ways of reaching it, but it's a clandestine sort of thinking that reaches them, a sort of nomadic thinking. The only form of communication one can envisage is the Nietzschean model of an arrow shot by one thinker and picked up by another."[27] These lines—seemingly written to amplify Rorty's objection to Nietzscheanized theory—characterize philosophy as addressing a nameless public, but one composed of strangers completely different from those Socrates entertained. Deleuze's strangers are limited to other philosophers or, more narrowly, to other philosophers who've been versed in the rules of clandestine thinking. So, where the word stranger in our discipline used to apply to a broad public, to everyone with a disposition to be persuaded, the word now only applies to those who already know, to the few, to the particular nomads who recognize Nietzschean arrows when they see them. As for the rest, to the extent Deleuze really believes that "the *only* form" of philosophical communication is through covert messages he also believes in giving up on them. He believes that instead of openly trying to influence the discipline's traditional outsiders philosophy should slip into secretive shadows where it can go on almost without being seen or heard.

What remains after this slipping into ingrown self-obsession are two alternatives. One is a dead-end, literally; it's a possibility continually rehearsed by young philosophers faced with mounting bills and the prospect of still another conference next month where adults who intentionally dress poorly will spend countless hours deploying their readings of Deleuze's Leibnizian text and intervening with Foucault's notion of transgression and tracing the meaning of a palimpsest put under yet another erasure. . . . Faced with the prospect it's hard not to wonder about the profession's always open back door. Most philosophers occasionally waver on that threshold, I suppose, and when they do they resemble intellectual movements: both philosophers and kinds of philosophy can be entranced by the melancholy possibility of disappearing without anyone noticing. The other alternative for any self-obsessed theorizing is equally inconspicuous but not at all flaccidly melancholic. It's a refusal to silently go away, it's French Nietzscheanism as separating from the tradition's strangers but not from philosophy. If this is the direction that's followed, then it's difficult to see how contemporary theory

can lead anywhere but down a cramped passage of increasing concentration and acceleration. Like the work of a scholar locked in the office, no French Nietzschean writing, no insight, no distinction, refinement or conclusion, nothing produced can have any use or anywhere to go but back into churning thought as leverage for continued investigating. Under this regime, nearly the only approval any truth can attain, almost the only value it can have, is the one granted by other philosophers because it enables them to carry on with their marginal and disciplined occupation. If this, finally, is where philosophy goes after dismissing strangers then, according to Rorty, it's going into something substantially worse than resigned self-obsession, it's going into the region marked by the second part of his objection to Nietzscheanized theory. It's going into the extreme of truths only serving more philosophizing, the extreme of the "absurdly over-philosophized."

French Nietzscheanism exemplifies overphilosophy. Because it's not only that, however, because it's so much more than that, it's difficult to find the bleak condition explicitly conceded by its leading practitioners. Still, Deleuze approached the concession when he characterized philosophy as a clandestine effort. He also approached it much more substantially with an entire book, with the one he wrote on Kafka. There, the concession appears as an effect of his study's findings and more tellingly as an effect of the fact that he did study that irregular author. First and with respect to the reams of specific findings Deleuze assembled from Kafka's material, many are doubtlessly provocative but, Rorty as a critic of overphilosophy necessarily responds, provocative isn't enough. As he wants to identify and object to theorizing curling into itself he insists upon asking whether the understandings Deleuze produced manage to break out of intellectual claustrophobia; as a critic of overphilosophy Rorty wants to know whether Deleuze's *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* makes a difference for those whose experiences aren't entirely philosophical. The question can be concretized with a typical excerpt from the book, one where Deleuze examines the peculiar "Investigations of a Dog" and determines that "the expressions of the solitary researcher in Kafka's story tend toward the assemblage of a collective enunciation of the canine species, even if this collectivity is no longer or not yet given."[28] Now, there's a lot to unpack here but with respect to the overphilosophy question it will be enough to note the following. On one side Deleuze

would maintain—he does maintain—that his concept of a "collective enunciation" may be valuable for you and I as a way of comprehending some parts of our experience together in the world we share with others who don't do philosophy. On the other side, though, even confirmed advocates of Deleuze's work like myself have to admit that it's legitimate to wonder whether descriptions of a canine species can be moved into the human realm as anything more than theoretical curiosities. Around this single debate an entire academic book of elaborate arguments about metaphors and communities and so on could be written. More, a book sympathetic with Deleuze's aspiration to do more than produce rarified theory could even be written very easily because he makes a strong case for his claim that Kafka's stories, including the one about dogs, do transfer into lessons about existence in the quotidian, human world. Still, it's not clear that actually making this case will resolve the question. It's not clear because no matter how strongly Deleuze argues for a connection between his interpretations of Kafka and common reality, and no matter how well his argument may be promoted by other philosophers, there remains a simple fact that's extremely difficult to overcome. Given the *audience* that finds Deleuze's writing and writings about him both comprehensible and gratifying, what any effort to resolve the overphilosophy question will very probably do as much as anything else is repeat it. It will ask once again whether Deleuze's reading of Kafka connects theory with customary reality or separates theorists and their reality from others unlike themselves. Inserting this into Deleuze's rhetoric of the clandestine, a book composed to terminate the overphilosophy question will end by raising doubts about whether its ideas are for those many strangers who may be persuaded within a reasonable discussion or for those few and familiar philosophic strangers who know how to find Nietzschean arrows and shoot them further ahead.

In the book you're reading now arguments could be formulated on one side or the other, but better to step up a level by asking not about particular readings of Kafka but about the fact that Deleuze chose Kafka to read and write about. Why? Of all the literature in or near the canon, why select this author and everything marginal his irregular stories and fragmentary novels represent? For Rorty, or for anyone standing guard against overphilosophy, the suspicious question can be phrased this way. Did Deleuze choose Kafka as a subject for study to imply that his theorizing seals out normal reality just as Kafka's weird literary pages seal it

out? More penetratingly, was Deleuze *attracted* to Kafka because he felt that others could only perceive his writings as Kafka apparently felt himself to be perceived, as bizarre, as frightfully removed from regular existence, as—in accordance with *The Metamorphosis*—a kind of ghastly beetle? There are two answers. The relieving one is that Deleuze didn't study Kafka because he felt so queer. If that's the answer then Rorty's objection to French Nietzscheanism is supported. It's supported because while the interpretations Deleuze crafted from Kafka's broodingly eccentric pages are no doubt stimulating, they aren't applicable to Deleuze's experiences in the common world. And since the interpretations aren't applicable there, they're left to be little more than encouragements to write more theory about aberrant life (as an insect, or as one of Kafka's other animal protagonists: a dog, a mouse, a mole). The interpretations are left, it follows, to be little more than inducements to more interpreting. The other answer moves along a different path but comes to the same end. The answer is that Deleuze chose Kafka because he *did* believe Kafka sympathetically portrayed his condition. If that's the case then Rorty's accusation of overphilosophy is supported very graphically because if Deleuze as a philosopher felt like Kafka's literature, if Deleuze sensed that he was only capable of writing sentences that most others would perceive as inexplicable beetle-warblings, then it's difficult to imagine any option but the one Kafka described for Gregor and seemed to adopt for himself. Deleuze should hide in his room, bolt the door and pass the hours immersed in a theoretical existence that hardly connects with anyone else and relates to little more than what he's doing. That leaves Deleuze doing isolated work and then constantly more on the way to interminably affirming that he and his writings are strange, not fit for presentation to society, even absurd. Absurd, Rorty comes in here, in the sense of "absurdly overphilosophized," absurd in the sense of thought that can only be dedicated to more philosophizing. The broad result is that it makes little difference whether Deleuze chose Kafka to write about despite his feeling removed from Kafka's extraordinary writings or because he identified with them; either way, his decision transforms him into a subject of Rorty's criticism.

No doubt a more complete study of Deleuze could blunt the criticism. No amount of studying, however, can completely blot out the reality that *all* French Nietzscheanism edges toward Rorty's overphilosophizing extreme to the extent it's guided, as it so often is, by the singular

desire to explore the most dissident realities. Foucault's career began with a study of madness. Then *The Order of Things* "arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought."[29] Foucault also signed his name to *I, Pierre Rivière, having slaughtered my mother, my sister and my brother*. . . . No further examples from this author are needed. Moving to another, Roland Barthes's *Pleasure of the Text* found literary eroticism in pages that some refuse to recognize as literature and that almost everyone refuses to recognize as erotic. The refusals didn't stop Barthes from insisting, though, that "the pleasure of reading is like the untenable, impossible, purely novelistic instant so relished by Sade's libertine when he manages to be hanged and then to cut the rope at the very moment of his bliss." Next, and retreating to one of the first installments of French Nietzscheanism, Georges Bataille began his *On Nietzsche* with this forbidding announcement: "Motivating this writing—as I see it—is a fear of going crazy."[30] If the book's last words are to be trusted the fear was well founded: "The tragedy of reason changes to senseless variation."[31] Quickly cutting back to Deleuze, he revered Kafka, was enthralled by everything "minor" and, as a habit amply demonstrated by his entire book on Kafka, joined his colleagues in exhorting readers to seek and investigate experiences, desires and decisions that need to struggle just to seem plausible. As for the outcast episodes he and other French Nietzscheans along with their advocates try to grasp, there's no doubt many are intellectually arousing but they're also and equally dangerous in this sense: every time work is oriented toward the rarest and most distant occurrences there's a risk of being caught in Rorty's snare. There's a risk of being forced to concede that interpretations, conceptual understandings and, most generally, philosophic truths only have meaning for and only hold the interest of those who want to do more philosophy.

In the end, the Deleuze and Kafka episode as framed by Rorty's objecting to Nietzscheanized theory can be inserted into the long history of our discipline's progressive narrowing of authority to produce the following account of the contemporary. The narrowing begins reaching the present as philosophy only working for strangers already versed in hushed, clandestine rules for thinking (philosophy as extraordinarily self-obsessed and ingrown). Then, the narrowing culminates as those strangers thinking in directions and about subjects so remote that all their conclusions can be good for, all they can productively do, is generate still

more sequestered theoretical labor (overphilosophy). While this description of the restricted present is certainly far too neat to be considered exhaustively accurate, it's nonetheless accurate enough to yield an abrupt prescription for French Nietzscheanism. Stop doing it. We should stop, Rorty insists, because it's tightening philosophy into a detached intensity that, for him, can only be absurd.[32]

Is it? Does Rorty's accusation even make sense? Does it make sense to accuse an artist of being absurdly artistic? Or to discredit a just act as absurdly overjustified? Can a piece of reasoning prove absurdly reasonable? To ask the same question more prosaically, can, say, chocolate be absurdly overchocolatized? Doubtless, Jean Baudrillard should be consulted here. I won't go in that direction but it's worth noting that Rorty's disparagement of Nietzschean theorists begins as oddly as the marginalizing subjects those philosophers frequently take up. On the other hand, the response comes back that, really, it's not so complicated or unusual since many typical things can be overdone. An apology. Sugar in the dessert. Still, I'm not sure about philosophy. Because I'm not sure, Rorty would probably suspect I haven't read his whole book. The book in question, the one from which I took the objection to French Nietzscheanism as overphilosophized, is *Philosophy and Social Hope*. It could just as easily have been titled *Philosophy for Strangers*, philosophy, that is, for Socratic strangers, for the ones we were once trying to find and debate and enlighten. Taken as addressed to them (while being read by us), the book forms a clear, easy-reading argument against our discipline as generating into an overdriven vocation by explaining and exemplifying how it can be protected from that extreme. According to Rorty, philosophy is protected—it's maintained at a sensible intensity and kept under temperate control—when it seeks "to interest an audience wider" than the one normally hovering around university libraries and when it endeavors "to improve our public institutions in such a way that our descendents will be still better able to trust and cooperate, and will be more decent people than we ourselves have managed to be."[33] It's for just those reasons, Rorty underlined in his book's preface, that he put the collection of essays together. Those reasons also explain why the essays are unburdened of nuanced allusions to other major figures and oblique references to highly specialized debates, or, as Rorty discretely put it, those reasons explain why his book "contains fewer footnotes" than those written by most philoso-

phers. However it's put, the idea is that thinking is safely removed from the vertigo of overphilosophy when it can circulate among and interact with strangers to the discipline on the way to making them more trustworthy, cooperative and decent. Stated in that abstract way, Rorty's enterprise surely seems beneficent and commendable. And because it does it also recommends that the rest of us participate in this project of bringing theory to the people. Among the many possible ways of contributing we can aspire to do the kind of inspirational writing that fits comfortably underneath the rallying slogan Rorty adeptly composed, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, or his achingly motivating title for an earlier book, *Achieving Our Country*. (I wonder if these rousing calls could be made even more compelling by adding exclamation points.)

The preceding lines—especially the parenthetical one—sound, I admit, snide, and philosophers who still believe in strangers would surely like to cut in here with the complaint that I'm rudely trivializing Rorty's admirable hope for a better society. It looks like I'm not giving his efforts a chance and just covering good intentions with the snottiness that pervades our nasty profession. That's not what's going on, though. Far from revealing me as sullen and disagreeable the cynical reaction was nearly necessary, an almost inescapable symptom of an honest consideration of Rorty's attempt to join philosophy with uplifting social hope. To confirm that, take the book's essay "Failed Prophecies, Glorious Hopes." This title, too obviously, is already highly suspicious and unfortunately the elicited worries are extremely rapidly confirmed by line after line of pronouncements including and resembling: "The rich will always try to get richer by making the poor poorer."[34] Now, to this universal claim there are two obvious (for those who are philosophers and for those who aren't) reactions. Both are questions. First, while, say, the early automobile barons definitely got rich and then richer, is it really true that those living through Detroit's piercing winters feel their lives getting poor and then still poorer because they no longer have to mount the sagging back of a plodding mule to reach the university library? Assuming Rorty could get that straightened out, the second question for his assertion about the rich and poor is: How can teaching readers to unabashedly despise the wealthy help us all trust and cooperate and live together more decently? The answer's not immediately evident and Rorty obtrusively doesn't tell us in his presentation of philosophy as social hope. He does, however, go on to affirm that his sour tonic shouldn't be reserved for the rich; more

of it should be poured over those who happen to be born to wealthy parents. These infant bundles of humanity, Rorty warns, are destined to merit any advanced society's spite because they (and then their children and then their children's children) will necessarily grow up to carry on a set of reprehensible family traditions always accompanying wealth's accumulation. "In every imaginable situation," Rorty inform us, "the people who have already got their hands on money will lie, cheat and steal in order to make sure that they and their descendents monopolize both forever."[35]

After that ranting announcement, I'm tempted to immediately close an argument. The argument is that objecting to French Nietzscheanism because it takes the contemporary lead in our discipline's withdrawal from broad claims to competence in the eyes of strangers is only superficially persuasive and, more significantly, potentially counterproductive. With respect to the superficial persuasiveness, while no one disapproves of the idea of philosophers participating constructively in public life, the idea isn't sufficient. For it to be anything more than a pleasantly vacuous notion those promoting it must demonstrate that they *can* participate constructively. If they can't then their hopeful idealism isn't even that. It may be, however, counterproductive. Counterproductive because the criticism of French Nietzscheanism as tending toward overphilosophy converts into a reason for accelerating the process: if those who actively promote our discipline's involvement with all strangers in the name of trust, cooperation and decency only enlighten them with envy and resentment, then the way is cleared to the assertion that society will be best served by those philosophers whose work never leaves the library. The way is cleared to the conclusion that all of us will benefit from philosophy books guided by the sole purpose of generating still more of them.

The way is cleared to that conclusion, but it's not reached. It can't be reached: the determination that philosophy should appeal only to its own strangers is as impossible to reach as it is to exhaustively demonstrate that in every imaginable situation all philosophers' attempts to use their distinctive skills and knowledge for something other than the production of clandestine books will result in festering bitterness. That simply can't be demonstrated; it's not true. Even so, the work I'm doing here isn't affected because I'm not trying to persuade anyone that philosophers can best serve their communities by veering toward decadence, I'm only interested in seeing where decadence comes from. I'm trying to show how

a specific contemporary objection to French Nietzscheanism opens the movement toward writings that exist only to drive more thought.

Going back to Rorty's indictment of overphilosophy called *Philosophy and Social Hope*, an indefinite number of pronouncements resembling those already cited in tone and meaning could be added here. Since many hinge on clauses allowing no exceptions—certain people "will always" try to make the poor poorer, "in every imaginable situation" certain children will become liars, cheaters and thieves—it would be easy to go through them and show one by one that they're plainly, empirically false. That would, obviously, be an academic exercise. It would find a comfortable place in philosophy's oldest tradition of separating assertions that are right from ones that aren't and it would also be the discharging of a professional responsibility, of the responsibility to participate in the evaluation of our discipline's books so that students in the future can go straight to the most thoughtful ones while interminably leaving the rest for later. Doing that in this book, one that will gain attention only from other philosophers and that will in turn succeed or fail as measured by the discussion it generates among them, could even be conceived as a decadent exercise. It would be that, in fact, if it managed to generate a discussion among our discipline's strangers while also succeeding in producing little or nothing more; it would be decadent if it successfully stimulated a debate among philosophers about the ideas and arguments articulated in *Philosophy and Social Hope* without affecting, even indirectly, that book's reception by the wider audience Rorty wrote to reach. There's a certain passage in Rorty's book, however, that brings this aspiration to a dead halt. The passage makes it nearly impossible to blithely do philosophy with *Philosophy and Social Hope*.

The passage appears in a discussion of a Peruvian social and political and terrorist movement, the Shining Path. Further, the subject isn't just that group but the Shining Path during, according to Rorty, its "heyday."[36] Immediately, a pause is required for this note. It would be extremely instructive—especially for anyone interested in curving philosophy toward society's well-being—to hear one of those indoctrinated by the Shining Path respond to Rorty's use of this particular descriptive term. That's not possible, though, and I definitely can't speak for them so the pause must simply end. Following Rorty's commentary, he informs us that the Shining Path was "headed by Abimael Guzmán, a philosophy teacher who thought of himself as the successor of Lenin and

Mao, as an inspired contemporary interpreter of the writings of Marx."[37] Next, Rorty compares Guzmán's cause and its consequences with another social and political undertaking, one led by "a contemporary interpreter of the Gospels" in the United States, Pat Robertson. For my purposes, all that's necessary to note about this gospel preacher is that he resembles most sermonizers in the following way: those who've suffered as a result of his Sunday morning admonitions have a viable recourse, they can get organized and dispute his words with their own. That will be harder for those who've suffered the Shining Path. Many, many of them—between twenty-five and thirty thousand men, women, pregnant women, children and babies—are dead.[38] Others were spared by this philosophy teacher and his extremely diligent and applied students, spared to serve as remarkable living testimonials to the Shining Path's social activism. These survivors generally prefer not to talk about their learning experience, however, as it involved having one of their arms or legs hacked away with a machete. In a sense, of course, their grisly reticence and then its amplification by the wordlessness of the thousands who died could stand on its own as a testimony about philosophy and human community. It doesn't, though; the collective silence is broken by this statement from Rorty:

> Pat Robertson will probably cause much more suffering in the United States than Abimael Guzmán managed to cause in Peru.[39]

Most of this book's readers, I recognize, have not lived in Latin America and so cannot be expected to catch the full force of this sentence. My ability as a writer is too limited to directly express it in prose. The best I can do is a rough comparison: the revulsion a typical, contemporary Peruvian would feel upon reading this striking contribution to society's betterment resembles what a Holocaust survivor would feel upon reading that Pat Robertson will probably cause much more suffering in the United States than Hitler managed to cause during the heyday of his gas chambers.

It would be good if we could categorize Rorty's conclusion as a literary experiment, as an attempt to make Guzmán's insanity vivid and immediate in language by himself making an insane comparison. Unfortunately, the conclusion is part of a straightforward effort to engage a wide audience in the name of trustworthiness, cooperation and decen-

cy. The conclusion is, according to Rorty, a contribution to social hope. It doesn't offer much. Which shouldn't be surprising. Not at all since within the history of our discipline's attempts to make such contributions the outcome was well precedented. Starting with the philosophy teacher Guzmán, he also sought to reach a wide audience and improve public life. Like Rorty, that led him to breed class warfare and finally to advocate massive, indiscriminate exterminations as preferable to verbal debate in certain situations. (In Guzmán and Rorty's defense—assuming one can be mounted without arousing suspicions of tasteless satire—advocating indiscriminate exterminations as preferable to verbal debate in certain situations is different than aimlessly advocating exterminations which neither did.) Continuing back through the recent past but in a less revolting direction, there's Foucault's declaration of human rights which, like the civil unrest of the late 1960s that first inspired it, at least held the virtue of ending with nothing worse than snickers and exasperated sighs. The sighs were significantly heavier, though, in communist Russia where the spirit of Hegel embodied in Marx presided over decades of sometimes contemplated, sometimes frenetic killing. Bones stacked up in Asia too. In Hitler's Germany, Nietzsche's memory and inflammatory paragraphs were called upon to motivate innumerable atrocities. In the midst of that, Heidegger made his own, not exactly commendable offerings to social hope. Further discouraging examples from the last century could easily be piled on, but that risks obscuring the sad fact that the problem isn't only recent. It's also Modern, as Kant's stern division of intellectual ability along racial lines demonstrates.[40] And the problem's also Medieval as displayed by Augustine's *City of God* fueling the public burning of heretics.[41] And the problem's also Ancient. It goes all the way back to the beginning of philosophy's appeal to strangers, back to Plato in Syracuse tutoring the city's monarch in the art of politics. Plato's primary successes, we know, were narrowly escaping imprisonment and then getting back to the placid discussions of his school in Athens just before Syracuse was engulfed in civil war.

Clearly, none of this can be taken to establish that all philosophic attempts to guide outsiders through the complexities of living together will necessarily end in disappointment or worse. Further, within the limited set of attempts that have ended badly there's this constantly cited explanation. The master thinker wasn't correctly understood; the problem was the strangers to philosophy, not the philosophers. The problem

was Hitler, not Nietzsche; the problems were Stalin and Guzmán, not Hegel and Marx; the problem is a cynical interpretation of *Philosophy and Social Hope*, not the book. Could be, but if philosophers can't even control the reception of their ideas then it's hard to see how there can be any confidence at all that the ideas will work as planned. Regardless, however, of who finally deserves the blame and even though my recounting of philosophy's history and its social frustrations is too selective to prove anything, there's still something substantial in the midst of the indisputably impressive and impressively diverse list of failures. All the disheartening, dismaying, sometimes abhorrent episodes reduce philosophy's area of acknowledged competence; each one presses hard against our discipline's frontiers of authority. And while there's no way to gauge exactly where those frontiers are right now, it's evident that the pressure at least threatens with a reality represented today by the cloistered elements of French Nietzscheanism. The reality: it's possible to conceive of philosophy—to conceive of *prudent* philosophy, *sober* philosophy, even *socially responsible* philosophy—as thinking that does not appeal to the discipline's outsiders. In dismissive language, this speechlessness is called overphilosophy. The more ambiguous title is decadence.

The name doesn't matter but the question set at the end of this paragraph matters for French Nietzscheanism. It matters because it's inseparable from Rorty's particular disparagement; the question matters since it unavoidably rises alongside Rorty's attempt to bury French Nietzscheanism under the label absurd. That powerfully dismissive word, I've reported, is assigned to Nietzsche's contemporary followers as it describes what goes on at the bottom level of philosophy's involvement with others. The top level is occupied most imposingly by Aristotle, by his appeal to almost everyone, even to students of the natural sciences. As is obvious our discipline slipped from those heights long ago; today almost no one believes that philosophy done prudently and reasonably should challenge accepted wisdom about the physical world. Philosophers can still be found, though, tenaciously clinging to the middle region of public involvement, to the less exacting and less rigorously developed pursuit of knowledge about ethics and politics. On this level our discipline's involvement with strangers started with Plato lecturing in and then fleeing Syracuse. As for the following centuries, while it's uncertain whether advances have been made it's difficult to imagine them as more than stumblings since work done under the banner of philosophy and social hope

has come to mean advocating lethal terrorism as preferable to berating preachers. Last, and on the lowest level, there's philosophy refusing to connect with and persuade those participating in the world outside our section of the library. There's the clandestine thought of authors not addressing or engaging the general public's readers, there's the production of books barely visible and even less meaningful for them. This doesn't mean books as obscure because they're composed from esoteric words, tortured sentences and vague lines of development, and it doesn't mean books presenting ideas too subtle, complex or sophisticated for most people to grasp. Instead, the near meaninglessness reflects self-obsession. It's the effect of devotion to experiences and problems that readers who aren't philosophers don't relate to and don't want to relate to and don't have any reason to relate to. Made tangible, the estrangement is the common indifference to theoretically conceived reality as it circulates through Kafka's warped writings, and it's the common disregard for strictly philosophical problems like the one centering this book, thinking and truth's relation. The estrangement extends, more definitively, from what these two interests have in common, which is that for most people they're not interesting. Then, sagging underneath philosophy's public lethargy are its restricted truths. They aren't evaluated in terms of how accurately they describe the world or how well they work out there; instead, like interpretations of Kafka's narratives or claims about the relation between thinking and truth, they're valued only within the confines of the discipline that generated them and exclusively in terms of their capacity to keep the generation going. These are truths twisting through philosophy as concentrated entirely on its own acceleration, they belong to authors less dedicated to their assertions than to the further thinking some assertions inspire. These are truths, finally, that line the bottom of our discipline and separate decadence from the other aspirations philosophers can have. I've just listed the aspirations. They're the appeal to all strangers, the appeal to socially involved ones and the appeal only to our own. Now, faced with these appeals, with these levels of involvement with others, the question immediately asked when one of them gets labeled absurd is, really, dispassionately, thoughtfully, what are the misguided hopes for philosophy?

The question repeated. If we've been losing territories of competence virtually without interruption for more than two thousand years and despite the best efforts of history's most powerful minds, what's a mistake?

Is it to keep forcing our perennially failing and decreasingly wanted claims out into the world or is it to embrace the thinking we want and only we want? Worse than a mistake, what's depressing, is it philosophy groping for wider audiences or a philosopher single-mindedly driving the discipline ahead? In the end, what's sadly absurd, yet more thinking for increasingly hopeless conclusions or all conclusions dedicated to intensifying thought?

None of these questions needs to be answered. All that matters is that they exist. To the extent they do, and to the extent they're urged forward by a contemporary objection to French Nietzscheanism there is also the decadence of the French Nietzsche.

End

Notes

1. Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. 129. My italics.
2. Bilgrami, "Comment on Rorty," p. 95.
3. Bilgrami, "Comment on Rorty," p. 110.
4. Bilgrami, "Comment on Rorty," p. 111.
5. Bilgrami, "Comment on Rorty," p. 111.
6. Bilgrami, "Comment on Rorty," pp. 111-12.
7. Bilgrami, "Comment on Rorty," p. 112.
8. Boyer, "Hierarchy and Truth," p. 13. As another, similar example, there is Comte-Sponville's essay in *Why We Are Not Nietzscheans*, pp. 52-55, as well as Thomas Nagel constantly throughout his *Last Word*.
9. Sometimes the adherence isn't so oblique: "Nothing in man—not even his body—is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men." Foucault, "Nietzsche Genealogy, History," pp. 87-88.
10. Ferry and Renaut, *French Philosophy*, p. 110.
11. Ferry and Renaut, *French Philosophy*, p. 119.
12. Ferry and Renaut, *French Philosophy*, p. 111. The declaration was published in *Libération* June 30-July 1, 1984.
13. Ferry and Renaut, *French Philosophy*, p. 121.
14. Ferry and Renaut, *French Philosophy*, p. 123.
15. Ferry and Renaut, *French Philosophy*, p. 92.

16. A few examples of books intending to link Foucault's philosophy with actual lives in real societies: *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*, *Saint Foucault: Toward a Gay Hagiography*, *Foucault and the Law: Towards a Sociology of Law as Governance*, *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism and Rationalities of Government*, *Foucault's Challenge: Discourse, Knowledge and Power in Education*.

17. Ellen Goodman, "Fast Food Nation," *Washington Post*, Saturday, 10 February 2001, page A23.

18. Had I been willing to interrupt the flow of my argument, I would have added these lines to the paragraph's end: The decision to join the philosophizing Foucault also sends philosophy directly into the reversal between thinking and truth, as the only justification we can have for produced truths is the return they catalyze to the theoretician's private labors. Then, since these are labors about what it means to be someone, and since what this someone is being is a philosopher, the result is theory and theorizing curling as tightly as possible into theoretical generation.

19. Ferry and Renaut, *Not Nietzscheans*, p. 106.

20. Ferry and Renaut, *French Philosophy*, p. 229.

21. See Bricmont, Jean and Alan Sokal *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science* (New York: Picador, 1999).

22. Ferry and Renaut, *Not Nietzscheans*, p. 106.

23. Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, p. 18. (*Genealogy of Morals* Preface, Section 4.)

24. Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, p.7.

25. Ferry and Renaut, *Not Nietzscheans*, p. 106.

26. Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. 129.

27. Deleuze, *Negotiations*, p. 154.

28. Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, p. 18.

29. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. xv.

30. Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, p. xix.

31. Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, p. 166.

32. Another meaning for the word "culmination" as used in this paragraph can be added. The word fits in the sense that philosophy was coming to its contemporary reality from the beginning, from the moment the law court, the politicians, the sophists and the strangers in Athens turned their back on Socrates and his grand aspirations for philosophy. History since then has been a slow return to what little Socrates didn't concede to his society; it has been French Nietzscheanism edging toward philosophy as so dedicated that strangers witness it as suicide. Either literally or figuratively, they witness it as a complete withdrawal from common, social reality. The two situations are nevertheless very distinct because at the beginning the

strangers abandoned the philosopher and in the end French Nietzscheanism abandons the strangers.

33. Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. xiii.

34. Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. 205.

35. Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. 206. Rorty does not tell us whether this destiny of moral and legal delinquency is guaranteed by genetic factors or upbringing or both in combination.

36. Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. 205.

37. Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. 205. As a technical note, Rorty misspelled Guzmán's name.

38. *World Report 1999*, Human Rights Watch; *Patterns of Global Terrorism, 1999*, United States Department of State, April 2000; *Peru: Human Rights since the Suspension of Constitutional Government*, Amnesty International, May 1993. AI Index: AMR 46/13/93.

39. Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. 205.

40. Kant's response to an African cited from his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764): "This fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid." Kant, *Observations*, p. 113.

41. The 1494 *Repertorium Inquisitorum*, written by an anonymous Valencian author, justified the Inquisition and the punishment of heretics by citing Augustine's *City of God* among other authors and works.

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