Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor

Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor explores the German philosopher's response to the intellectual debates sparked by the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*. By examining the abundance of biological metaphors in Nietzsche's writings, Gregory Moore questions his recent reputation as an eminently subversive and (post-) modern thinker, and shows how deeply Nietzsche was immersed in late nineteenth-century debates on evolution, degeneration and race.

The first part of the book provides a detailed study and new interpretation of Nietzsche's much disputed relationship to Darwinism. Uniquely, Moore also considers the importance of Nietzsche's evolutionary perspective for the development of his moral and aesthetic philosophy. The second part analyses key themes of Nietzsche's cultural criticism – his attack on the Judaeo-Christian tradition, his diagnosis of the nihilistic crisis afflicting modernity and his anti-Wagnerian polemics – against the background of *fin-de-siècle* fears about the imminent biological collapse of Western civilisation.

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Abbreviations

Translations of Nietzsche's works are abbreviated as follows:

A	*The Antichrist*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).
BGE	*Beyond Good and Evil*, translated by Marion Faber (Oxford University Press, 1998).
BT	*The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, translated by Ronald Speirs (Cambridge University Press, 1999). This volume also contains *On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense* and *The Dionysiac World View*.
CW	*The Case of Wagner*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967).
D	*Daybreak*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge University Press, 1997).
EH	*Ecce Homo*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979).
GM	*On the Genealogy of Morals*, translated by Douglas Smith (Oxford University Press, 1996).
GS	*The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Press, 1974).
HA	*Human, All Too Human*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge University Press, 1986).
NCW	*Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1971).
TI	*Twilight of the Idols*, translated by Duncan Large (Oxford University Press, 1998).
UM	*Untimely Meditations*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge University Press, 1997).
Z	*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969).

Quotations from Nietzsche's notebooks are taken from the *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* of his works, ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967–). References follow the standard method of citation for this edition. All quotations which do not bear an abbreviation are taken from here.

Quotations from letters to and from Nietzsche are taken from *Briefwechsel: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (abbreviated as *KGB*), ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1975–84).

All translations from the notebooks and letters are my own. In the interests of consistency and accuracy, I have occasionally modified the translations of Nietzsche's published works.

Introduction

Even the most careless of Nietzsche's readers – and there have been many – cannot fail to notice the prevalence of biological and medical metaphor in his writings. All too often his predilection for the rhetoric of health and sickness has been portrayed as an idiosyncratic response to, and preoccupation with, his own well-documented medical crises.[1] This is at least partially true: his chronic illness undoubtedly shaped his perception of the world and left an indelible imprint on his thought. But such an approach necessarily ignores the fact that Nietzsche's texts are informed by the same hopes and anxieties that haunted the *fin-de-siècle* Europe in which he lived, an increasingly medicalised culture that was obsessed with defining and policing the frontiers of the normal and the pathological. His work, which both espouses an anti-Darwinian theory of evolution and evinces an enduring concern with the decadence of Western civilisation, was not immune from the influence of what the neo-Kantian philosopher Heinrich Rickert termed the 'biologism' of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – the dissemination of the language of evolutionary naturalism and racial degeneration beyond the boundaries of the rapidly specialising biomedical disciplines and into the wider cultural debates of ethics, politics, anthropology, history and aesthetics.[2] It is my contention that Nietzsche's recourse to biological and medical idiom is both a reflection and an ironic distortion of this pervasive biologism, and can only be truly appreciated once the contemporary force

[1] See e.g. Jörg Salquarda, 'Gesundheit und Krankheit bei Fr. Nietzsche', *Studi Tedeschi* 17 (1974), 73–108; Thomas A. Long, 'Nietzsche's Philosophy of Medicine', *Nietzsche-Studien* 19 (1990), 112–28; Eberhard Falcke, *Die Krankheit zum Leben: Krankheit als Deutungsmuster individueller und sozialer Krisenerfahrung bei Friedrich Nietzsche und Thomas Mann* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1992).

[2] Heinrich Rickert, 'Lebenswerte und Kulturwerte', *Logos* 2 (1911–12), 131–66. On the phenomenon of biologism, see e.g. Gunter Mann (ed.), *Biologismus im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke, 1973). See also the following articles by Mann: 'Biologie und Geschichte: Ansätze und Versuche zur biologistischen Theorie der Geschichte im 19. und beginnenden 20. Jahrhundert', *Medizinhistorisches Journal* 10 (1975), 281–306; 'Medizinisch-biologische Ideen und Modelle in der Gesellschaftslehre des 19. Jahrhunderts', *Medizinhistorisches Journal* 4 (1969), 1–23.

and significance of his metaphor is reconstructed. I believe that new light can be thrown on his thought by situating it within the historical context of nineteenth-century theories of evolution and degeneration.

Nietzsche and nineteenth-century biologism

In the preface to his *Natürliche Schöpfungs-Geschichte* (*History of Creation*) in 1868, the zoologist Ernst Haeckel boasted that evolution was the 'magic word' which would one day unlock all the mysteries of the universe. At the time of his writing, nine years after the epochal publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, biology had already become one of the dominant discourses of the latter half of the nineteenth century. The supremacy of the biological sciences is illustrated by the work of Haeckel himself, Darwin's most ardent and influential disciple in Germany. For he not only brought evolutionary theory to the masses in a series of best-selling popular works, but also used it as the basis for formulating an ambitious biologistic philosophy that sought to account for the origins and behaviour of all natural entities, from the microscopic cell to the cosmos as a whole. A vociferous proponent of the simian ancestry of humans and an implacable enemy of the Church, his attempt to construct a secular theory of human nature often assumed the form of biological reductionism. He saw in biology a natural basis for ethics, psychology and art, and regarded Darwinism as an objective foundation for nationalism and as an ideology of social integration. As with many of his contemporaries, Haeckel's insistence on the central role he believed biology should play in shaping national politics arose from the expectation that, if it were possible to understand the basic developmental laws governing primitive life-forms, then laws for higher and more complex organisms – that is, human collectives or societies – might be ascertained. The history of nations, no less than the phylogeny of plants and animals, 'must therefore be explicable by means of "natural selection", – must be a physico-chemical process, depending upon the interaction of Adaptation and Inheritance in the struggle for life'.[3] With its uncommon degree of specialisation and differentiation, the newly established German Empire was, Haeckel believed, a highly evolved organism, and he even went so far as to proclaim Bismarck a 'doctor of phylogeny' after the latter had been forced into retirement by Kaiser Wilhelm II.[4] Like many contemporary thinkers who would later be called 'social Darwinists', Haeckel – at least outwardly – placed great

[3] Ernst Haeckel, *The History of Creation: Or the Development of the Earth and its Inhabitants by the Action of Natural Causes*, 2 vols. (London: Henry S. King, 1876), vol. I, p. 170.

[4] Paul Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics between National Unification and Nazism, 1870–1945* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 45.

faith in the competitive struggle for existence at the heart of Darwinian theory, seeing it as an integral facet of human life and the engine of past and future cultural advancement. Quoting the words of the zoologist and geographer Fritz Ratzel, he argued that evolution depended on ensuring that such beneficial conflict was not inhibited and on restructuring outmoded social institutions according to 'rational principles deduced from knowledge of nature. Politics, morals, and the principles of justice, which are still drawn from all possible sources, will have to be formed in accordance with natural laws only.'[5]

But Haeckel's fervent belief in intellectual, moral and biological progress was not shared by everyone. Without denying that most of human history represented an advance from uncivilised origins, some commentators began to doubt whether such improvement could be maintained indefinitely. Others were forced to confront the possibility that civilisation itself – in particular the rapid urbanisation and industrialisation that took place during the nineteenth century – might actually be the cause of the impending racial and cultural decline which, as the *fin de siècle* drew near, was being predicted with ever greater urgency. Europe, it seemed, was sliding inexorably towards biological ruin, the disease-ridden slums of its major cities the breeding-ground for the degeneracy and hysteria that were supposedly sapping the vitality of the nation and causing it to regress to a primitive state of savagery. Since the putative decadence of the West was thought to be symptomatic of a more fundamental physiological degeneration, the concerns for the health of the race – which reflected the growing bourgeois fears of the criminal, diseased and volatile masses – gave rise to the eugenics movement, and eventually fuelled the racial manichaeism and state-sponsored murder of National Socialism.

Nietzsche's own writings bear witness to the extraordinary cultural impact of the biological sciences in the late nineteenth century. His work demonstrates not only a life-long fascination with the mechanisms of progress and decline, but also, his attacks on Darwin notwithstanding, a profound interest in the far-reaching implications of the modern evolutionary world-view for the traditional areas of philosophical inquiry. Indeed, the central project of his later thought – the much-vaunted 'transvaluation of all values' – rests precisely upon an appeal to the explanatory power of a newly confident biology to demonstrate the inferiority of prevailing ideals and to overturn them. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, for example – a book whose very title attests to the post-Darwinian preoccupation with the question of descent – he asserts that

[5] Haeckel, *History of Creation*, vol. II, p. 368.

all tables of commandments that have been promulgated hitherto 'await a critique from the medical sciences' (*GM* I, 17). The insight that the structures of human knowledge were biologically determined, the epistemological claim that 'all our *organs of cognition and our senses* are developed only with regard to conditions of preservation and growth' (VIII 2, 9[38]), led Nietzsche, rather like Haeckel before him, to insist upon the 'predominance of *physiology* over theology, moralism, economics and politics' (VIII 2, 9[165]). And, in much the same vein, he attempts, in his last notebooks, to sketch out a new understanding of aesthetics based on what he calls the 'physiology of art'. But for all his apparent confidence in the resources of evolutionary naturalism, Nietzsche also shares with his contemporaries an acute sense of social and cultural crisis, a belief in the imminent collapse of order that seeks and finds appropriate expression in the language of degenerationism. Like other turn-of-the-century prophets of doom, Nietzsche believed his age to be the 'time of a great, ever worsening decay and disintegration' (VII 2, 25[9]), an era blighted by a debilitating loss of nervous energy that was manifested in phenomena as varied as madness, crime, alcoholism, the depravity of modern art, anarchism and the women's movement. Even the characteristic attitude of the *fin de siècle*, the morbid pessimism nourished by the cult of Schopenhauer and Hartmann, was itself 'merely the expression of physiological decadence' (VIII 3, 17[8]). However, the task of the 'physician of culture' – as Nietzsche once memorably described the philosopher – is not restricted solely to diagnosis, to identifying the 'symptomatology of decline' (VIII 3, 16[86]); he must also prescribe a course of treatment. Nietzsche advocates a number of hygienic – or, rather, eugenic – measures to facilitate recovery: the erection of a cordon sanitaire between the healthy and the sick, the purging of unproductive and parasitic elements within society, 'the *extermination* of the wretched, the deformed and the degenerate!' (V 1, 6[203]). There is no room for compassion here, he insists, for the regeneration of humanity – or at least part of it – lies in submitting to the remorseless and salutary struggle for existence: 'Pity on the whole thwarts the law of evolution, which is the law of *selection*. It preserves what is ripe for destruction; it defends life's disinherited and condemned' (*A* 7).

The question of how such utterances should be interpreted – whether as crude biological reductionism or mere metaphor – has dogged the reception of Nietzsche's thought ever since critics began to engage with his writing. This book will attempt to answer this question, by exploring Nietzsche's response to those hopes and fears which were invested in the concepts of evolution and degeneration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Given the potency and ubiquity of these ideas during this period, it is perhaps unsurprising that Nietzsche's own preoccupation

with what he called 'ascending and descending life' was emphasised by his contemporaries and by the subsequent generation of his interpreters, prompting Heinrich Rickert to complain in 1912: 'Only the biologist has become fashionable.'[6] Indeed, Nietzsche had been linked with evolutionism as early as 1873, when a reviewer of *The Birth of Tragedy* described his thought, much to Nietzsche's amusement, as 'Darwinism and materialism translated into musical terms', and compared the Dionysian 'primal unity [*Ureine*]' which exists beyond the world of Apollonian appearance with Darwin's 'primordial cell [*Urzelle*]' (*KGB* II 3, pp. 139–40). If that youthful, Romantic work apparently offers little justification for such a curious appraisal, his later thought, and especially the proclamation of the *Übermensch* in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, seemed, at a time when the human implications of evolution were first being debated, expressly to address those issues. The response of one critic, writing shortly after Nietzsche's mental collapse in early 1889, is typical: 'If one examines Nietzsche's conception of the world in terms of its results, one finds that it is wholly in accord with the more recent scientific discoveries. The teachings of Darwin and Haeckel, too, ultimately lead to the *Übermensch*.'[7] What is more, Nietzsche was widely seen, in the anti-Semitic writer Adolf Bartels' words, as 'the philosopher and prophet of decadence' and, together with Max Nordau, was regarded as one of the leading critics of the looming *fin de siècle*.[8] Though some serious scientists such as the English biometrician Karl Pearson may have sought to distance what he denounced as Nietzsche's 'doctrine of scorn and contempt for the feeble'[9] from the supposedly humane ideals of eugenics, others were more enthusiastic. Nietzsche's work was discussed in the British journal *The Eugenics Review* and lauded by the founding fathers of German racial hygiene, men such as Alfred Ploetz, Wilhelm Schallmayer and Otto Ammon. The physician Georg Klatt argued that the point of departure for Nietzsche's philosophy was 'the fact of modern man's degeneration' and he praised in particular Nietzsche's understanding of 'the significance of alcohol for the *health of the race*'. Raoul Richter, the editor of the racist monthly *Politisch-anthropologische Revue*, hailed Nietzsche as 'the philosopher

[6] Rickert, 'Lebenswerte und Kulturwerte', 137.

[7] Joseph Diner, 'Friedrich Nietzsche: Ein Dichterphilosoph', *Freie Bühne* 1 (1890), 371. See also Karl Knortz, *Friedrich Nietzsche und sein Uebermensch* (Zurich: Verlag von Stern's literarischem Bulletin der Schweiz, 1898); Alexander Tille, *Von Darwin bis Nietzsche* (Leipzig: C. G. Naumann, 1895); Kurt Bauer, 'Der "Übermensch" Friedrich Nietzsches im Verhältnis zu den biologischen Lehren, zum Staat und zu Verbrechen und Strafe', Ph.D. thesis, University of Greifswald (1924).

[8] Adolf Bartels, *Die deutsche Dichtung der Gegenwart: Die Alten und die Jungen*, 3rd edn (Leipzig: Avenarius, 1900), p. 184.

[9] Karl Pearson (ed.), *The Life, Letters and Labours of Francis Galton*, 4 vols. (Cambridge University Press, 1914–30), vol. II, p. 119.

of biological anthropology'.[10] But although Nietzsche's 'biologism' was generally recognised right up until 1945, when, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, the myth of racial degeneration finally loosened its grip on the popular imagination, almost no one questioned the status of his biological language; no one doubted that he was, as Rickert put it, merely 'one biologist amongst others'.[11]

One notable figure during this period to take issue with what he dismissed as Nietzsche's 'alleged biologism' was Martin Heidegger. Heidegger, of course, reads Nietzsche through the distorting lens of his own philosophy; the wider implications of his interpretation, however, do not concern us here. Suffice it to say that where almost everyone else had taken Nietzsche's biological metaphor too literally, Heidegger suggests that to read Nietzsche in this way is to remain in the 'foreground' of his thought, obscuring its 'real' metaphysical nature (a claim which itself seems to recapitulate the metaphysical dichotomy of essence and appearance, inner and outer). Heidegger argues that Nietzsche's thought is not really 'biological' because he conceives life in essentially anthropomorphic terms, as an expression of the metaphysical will to power rather than the truly organic phenomena described by a properly scientific biology:

> To be sure, Nietzsche relates everything to 'life' – to the 'biological'. Yet does he still think life itself, the biological, 'biologically', in such a way that he explains the essence of life in terms of plant and animal phenomena? *Nietzsche thinks the 'biological', the essence of what is alive, in the direction of commanding and poeticizing, of the perspectival and horizonal: in the direction of freedom.* He does *not* think the biological, that is, the essence of what is alive, biologically at all. So little is Nietzsche's thinking in danger of biologism that on the contrary he rather tends to interpret what is biological in the true and strict sense – the plant and animal – *nonbiologically*, that is, *humanly*, pre-eminently in terms of the determinations of

[10] Georg Klatt, 'Das Alkoholproblem innerhalb der Gedankenwelt Nietzsches', *Revue Internationale Contre l'Alcoolisme* 38 (1930), 340–1; Raoul Richter, 'Nietzsches Stellung zur Entwicklungslehre und Rassentheorie', in *Essays* (Leipzig: Meiners, 1913), p. 140; Alfred Ploetz, 'Die Begriffe Rasse und Gesellschaft und einige damit zusammenhängende Probleme', *Schriften der deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie* 1 (1911), 113, 135; Wilhelm Schallmayer, *Verberbung und Auslese im Lebenslauf der Völker* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1903), pp. 1, 152, 182, 194, 223, 226, 231, 243, 244, 323. See also Ed. Bertz, 'Nietzsches Kampf gegen die Entartung der Rassen', *Zeitschrift für Turnen und Jugendspiel* 9 (1900), 193–6, 209–13, 228–32; Claud W. Mullins, 'Eugenics, Nietzsche and Christianity', *Eugenics Review* 4 (1912–13), 394–5; Scipio Sighele, *Letteratura e sociologia. Saggi postumi* (Milan: Treves, 1914), chapter 1; James Lindsay, 'Eugenics and the Doctrine of the Superman', *Eugenics Review* 7 (1915–16), 247–62; Margarete Adam, 'Unwertiges Leben und seine Ueberwindung bei Nietzsche', *Monistische Monatshefte* 14 (1929), 140–5; Karl Giering, 'Der eugenische Imperativ: Gedanken zur Erb- und Rassepflege bei Friedrich Nietzsche', *Nationalsozialistische Erziehung* 4 (1935), 301–3; Heinrich Römer, 'Nietzsche und das Rassenproblem', *Rasse* 7 (1940), 59–65.

[11] Rickert, 'Lebenswerte und Kulturwerte', 137.

perspective, horizon, commanding and poeticizing – in general, in terms of the representing of beings.[12]

While Heidegger is correct to claim that Nietzsche does understand life in such 'metaphysical' terms, it by no means follows that his thought cannot also be biological in character. Heidegger implies that a genuinely biological account of life would transcend the evident anthropomorphism that permeates Nietzsche's 'metaphysical' philosophy. Yet it is unclear whether biology – or any science, for that matter – can adequately describe natural phenomena without resorting to some degree of anthropomorphic language. Darwinism is a case in point. Darwin's attempt to eliminate teleology from evolutionary thinking and his commitment to the principle of the uniformity of nature were celebrated by his contemporaries as a kind of 'Copernican revolution'. For, just as the astronomer had refuted the geocentric cosmos, so the naturalist had supposedly abolished the anthropocentric universe, in which humanity occupied a privileged place reserved for it by a beneficent deity. But all his attempts to describe evolution in terms of a non-teleological, mechanistic paradigm notwithstanding, anthropomorphic and voluntarist descriptions of natural selection litter the pages of *The Origin of Species*. Throughout the book natural selection is described as 'acting'; it is said to 'pick out with unerring skill each improvement'; it is 'always intently watching'. Such language is misleading, and Darwin was forced in later editions of his work to answer criticisms which had arisen from interpreting his metaphorical expressions too literally. More fundamentally, it demonstrates how deeply ingrained creationist ways of thinking are, and raises the question whether the processes that he seeks to describe can ever be defined in purely biological terms.[13] But if Darwin was scrupulous enough at least to acknowledge the difficulties inherent in the formulation of his theory, the same cannot be said of Ernst Haeckel. Haeckel is typical of a significant number of nineteenth-century thinkers who, while publicly renouncing metaphysics, began to smuggle theistic ideas back across the frontiers of science, secreting them in their theories in a disguised form. Like Gustav Fechner's earlier doctrine of psychophysics, Haeckel's 'monism'

[12] Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 4 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1979–87), vol. III, p. 122. Karl Jaspers was similarly dismissive of Nietzsche's 'inclination to allow a biological way of speaking constantly to pass for insight' (*Nietzsche. An Introduction to the Understanding of his Philosophical Activity* (Tuscon, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1965), p. 315n).

[13] For a discussion of the issues arising from Darwin's anthropomorphic language, see Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983); Robert M. Young, 'Darwin's Metaphor: Does Nature Select?', in *Darwin's Metaphor: Nature's Place in Victorian Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 79–125.

translates the governing idea behind Romantic *Naturphilosophie* – the idea that 'nature' and 'spirit' are ontologically identical – into outwardly positivistic terms. For all his 'scientific' talk of 'physico-chemical processes', his theory of the unity of man and nature is based on the claim that both the organic and inorganic world, at all levels of organisation, are imbued with 'soul': '*All substance*, regardless of whether it is inorganic or organic, *possesses life*; *all things are ensouled*, crystals as much as organisms.'[14] Haeckel's thought, then, is both metaphysical *and* biological. The same, I would argue, can be said of Nietzsche's.

Furthermore, Heidegger never bothers to ask *why* Nietzsche mobilises a wide array of biological metaphors and, from an early stage in his intellectual development, consistently situates his thought within the dominant discourse of the second half of the nineteenth century. This is not a peripheral issue, for it necessarily reveals Nietzsche's complex and often ambivalent attitude to the culture in which he lived. Histories of evolutionary theory and degenerationist psychiatry have made it clear that biology must be understood within its historical context, that it was inextricably enmeshed in the language, culture and politics of late nineteenth-century Europe.[15] Darwin's own metaphors, such as the struggle for existence, exerted such a powerful hold on the Victorian imagination because they derived their force from wider social and philosophical concerns. One of the enduring popular myths about the so-called 'Darwinian Revolution' is that it dealt the final blow to what was left of the Christian world-view after two hundred years of scientific progress, and that it was responsible for the deicide proclaimed by Nietzsche's madman in *The Gay Science*.[16] But Darwin's 'dangerous idea' – as the philosopher Daniel C. Dennett has described the theory of evolution[17] – did not precipitate a collapse of old certainties and usher in a new, post-metaphysical age of vertiginous contingency. The supposed demise of God did not lead to a 'transvaluation of all values', to use Nietzsche's phrase. In fact, as the claims of religion and metaphysics were eroded by the tidal wave of new scientific discoveries, biology itself was pressed into service to sustain, legitimate and reinvigorate the values of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, reconstructing religious orthodoxies in a secular,

[14] Ernst Haeckel, *Kristallseelen* (Leipzig: Kröner, 1925), p. vii.

[15] See e.g. J. C. Greene, *Science, Ideology and World View* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981); Robert M. Young, 'Darwinism *is* Social', in D. Kohn (ed.), *The Darwinian Heritage* (Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 609–38; Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[16] See e.g. Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1959); Michael Ruse, *The Darwinian Revolution: Science Red in Tooth and Claw* (University of Chicago Press, 1979).

[17] Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995).

scientific form. Instead of locating their source in some transcendent realm, scientists, philosophers and moralists now sought the genesis of good and evil, beauty and ugliness, even truth and falsity, in the evolutionary processes of life itself, in the health of the individual and the vitality of the species. Philosophy, Heinrich Rickert complained in 1912, had been reduced to the status of mere 'species-hygiene' (*Gattungshygiene*).[18] Like Dennett after him, Nietzsche, in *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, also describes as true but deadly 'the doctrines of sovereign becoming, of the fluidity of all concepts, types and species, of the lack of any cardinal distinction between man and animal', and suggests that, should these doctrines find a wider audience, the fabric of society would disintegrate as moral and legal codes lost their binding force (*UM* I, 9, p. 112). But as his earlier diatribe against David Friedrich Strauss's book *The Old Faith and the New* shows, he was already acutely aware that the true and lethal implications of evolutionism were being suppressed by the very men who were its most vociferous champions. The struggle for existence may have become, as one German naturalist put it, 'a badge and common property of our age',[19] but the majority of Victorians could not accept that such ubiquitous conflict was entirely without purpose. Their faith in progress was an essential means of reassuring themselves that whatever the short-term suffering, there was a meaningful goal to be achieved, that evolution was a process leading inexorably towards moral and intellectual improvement. Biologists, then as now, looked to evolution as a source of spiritual values, and sought to discover indications and proof of an underlying order and meaning in nature. Even Darwin claimed to find a moral grandeur in the work of natural selection. And Haeckel went so far as to declare that the theory of evolution and his studies of unicellular organisms proved the existence of a natural religion based on duty, division of labour, and the subordination of egoism to the social collective. Like Strauss, Haeckel proclaimed evolutionism to be the 'new faith', which was in reality nothing but the 'old faith' dressed up in the fashionable vocabulary of the biological sciences. Like others since – most notably, of course, Max Weber – Nietzsche himself recognised that although nineteenth-century secular theories of human nature and origins discarded the obvious trappings of Christian teachings, they by no means repudiated the view of human nature which was once identified with creationist theology and the Judaeo-Christian 'ascetic ideal'. Equally importantly, however, Nietzsche was by no means consistent in his awareness of the ideological presuppositions implicit in contemporary

[18] Rickert, 'Lebenswerte und Kulturwerte', 135.
[19] Oscar Schmidt, *The Doctrine of Descent and Darwinism* (London: King and Co., 1875), p. 140.

biologism – as it was manifested, for example, in Darwinian and Spencerian evolution, in theories of evolutionary ethics and aesthetics, in racial science and the crypto-theology of degenerationist psychiatry. By disentangling the complex web of associations attached to the discourses of evolution and degeneration, I hope to demonstrate not only the ways in which Nietzsche seeks to subvert, reinterpret and revalue them, but also the extent to which his own thought is still ensnared in his century's values and prejudices. But whether critical or uncritical, the very fact of Nietzsche's biologism undermines the self-created myth of his 'untimeliness'.

Nietzsche on metaphor and rhetoric

There is a third way of approaching Nietzsche's biological language, in addition to seeing it as either purely literal or as merely 'foreground'. Since the 1970s there has been a growing appreciation of both his theory of rhetoric and the rhetorical nature of his writing.[20] That is not to say that this aspect of his work had previously been completely neglected. Ever since Nietzsche's fame began to spread in the early 1890s, he had been lionised as the *Dichterphilosoph*, whose work was neither wholly philosophy nor wholly literature, but represented in some sense an unprecedented fusion of the two. But despite this acknowledgement, there was, as I have already intimated, no attempt to engage with Nietzsche at the level of language or metaphor. Only comparatively recently have his interpreters recognised that the conspicuous rhetorical flourishes, the multivocality and seeming contradictoriness of his texts – in short, all those characteristic features which have so often frustrated those who have sought to distil the cognitive 'content' from the literary 'form' – are not (or at least not merely) the idiosyncrasies of an accomplished stylist, but may be interpreted as the expression of one of Nietzsche's most basic philosophical convictions: that all language is intrinsically rhetorical. Not only poetic modes of discourse, but *all* linguistic functions – philosophy and science, even the abstract symbolism of mathematics and logic – are fundamentally, inescapably metaphorical. Can Nietzsche's theory of language, truth and rhetoric shed light on his relationship to nineteenth-century biologism?

Nietzsche's subversion of the traditional distinction between the literal and figurative can be traced back to the very beginning of his career. His earliest writings on language and metaphor take the form of notes for

[20] See e.g. Paul de Man, 'Nietzsche's Theory of Rhetoric', *Symposium* 28 (1974), 33–51; Sarah Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor* (London: Athlone Press, 1993); Douglas Thomas, *Reading Nietzsche Rhetorically* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999).

a lecture series on rhetoric delivered at the University of Basle during the winter semester 1872–3. One of the major themes expressed in these lectures is the idea that metaphors and other rhetorical figures are not ornamental, nor is the realm of the figurative some semantic aberration, deriving from a fixed domain of literal meaning. The trope is not a peripheral, secondary linguistic phenomenon, but rather the very essence of language:

> But it is not difficult to prove that . . . *rhetoric is a further development*, guided by the clear light of the intellect, *of the artistic means which are already found in language*. There is absolutely no unrhetorical 'naturalness' of language to which one could appeal; language itself is the result of purely rhetorical arts . . . [L]anguage is rhetoric, because it desires to convey only a *doxa*, not an *episteme* . . . In sum: tropes are not just occasionally added to words, but constitute their most proper nature . . . What is usually called language is actually all figuration (II 4, pp. 425–7).

Later that same year, in 1873, in the unpublished essay *On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense*, Nietzsche made the premise of the inherent metaphoricity of language, and the idea that it conveys only value rather than truth, the basis of his critique of traditional metaphysics and epistemology. In that essay, Nietzsche argues that consciousness has no access to an extralinguistic reality. But as a human creation, the product of an innate 'drive to form metaphors' (*BT*, p. 150), language has no purchase on the world of becoming; it is not a system of adequate relations between concepts and the objects which they supposedly represent. Indeed, the very notion that there are discrete, self-identical entities in the world, or a perceiving subject and its object, is a fiction created by the structure of language. Rather, concepts are arbitrary signs that are the product of a metaphorical process of transference – one that begins with the act of perception itself – between separate spheres of representation, as nerve stimuli are translated into an image, which is in turn expressed in language as a word, and ultimately as a concept. A concept is also metaphorical in so far as it is formed by treating as equal two non-identical, but roughly similar things either by ignoring their differences or by a selective emphasis on the points which they have in common. In short, then, the distortion, elision and falsification that are for Nietzsche the defining characteristics of language abstract from the concrete individuality of experience and construe it in terms of universal qualities and properties, imposing an order which makes the world (or what we understand as the 'world') thinkable and communicable: 'There exist, however, no "proper" expressions and *no proper knowledge without metaphors*' (III 4, 19[228]). Literal meaning is thus impossible, as this implies that a word or proposition can express completely the meaning of a given, unique experience, or that there is complete coincidence between word and referent. Nietzsche's rejection

of a representational model of language therefore goes hand in hand with his repudiation of metaphysics and the correspondence theory of truth. Because the world and the way in which its objects relate to one another is inaccessible to human consciousness, language can express only anthropomorphic relations, which are then projected onto the world and held to constitute the entities themselves. The categories and concepts in terms of which we order our experiences have no more epistemic justification than the premeditated metaphors of poetic discourse. The only difference is that through habit we have forgotten their essentially tropological and arbitrary nature; we have imbued them with an independence and a causal efficacy which they do not possess and allowed them to congeal into normative measures of 'reality' itself. According to Nietzsche's famous definition – which is itself, of course, a metaphor – truth is hence nothing but a

> mobile army of metaphors, metonymies anthropomorphisms, in short a sum of human relations which have been subjected to poetic and rhetorical intensification, translation, and decoration, and which, after they have been in use for a long time, strike a people as firmly established, canonical and binding; truths are illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions, metaphors which have become worn by frequent use and have lost all sensuous vigour (*BT*, p. 146).

This account of the anthropomorphism of language and truth is what Nietzsche, from *The Gay Science* onwards, would call the 'perspectival' character of human knowledge: the claim that there are no objective facts, only partial interpretations of the world which are informed by such factors as the physiology of our sensory apparatus, our instincts and the extent to which we have internalised the dominant values of the culture in which we live. Given that cognition is inescapably anthropocentric and that, as bodies with desires and drives, there can be for us no such thing as the 'pure reason' or 'immaculate conception [*unbefleckte Erkenntnis*]' idealised by the ascetic rationalism of our Judaeo-Christian culture, interpretation inevitably contains a dimension of value; indeed, interpretation *is* valuation. Our world is not only encrusted with the dead metaphors which we naïvely take to be the 'Truth'; the values expressed by the network of interpretations that constitutes our systems of knowledge also become naturalised so that they appear to be part of the furniture of what we call reality. This premise opens up the space for Nietzsche's linguistic deconstruction of the value-laden rhetoric of metaphysics – and modern empirical science, in so far as metaphysics has bequeathed to it the misguided belief that dispassionate contemplation or observation can provide privileged insight into the supposedly rational and moral structure of the universe.

It would seem, then, that Nietzsche's theory of rhetoric and language can help us to understand the status and function of his biological language. For it suggests that he not only employs biology *as* a metaphor; biology, like any body of knowledge, *is* a metaphor, a system of signs and values by which we attempt to grasp the processes of life.[21] Nietzsche not only argues, like all biologistic thinkers, that values have their genesis in a biological substratum underlying human experience; he also claims that the discourse of biology is itself shaped by and saturated with these same values. But while I think Nietzsche can, as we shall see in later chapters, sometimes be shown to interrogate biological concepts and theories at this ideological and abstract level, in many other cases – perhaps in most other cases – he clearly does *not* use biological language in a way that is consistently critical or even metaphorical – at least in any normal sense of the term 'metaphorical'. And here is a problem: Nietzsche's definition of metaphor is so wide that he effectively empties the concept of meaning and renders it practically useless. If *all* cognitive and linguistic phenomena are to be understood as metaphors, then this can tell us nothing about his specific use of biological and medical terms. It does not explain why he has chosen to express himself in this particular idiom; nor does it allow us to make any meaningful distinctions between Nietzsche's biologism and that of, say, Ernst Haeckel.

It has often been suggested that Nietzsche's deconstruction of the traditional distinction in rhetoric between proper denomination and figurative language explains the tendency of his writing to conflate literal and metaphorical meanings. Where he once articulated his insight into the rhetoricity of language in the idiom of conventional philosophy, the mature Nietzsche employs this 'middle mode of discourse', as J. P. Stern has described his style,[22] as a rhetorical strategy designed to demonstrate *ad oculos* the inherently tropic nature of language. His later texts 'show' rather than 'say', to borrow Wittgenstein's distinction from the *Tractatus*. Now, while Nietzsche's texts do indeed often occupy this middle ground between the literal and the figural, there is no way of proving conclusively that this stylistic feature is always the result of conscious design. Nor is this phenomenon exclusive to Nietzsche's writings. After all, nineteenth-century biologistic thought itself inhabits this mode of expression. In such ancient concepts as the 'social organism', 'moral health' and 'degeneration' itself, what were originally simple metaphors

[21] Wayne Klein has argued that in Nietzsche's writings the concept of physiology 'is suspended between the literal and the figurative, the biological and the semiological' (*Nietzsche and the Promise of Philosophy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 168).

[22] J. P. Stern, *Nietzsche: A Study* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 199.

or analogies became increasingly literalised through the medicalisation of moral and socio-political discourse, as well as through the transference of ideas and imagery from social and political science into biology. By locating Nietzsche's writings within the context of nineteenth-century biologism, we can begin to differentiate his own metaphors and anthropomorphisms from those that were already current within his culture, and critically evaluate his incorporation of widespread contemporary tropes into his work. What is more, by reconstructing the historical debates in which Nietzsche participated, we can show that those aspects of his biologism which have often been dismissed as having merely a rhetorical or metaphorical function – such as his attempt to formulate a 'physiology of art' – emerge as a coherent strand of his thought backed up by the science, or rather, pseudo-science, of his day.

Our task in the following chapters, then, must be to distinguish between, on the one hand, Nietzsche's discriminating and ironic deployment of biological and medical terms and, on the other, his more uncritical use of such language. However, it is worth briefly pointing out here to what extent in practice biology retains the status of a privileged discourse in Nietzsche's thinking, one that is exempt from his epistemological relativism. Since no system of knowledge 'explains' the world, being only a 'way of interpreting or arranging the world' (*BGE* 14), the validity of a particular scientific theory or paradigm depends for Nietzsche on what values are expressed in and through it. The difference between, say, the mechanistic view of nature as a predictable, law-bound system of matter in motion and Nietzsche's postulation of a 'will to power' operating in nature is not that one conception is less anthropomorphic or more 'true' than the other, but that the former (as an attempt to project onto nature Enlightenment ideals of democracy and equality before the law) is an expression of weakness, sickness and declining life and the latter of strength, health and ascending life. Leaving aside the problem that these criteria for assessing the validity of values are themselves valuations, the point is that even at this fundamental level Nietzsche perpetuates the health–sickness dichotomy that underpins nineteenth-century thinking. Even his fictionalist epistemology, as we shall see, is conceived within an evolutionary framework – is itself an expression of his biologism. Nietzsche's thought is so deeply rooted in the issues, fears and values of the nineteenth century, that it is unthinkable outside of this context. In what follows, therefore, we must combine both an awareness of the rhetoricity of his thought with an appreciation of the very real inconsistencies and aporias in his use of biological language. For Nietzsche's insight into the value-laden character of science and biology does not always lead him consistently to subvert or ironise those valuations. It is

only by historicising Nietzsche's biologism – in a sense turning his own deconstructive weapons against him – that we can assess the extent to which he achieved or failed to achieve what he saw as the first and last task of the philosopher: 'To overcome his time in himself, to become "timeless"' (*CW*, Preface).

As I have said, I wish to portray Nietzsche's rhetoric of health and sickness as taking issue with, or more often uncritically reflecting, broad currents of thought in the post-Darwinian age, and to this end I shall reconstruct in general terms the relevant contemporary debates surrounding the cultural significance of biological theories of progress and decline. In doing so, I shall be drawing on a rich body of work which the historiography of evolutionism and degenerationism has produced in recent years. For example, concerted efforts have been made not only to plot accurately the gradual development of Darwin's ideas about evolutionary change, but also to reveal his indebtedness to more traditional ways of thinking, both biological and theological. Revisionist accounts of the historical framework in which Darwin's work was both formulated and received – such as those by Peter Bowler and Robert J. Richards – will be crucial to my own investigation. For I believe that it is only in the light of this reassessment of the provenance and impact of Darwin's thought that we can properly appreciate Nietzsche's own ideas about evolution and its significance for human values. 'Darwinism', like 'degeneration', was not a monolithic category, but rather a shifting, unstable concept, subject to multiple ideological confusion and intrusion. If we are to understand Nietzsche's biological language we need to know what such terms meant, both to him and his contemporaries. This is especially the case with the myth of 'decadence' or 'degeneration', which, though it cast a long shadow over the late nineteenth century, has little resonance today, and has only recently been rescued by intellectual and literary historians from scientific obsolescence. In this respect, the work of Erwin Koppen on Wagnerism and Jens Malte Fischer's writings on the *fin de siècle* have been extremely useful, as have the seminal anthology of essays edited by J. E. Chamberlin and Sander Gilman, *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress* (1985), and Daniel Pick's outstanding and definitive work on this topic, *Faces of Degeneration* (1989). The renewed scholarly interest in degeneration has also produced a burgeoning literature on the cultural history of those quintessentially *fin-de-siècle* diseases, hysteria and nervous illness. The most important of these for the present study have been: Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady* (1985); Janet Oppenheim's *'Shattered Nerves'* (1991) and Mark Micale's *Approaching Hysteria* (1995). Sander Gilman's numerous studies on race and the perception of disease have also proved invaluable.

My aim in what follows, however, is not only to situate Nietzsche within the bigger picture of nineteenth-century biologism; my argument will also have a narrower focus. With the ever expanding critical edition of Nietzsche's writings and the on-going re-evaluation of his unpublished notes, Nietzsche scholars have since the late 1980s made efforts to establish and quantify the influence of particular authors whose books Nietzsche is known to have read or owned. Among such books were numerous works on biology, medicine and psychiatry. I shall, then, in addition to outlining Nietzsche's intellectual milieu in general terms, also adopt a more concrete approach by discussing specific thinkers and writers from Nietzsche's extant library, many of whom, if now largely forgotten, are representative of nineteenth-century biologism and, one way or another, coloured his own perception of the problems he addressed.

The first three chapters of this book address the question of Nietzsche's complex and much disputed evolutionism. The aim is not to provide an exhaustive or definitive account of Nietzsche's relationship to Darwinism. My goal is, rather, more modest: to investigate how particular aspects of this evolutionism either reflect or call into question contemporary intellectual issues in the post-Darwinian age. I begin in chapter 1 by arguing that Nietzsche's self-professed 'anti-Darwinism' and his attitude towards evolutionary biology in general must be understood in terms of what has been called the 'non-Darwinian revolution'[23] – the proliferation of theories of evolution which, while paying lip-service to Darwin's hypothesis of natural selection, nevertheless harked back to older traditions of biology in seeking alternative engines of progress. In this context, I shall discuss Nietzsche's theory of the will to power as one such alternative evolutionary mechanism. Darwin's description of nature as an incessant, ruthless struggle for existence gave rise to one of the greatest challenges facing nineteenth-century thinkers: to account for the social and moral behaviour that is such a universal feature of human life. Typically, existing moral codes were held to be rationalisations of the altruistic impulses and behaviour which humans had inherited from their animal ancestors. Chapter 2 accordingly looks at Nietzsche's attempts to formulate an alternative evolutionary ethics in response to such theories, with particular reference to the ideas of Herbert Spencer. In chapter 3 I propose a new way of looking at Nietzsche's idea of a 'physiology of art', by linking it with contemporary attempts to explain the human artistic impulse in evolutionary terms. I also argue that Nietzsche's biologistic conception of art is not confined to his late notes, as is often assumed, but that this is a

[23] Peter J. Bowler, *The Non-Darwinian Revolution: Reinterpreting a Historical Myth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

constant theme underlying his aesthetics from *The Birth of Tragedy* onwards. These first three chapters are closely linked, and are in many ways intended to complement one another. Key features of Nietzsche's theory of evolution first discussed in chapter 1 are taken up and refined in the following two. The aim is to show to what extent evolution, morality and art are for Nietzsche aspects of one and the same natural phenomenon.

In the last three chapters, I shall explore how the concept of 'degeneration' is related to major themes in Nietzsche's thought – his anti-Christian diatribe, his aesthetics, his moral philosophy, the *Übermensch* and his attack on nihilism. In chapter 4 I discuss his theory of decadence in general terms, tracing its development in his writings, and suggest how Nietzsche's attitudes towards sex and sexuality are rooted in his advocacy of eugenic measures to control and eliminate degeneracy. If this aspect of his appropriation of the discourse of degeneration is wholly typical of his age, and equally uncritical, I move on in the next chapter to examine the ways in which he employs *fin-de-siècle* fears about the imminent disintegration of Western civilisation to subvert the pseudo-scientific Christian eschatology implicit in the concept of degeneration by turning it against the Judaeo-Christian values of which it is an expression. In particular, I concentrate on his appeal to concepts such as moral insanity, hereditary criminality and cretinism, and his ironic use of anti-Semitic rhetoric to discredit Wagner's brand of Aryan Christianity. Finally, in chapter 6, I shall locate Nietzsche's critique of modern art within the context of contemporary notions of artistic 'health' and 'sickness', paying close attention to the argument and metaphor of *The Case of Wagner*.

Part I

Evolution

1 The physiology of power

Was Nietzsche a Darwinist? Or was he, as he himself often claims, an 'anti-Darwinist'? It is typical of the misunderstandings, misreadings and misappropriations that have plagued the reception of Nietzsche's thought that he has been so frequently identified with one of the very nineteenth-century figures whose theory of evolution he repeatedly sought to challenge and whom he dismissed as an intellectual mediocrity. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche himself was sufficiently irritated by those who insisted on reading his work – and in particular his proclamation of the *Übermensch* – in Darwinian terms to complain: 'learned cattle caused me on its account to be suspected of Darwinism' (*EH* III, 1). And yet there can be no question that Nietzsche adopts a broadly evolutionist perspective: he believes in the mutability of organic forms; he sees morality, art and consciousness not as uniquely human endowments with their origin in a transcendental realm, but as products of the evolutionary process itself. In *Human, All Too Human*, he suggests that the question of how our conception of the world might differ from the 'true' nature of the world will be relinquished to 'the physiology and evolutionary history of organisms and concepts' (*HA* 10). And in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche rebukes Schopenhauer for rejecting all evolution as chimerical and dismissing Lamarck's insight as 'an ingenious but absurd error' (*GS* 99). But does all this make him a Darwinist? One of the more recent writers to discuss the issue of Nietzsche's supposed 'Darwinism' certainly thinks so. Werner Stegmaier argues that Nietzsche was, 'as far as the scientific content of Darwin's theory of evolution is concerned, and despite several objections, a resolute Darwinist in all phases of his creative life'.[1] This seems an odd verdict to reach given

[1] Werner Stegmaier, 'Darwin, Darwinismus, Nietzsche: Zum Problem der Evolution', *Nietzsche-Studien* 16 (1987), 269. Nietzsche's relationship to Darwinism has also been discussed by, among others: Oskar Ewald, 'Darwin und Nietzsche', *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik*, Ergänzungsband 1 (1909), 159–79; Claire Richter, *Nietzsche et les théories biologiques contemporaines* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1911); Ludwig Haas, 'Der Darwinismus bei Nietzsche', Ph.D. thesis, University of Gießen (1932); Alwin Mittasch, *Friedrich Nietzsche als Naturphilosoph* (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1952), pp. 168–88; Pieter Mostert, 'Nietzsche's Reception of Darwinism',

that, like the majority of educated Germans of his time, Nietzsche appears never to have read a single work by Darwin himself. As with a host of earlier commentators, Stegmaier is led to this fallacious conclusion because he fails to differentiate between evolutionism in general and the specifics of Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection. This is not merely a dispute about terms; the lack of sharp distinctions here elides the complex historical framework within which Nietzsche expressed his ideas on evolution and without a knowledge of which any serious attempt to evaluate his 'anti-Darwinian' statements is impossible.

The myth of the 'Darwinian Revolution' can sometimes foster the belief that the publication of *The Origin of Species* had an effect rather like the one Nietzsche hoped his critique of Christian morality would have – that in marking a traumatic shift from the creationist paradigm underpinning natural theology to full-blown Darwinian evolutionary thought it broke 'the history of mankind into parts' (*EH* XIV, 8). But the idea of 'transmutation' was of course hardly novel, and long before Darwin there had been numerous attempts to understand how the diversity of species had been established and whether changes had occurred through time. In later editions of *The Origin of Species* Darwin listed over thirty predecessors and was still accused of a lack of generosity. Greek thinkers had held the view that life had developed gradually out of a primeval slime – an idea to which Lorenz Oken, perhaps the greatest of the German Romantic biologists, would later return. In the eighteenth century, Diderot, Buffon and Maupertuis all expressed some degree of commitment to the mutability of organic forms. Charles Darwin's own grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, postulated in his work *Zoonomia* (1794–6) the progressive development of all warm-blooded animals from 'one living filament', arguing that each one possesses 'the faculty of continuing to improve by its own inherent activity, and of delivering down those improvements by generation to its posterity'.[2] But perhaps the most significant and influential pre-Darwinian theory of species change was advanced by the French naturalist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck in his 1809 treatise *Philosophie zoologique*. For Lamarck, conscious endeavour and reflexive habit are agents of evolutionary change. He supposed that an organism's needs, imposed upon it by the environment, determine the development and modification of its physical structure. These needs dictate the way the organism will manipulate its body, and the effect of exercise, of use and disuse, causes some organs to expand, while others atrophy. The characteristics acquired by

Bijdragen tot de Dierkunde 49 (1979), 235–46; Alistair Moles, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Nature and Cosmology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), chapter 3.

[2] Erasmus Darwin, *Zoonomia; or, the Laws of Organic Life*, 2 vols. (London: Johnson, 1794–6), vol. I, p. 505.

the result of such effort are transmitted directly to offspring. Lamarck's best-known example involves the giraffe: ancestors of the modern giraffe stretched their necks in order to reach the leaves of tall trees; the effect of this stretching, inherited over many generations, accumulated to produce the long neck which now distinguishes the species.[3]

But although Darwin did not originate the idea of organic evolution, he was certainly responsible for its widespread acceptance. The chief objections to the pre-Darwinian evolutionary theories were based partly on the assumption of a short geological time span, which did not allow gradual evolution time to operate, and partly on the speculative and puzzling explanations of how the process worked. The persuasiveness of *The Origin of Species* derived not so much from Darwin's assemblage of evidence from natural history and paleontology showing that evolution *had* taken place, but largely from his construction of a plausible theory of *how* it occurred. Darwin's own attempt to explain 'the changing history of the organic world' and the process by which organisms adapt to their environment rests on two main premises. He begins in a deliberately minor key with a discussion of generally accepted and uncontroversial facts: the vast changes in domestic animals which can be obtained in a relatively short period of time through selective breeding by human beings. Having established the flexibility of nature introduced by the occurrence of variation in offspring and the power of what he terms 'artificial selection', Darwin asserts that individual organisms in a state of nature also exhibit a tendency to variation, a tendency induced largely through reproduction, but to some extent also by the effects of use and disuse of organs and the direct action of the environment. His second claim – famously inspired by Thomas Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1797) – is that organisms are everywhere engaged in a struggle for life, a conflict which inevitably arises because of the high rates at which all organic beings tend to increase and their ensuing competition for the limited resources available to sustain them: 'as more individuals are produced than can possibly survive, there must in every case be a struggle for existence, either one individual with another of the same species, or with the individuals of distinct species, or with the physical conditions of life'. Any variation in the structure of an organism – no matter how small – which confers on it an advantage over others in this struggle will ensure that it meets with success – as measured by its survival and ability to produce offspring. Useful variations are then inherited by descendants, and the cumulative effects of this process enable the organisms involved to mutate into varieties, species or even genera. This principle 'by which

[3] Peter J. Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea*, 2nd edn (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 81–9.

each slight variation, if useful, is preserved' Darwin calls, by analogy with the activity of human breeders, 'natural selection'. While the struggle for existence does not create the initial variations, it acts upon the probabilities affecting survival and reproduction. Hence, in conjunction with heredity, it supplies the dynamic of evolutionary change, always ensuring the preservation of those organisms best adapted to a given environment: 'The theory of natural selection is grounded on the belief that each new variety, and ultimately each new species, is produced and maintained by having some advantage over those with which it comes into competition, and the consequent extinction of less favoured forms almost inevitably follows.'[4]

The very presupposition of Darwin's argument is a well-established fact which he was nevertheless unable to explain satisfactorily: the tendency to variation in offspring, for it is only by such random variations occurring and being heritable that natural selection has any material upon which it can work. But how and why do these variations arise? The absence of any understanding of the nature and vehicle of heredity until the rediscovery of Gregor Mendel's laws of genetics in 1900 would seriously affect the way in which Darwin's theory was interpreted and received by his contemporaries. For there were many staunch evolutionists who, like Ernst Haeckel, hailed *The Origin of Species* as 'epoch-making' and yet harboured doubts about the sufficiency of natural selection as a means of accounting for organic change. Though most biologists accepted that natural selection could and did cause heritable change, many believed that it was not nearly as powerful as Darwin claimed, and that it played only a secondary role in evolution – or at the very least needed to be supplemented by other, more efficacious forces. This strangely ambivalent response to Darwin's work, together with the further confusion surrounding the concept of struggle, the genealogy of organisms, and the patterning of the evolutionary process, is symptomatic of what Peter Bowler has called the 'non-Darwinian revolution' in biology.

For Bowler, the paradigmatic shift in science which nineteenth-century evolutionism represents centres not on Darwinism as it is recognised and understood today, but on what he calls the 'developmental' model of evolution, with its roots in pre-Darwinian theories like Robert Chambers' *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1845) and Karl von Baer's work in embryology. By stressing the orderly, teleological, and usually progressive character of evolution, often through the perceived analogy between the growth of a species (phylogeny) and that of an individual embryo (ontogeny), developmental evolutionism preserved certain

[4] Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), pp. 151, 117, 115, 323.

aspects of the traditional view of nature.[5] It was this version of evolution which, in one form or another, continued to dominate late nineteenth-century biology. In contrast, Darwin's 'variational' model posited natural selection and adaptation as the sole driving agent of evolution, whereby species change because they must adapt to new environments or because they become too specialised for existing lifestyles. The bolder, more materialistic and dysteleological aspects of *The Origin of Species* – precisely those aspects which appeal to modern biologists – were not typical of Darwin's own time. The theory of natural selection had little impact on late nineteenth-century biology, not only because its explanatory power was less convincing without a genetic model of heredity, but also because it was formulated in an intellectual climate that offered better support to rival concepts of organic development – such as those of Lamarck – which circumvented and subverted Darwin's more radical proposals. Darwin's theory, Bowler argues,

> should be seen not as the central theme in nineteenth-century evolutionism but as a catalyst that helped to bring about the transition to an evolutionary viewpoint within an essentially non-Darwinian conceptual framework. This was the 'Non-Darwinian Revolution'; it was a revolution because it required the rejection of certain key aspects of creationism, but it was non-Darwinian because it succeeded in preserving and modernizing the old teleological view of things.[6]

Darwin, in other words, succeeded – and this despite all the scientific (and extra-scientific) controversy sparked by *The Origin of Species* – in converting the vast majority of biologists to some form of evolutionism, but not to Darwinism as such. This conversion was achieved remarkably quickly. The Darwinist philosopher Michael Ruse concurs with Bowler when he proposes that the alacrity with which Darwin's contemporaries accepted evolutionism in the wake of *The Origin of Species* and their concomitant scepticism vis-à-vis the efficacy of natural selection were not unconnected: 'one suspects that even those who objected to selection found evolution made more credible by selection: a suggested mechanism, even if untenable, helped establish the plausibility of evolution'.[7]

[5] Indeed, the term 'evolution' originally referred to embryonic growth and was seldom used by Darwin himself to denote the transformation of species. In Germany, the term 'Entwicklung' was used to denote both ontogenetic and phylogenetic development, because it was widely assumed that both processes were intimately related. 'Evolution' was understood literally, as an 'Ent-wicklung' or unfolding of preformed characteristics.

[6] Bowler, *The Non-Darwinian Revolution*, p. 5. Even Darwin himself, in later editions of the *Origin*, came increasingly to concede a role to Lamarck's notion of the inheritance of acquired characters.

[7] Ruse, *The Darwinian Revolution: Science Red in Tooth and Claw*, pp. 229–30. Other commentators to have cast doubt on the received view of Darwin's revolutionary impact include: Adrian Desmond, *The Politics of Evolution: Morphology, Medicine and Reform in*

Even though some biologists openly proclaimed themselves to be 'Darwinians', their thought often turns out to be little more than what Bowler calls 'pseudo-Darwinism', a blend of Darwinian rhetoric – usually the evocation of the struggle for existence – with attitudes that are in reality a legacy of the pre-Darwinian view of nature. It was in Germany that such attitudes were most visible. It has often been said that Darwinism, though born in England, 'found its spiritual home in Germany'; it was here more than any other country that evolutionary theory achieved the status of 'a kind of popular philosophy'.[8] But until the early 1860s, when Ernst Haeckel began his crusade on behalf of evolutionism with all the zeal of a recent convert, the response to *The Origin of Species* in Germany had been cautious. In the words of T. H. Huxley, Darwin's chief apostle in England, Germany 'took time to consider'. The initially muted reaction to Darwin's theory in Germany may have been due to the fact that many German naturalists – particularly amongst the morphologists – were already evolutionists in the sense that they accepted the gradual unfolding or *Entwicklung* of a purposeful trend in the history of life, ideas which had their roots in the dynamic view of nature fostered by Romantic and pre-Romantic *Naturphilosophie*.[9] This is certainly borne out by Huxley's remark that the 'curious interval of silence' which preceded the enormous outpouring of German writings on *Darwinismus* could be explained by the fact that German biologists were divided between those who doggedly adhered to the notion of the fixity of species and those who were 'evolutionists, *a priori*, already, and they must have felt the disgust natural to deductive philosophers at being offered an inductive and experimental foundation for a conviction which they had reached by a shorter cut'.[10] Heinrich Bronn, for instance, who published his own developmental view of nature in 1858 before translating *The Origin of Species* in 1860, certainly belonged to the latter category. Thus, while there were some German scientists who followed Darwin in holding that natural selection – or

Radical London (University of Chicago Press, 1989); Robert J. Richards, *Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Theories of Mind and Behavior* (University of Chicago Press, 1987).

[8] Emanuel Rádl, *The History of Biological Theories* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1930), p. 42; Alfred Kelly, *The Descent of Darwin. The Popularization of Darwinism in Germany, 1860–1914* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), p. 5. See also William Montgomery, 'Germany', in Thomas Glick (ed.), *The Comparative Reception of Darwinism* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1974), pp. 81–116; Pietro Corsi and Paul Weindling, 'Darwinism in Germany, France and Italy', in David Kohn (ed.), *The Darwinian Heritage* (Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 638–729.

[9] Oswei Temkin, 'The Idea of Descent in Post-Romantic German Biology: 1848–1858', in Bentley Glass, Owsei Temkin and William L. Strauss, Jr. (eds.), *Forerunners of Darwin, 1745–1859* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), pp. 323–55.

[10] T. H. Huxley, 'On the Reception of *The Origin of Species*', in Francis Darwin (ed.), *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1887), vol. II, p. 186.

at least some combination of external, environmental factors – was the mechanism of species mutation, a significant number of prominent biologists either wholly rejected Darwin's theory of natural selection or attached less importance to it. In its place, many articulated a *pre-Darwinian basic commitment to non-adaptive models of evolutionary change*. Loyal to the vitalistic traditions of their science, nineteenth-century German biologists resurrected Blumenbach's concept of the *Bildungstrieb*, the *nisus formativus*, and held an intra-organic directive or transformative force to be the main engine of evolution. This is not to deny that the concept of a 'struggle for existence' deeply penetrated German culture, becoming, like 'the will to power' after it, one of the watchwords of the day. But many nineteenth-century Germans – Haeckel among them – could not accept that the ubiquitous conflict entailed by Darwin's theory was entirely without purpose, something that becomes even clearer when the idea was applied by them to human society. The struggle for existence was commonly understood as the means through which a more fundamental Law of Progress manifested itself.[11]

These very same attitudes and prejudices underpin Nietzsche's own evolutionism, and in particular his anti-Darwinian statements from at least the mid-1880s onwards. For a start, he did not regard Darwin as the originator of a new world-view; rather, the theory of evolution is for him merely an 'after-effect', an echo of the philosophy of becoming first expounded by Heraclitus, Empedocles, Lamarck and, tellingly, Hegel – a sign of how widespread already was the notion of 'development' or *Entwicklung* in pre-Darwinian German *Naturphilosophie* (VII 3, 34[73]). In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche even suggests that Hegel anticipated Darwinism when he introduced the idea that 'the species concepts [*Artbegriffe*] develop *out of each other*... without Hegel there could have been no Darwin' (*GS* 357). More importantly, and in common with the vast majority of his contemporaries, Nietzsche insists that adaptation is 'a second-order activity' (*GM* II, 12), and is therefore not sufficient to account for the development of the individual organism or the species as a whole. Instead of emphasising the organism's relationship to its environment or the influence of the struggle for existence, Nietzsche locates the primary motor of evolution in an endogenous creative force: 'The influence of "external circumstances" is *exaggerated* by D[arwin] to a ridiculous extent; the essential thing in the vital process is precisely the tremendous shaping force which creates forms from within and which

[11] On the social application of Darwin's ideas, see: Richard Weikart, 'The Origins of Social Darwinism in Germany, 1859–1895', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54 (1993), 469–88; Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860–1945* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

utilises, *exploits* the "external circumstances"' (VIII 1, 7[25]). This vital energy, of course, is what Nietzsche calls the 'will to power'. Some of the earliest outlines which he drew up for his projected major work, *The Will to Power*, clearly show that, from the very beginning, he intended this agency to explain not only 'the evolution of organic beings' (VII 3, 39[13]), but also *all* organic processes: 'With the animal it is possible to derive all of its drives from the will to power: likewise, all functions of organic life can be derived from this one source' (VII 3, 36[31]). It is Nietzsche's 'physiology of power' – his attempt to formulate a non-Darwinian biology and theory of evolution – that I want to explore in this chapter.[12] This narrow focus means that I am not concerned with tracing the development of pseudo-Darwinian concepts and imagery in his work from the earliest instances around the time of *The Birth of Tragedy* right up to his last productive year, 1888; this shortcoming will to some extent be made good in the following two chapters. Here I shall be concentrating on the brief years of Nietzsche's intellectual maturity, during which time he became acquainted with the theories of a number of non-Darwinian biologists. Some of these had a considerable impact not only on his attitude towards evolution, but also on his formulation of the will to power itself (although it is worth pointing out that, without exception, *all* of the biologists with whose work Nietzsche was familiar – and not only those mentioned below – articulated either a pre-Darwinian or non-Darwinian theory of evolution).

I am not suggesting that Nietzsche advances a plausible or systematic refutation of Darwinism, let alone a consistent alternative theory of evolution. The ideas which I shall discuss here, for the most part drawn from his unpublished notes and written over a period of years, are tentative, often contradictory. I am aware, too, of the provisional nature of his theory of the will to power – after all, his planned *magnum opus* was never completed – and of the dangers of imposing an artificial structure upon these disparate notes. Nevertheless, I believe that it is possible to focus on several aspects of Nietzsche's ideas on evolution and the will to power which reveal both the original idiosyncrasies and time-bound limitations of his thought. In the first section, I shall discuss his attitude towards the progressivism that is characteristic of non-Darwinian theories of evolution and the nineteenth century more generally, and suggest how he envisages the direction and locus of organic change. Next, I shall explore his concept of the organism as a plurality of mutually antagonistic parts, and situate it within the context of contemporary theories of the 'cell state'. Finally, I shall turn my attention to Nietzsche's rejection of an

[12] Nietzsche planned to include a chapter entitled 'The Physiology of Power' in *The Will to Power*. See e.g. VIII 1, 2[76]; 2[82].

instinct for self-preservation and his consequent repudiation of Darwin's struggle for existence.

The problem of progress

The article on 'progress' in the 1875 *Larousse* dictionary concludes with the words: 'Faith in the law of progress is the true faith of our century.'[13] It has since become a commonplace that the unshakeable belief in moral and political betterment, buttressed by the technological improvements engendered by the Industrial and Scientific Revolutions, was one of the characteristic and dominant ideologies of the nineteenth century. Just as the history of human civilisation seemed to reveal a gradual and seemingly inevitable advancement over previous epochs, so biologists, as they looked back over the history of life as a whole, believed they could discern the same pattern of progressive development in the evolution of organic forms. This deep-seated belief in a law of progress resolved the potential crisis in Western thought provoked by the emergence of Darwin's theory: evolutionism need not be threatening, so long as the supposedly blind and random operations of natural selection could be portrayed as a process leading inexorably towards moral, social and intellectual improvement. The non-teleological character of modern evolutionary theory encourages the view that Darwinism helped to undermine the general faith in the ordered and inevitable progress of nature. But while Darwin was feted in his time for banishing speculative teleology from the biological sciences, this mode of thinking was so deeply ingrained that those very same biologists who trumpeted his name most loudly continued to adhere to a model of evolution that stressed a necessary, determined and wholly predictable movement, and consistently failed to differentiate between 'evolution', 'development' and 'perfection'. The Swiss botanist and cytologist Carl Nägeli, whose 1884 work *Mechanisch-physiologische Theorie der Abstammungslehre* (*Mechanico-Physiological Theory of Descent*) Nietzsche owned, even introduced as the chief driving force of evolution a 'perfection principle' (*Vervollkommnungsprincip*), whereby organisms are impelled to develop increasingly sophisticated forms independently of the environment and of natural competition.

Even Darwin's views on progress and teleology were ambivalent. While Darwin operated with a branching model of evolution, he was in many crucial respects ensnared in the prejudices of his day. Darwin *did* believe in evolutionary progress: evolution was for him progressive in the sense that it pushed each form toward a higher level of organisation within the context of its own peculiar kind of structure, with the result that

[13] Quoted in Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, p. 12.

its descendants were better prepared than their ancestors to cope with particular conditions of existence. In the closing pages of *The Origin of Species*, he even declares that natural selection 'works by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection'.[14] But Darwin stopped short of a law of progressive development. He repeatedly criticised Lamarck and Nägeli, contrasting their position with his own view that evolution results not from an inherent developmental tendency, but from incremental adaptive changes 'selected' by environmental pressure. Yet for all Darwin's attempts to dissociate himself from the legacy of traditional biology, vestiges of the earlier, neo-Platonic concept of nature as the Chain of Being persist in his work. His metaphor of the 'Tree of Life', which he uses to illustrate his model of branching evolution,[15] appears to suggest a hierarchical order of natural forms. The trunk of the tree, of which all organic forms are off-shoots, represents an ascending series of gradations from the lowest, simplest organisms to the highest, serving as a means to identify the place of each type of living creature with relation to all the others. Though Darwin refused to distinguish absolutely between higher and lower organisms in his more guarded moments, he did not always exercise such caution in practice. He repeatedly lapsed into the old teleological ways of thinking, referring to species as 'higher' or 'lower'.

Given this almost universal commitment in nineteenth-century biology to some form of progressionism (although, as we shall see in later chapters, the belief in the inevitable advancement of organic nature was by no means irreconcilable with a conviction that this process could be interrupted by periods of decline), it seems inevitable and wholly justifiable that Nietzsche should complain that Darwinism – at least as it was understood in the nineteenth century – is one of the last attempts to project 'reason and divinity' onto nature (VIII 1, 2[131]); that in modern concepts like 'nature', 'progress', 'perfection', 'Darwinism' and 'selection', he sees merely the persistence of Christian ideas of providential Design (VIII 2, 9[163], 10[7]). Nietzsche had always mistrusted the ideology of progress, and was convinced that the nineteenth century represented a decline rather than a high point of cultural evolution. He is equally suspicious of notions of biological improvement. Human beings do not, for Nietzsche, represent any significant advance over other species of organisms. Nor is evolution, human or otherwise, an unfolding towards a predetermined *telos*: 'Humanity has no goal, just as little as the dinosaurs had one; but it has an *evolution*: that is, its end is *no more important* than any point on its path!' (V 1, 6[59]) This antipathy towards the

[14] Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, p. 499. [15] *Ibid.*, pp. 171–2.

idea of progressive perfection in evolution means that Nietzsche, especially in his later notes, often denies that 'higher' organisms – by which he means simply 'the richest and most complex forms' (VIII 3, 14[133]) – necessarily evolve from 'lower' ones. Or at least he treats this claim with extreme scepticism: 'that the higher organisms have evolved from the lower ones has so far not been demonstrated in a single case' (VIII 3, 14 [123]).

Darwin believed that variations occur in all directions, and that natural selection is always relative to a particular environment; yet he portrayed evolution as proceeding along one dominant axis, represented by the main trunk of the Tree of Life. Given his assumptions, a more accurate model would present evolution as developing along a multiplicity of divergent axes, spreading and branching as each individual shoot advances along the lines of whatever variations are most suitable to the particular circumstances of its own environment. Ironically, this is more or less how Nietzsche describes the pattern of organic change. Since the 'entire animal and plant world' does not evolve in a straight, continuous line 'from the lower to the higher', Nietzsche argues, all organisms and forces evolve simultaneously, 'chaotically, on top of one another and in conflict with one another [*übereinander und durcheinander und gegeneinander*]' (VIII 3, 14[133]). Evolution is neither progressive, nor is it a linear development. It is a movement which is random, confused and conflicting, continually oscillating between both synthesis and dissolution.

Yet Nietzsche does not dispense with the concept of perfection altogether; he seeks only to redefine it. In common with most biologists, Carl Nägeli, in a passage underlined by Nietzsche in his own copy of the botanist's *Mechanisch-physiologische Theorie der Abstammungslehre*, characterised 'perfection' as a tendency to greater organisational complexity and specialisation in the organism: 'Perfection in my sense is therefore nothing other than the progression towards a more complex structure and to greater division of labour.'[16] Nietzsche accepts – to a degree – this definition of perfection. Thus he describes the 'principle of life' in the following way:

> greater complexity, sharp differentiation, the contiguity of developed organs and functions with the intermediate members disappearing – if that is *perfection*, then a will to power manifests itself in the organic process, by virtue of which *dominating shaping commanding forces* continually increase the limits of their power and continually simplify within these limits: the imperative *grows* (VIII 1, 7[9]).

[16] Carl Nägeli, *Mechanisch-physiologische Theorie der Abstammungslehre* (Munich: Oldenburg, 1884), p. 13. Nägeli's influence is visible in a number of Nietzsche's late notes. See Andrea Orsucci, 'Beiträge zur Quellenforschung', *Nietzsche-Studien* 22 (1992), 371–88.

However, he does not understand organic perfection solely in terms of increasing structural complexity and quantitative expansion. The concept of 'perfection' entails '*not* only greater complexity, but also greater *power* (– does not need to be only greater mass –)' (VIII 1, 2[76]). Nietzsche sees both power *and* complexity as indices of perfection; or, rather, greater organic complexity is the result of a more fundamental will to power in the organism: ' "*Perfection*": reduced to *the type's increase in power*' (VIII 1, 6[26]). In other words, Nietzsche replaces Nägeli's *Vervollkommnungsprinzip*, or any other such endogenous *Bildungstrieb*, with his own will to power. (Strangely, he does not seem to be aware that to redescribe perfection in terms of a will *to* power does not make evolution any less teleological.) As an instance of the activity of the will to power in nature, he cites the creative impulse and assimilation of nutrients necessary for embryonic development: 'It is the *shaping* force which desires an ever new supply of "material" (even more "force"). The masterpiece of the construction of an organism from an egg' (VIII 1, 2[76]). Significantly, this example illustrates the creative force of the will to power in ontogenetic development, rather than in the evolution of the species (phylogenesis). For Nietzsche understands Darwin (and Herbert Spencer) to be exclusively concerned with the origin, formation and preservation of *species* (even though, as Nietzsche was clearly unaware, Darwin presented selection as a process acting upon individuals). The focal point of Nietzsche's evolutionary thought, on the other hand, is *not* the group, but rather the solitary organism: '*Fundamental errors* of biologists hitherto: it is *not* a matter of the species, but of *bringing about stronger individuals*' (VIII 1, 7[9]). For Nietzsche, evolution is a process of differentiation taking place within particular individuals. The species as a whole does not advance.

As early as 1881, Nietzsche was already suggesting that most, if not all, extant species have achieved such a high degree of adaptation to their particular environment that variation no longer occurs: 'The animal species have, like the plants, mostly *achieved* an adaptation to a certain continent, and their natures now have something permanent and fixed about them; they are *no longer* subject to fundamental *change*' (V 2, 11[274]). In his final notes attacking Darwin, Nietzsche reiterates his insistence on the present fixity of organic forms. There he writes that the idea that species progress, that they are constantly evolving, represents 'the most foolish claim in the world'; they represent, rather, 'one level' (VIII 3, 14[123]). Evolution takes place only within the limits of the type, limits which are gradually fixed as the species as a whole tends towards stability: 'One asserts the increasing evolution of beings. All grounds are lacking. Every type has its *limits*: beyond these there is no evolution. Absolute regularity

up to that point' (VIII 3, 14[133]). This process of fixation or levelling is deleterious, he seems to argue, because it promotes biological mediocrity, the reduction of the members of a species to the lowest common denominator capable of adaptation.

What makes Nietzsche's apparent commitment to the stability of organic forms all the more astonishing is the fact that less than a year previously he had actually argued against the notion of the immutability and essentiality of species. As part of his critique of the concept of the 'individual', he holds that the erroneous and misleading term 'species' refers to nothing more than the fact that a number of superficially similar life-forms arise simultaneously, and that 'the tempo of further growth and transformation is retarded for a long period of time: so that the actual minute continuations and additions do not really come into consideration' (VIII 2, 9[144]). What biologists describe as speciation is simply the result of a seeming hiatus in evolutionary change, an error arising from our inability to discern the very real, but infinitesimal differences obtaining between organisms, whose structure, like all things, is permanently in flux. On the basis of this imprecision, careless biologists infer that, since gross variations are no longer visible amongst the members of a population, the potential for further change has been exhausted and that evolution has run its course. That is, they assume that a goal or end has been reached in the development of these organisms; that, consequently, evolution as a whole unfolds according to some preordained pattern. Yet while Nietzsche here attacks the Cuverian idea of species as invariable, absolute categories, he later perversely resorts to the old Idealist concept of 'type' to resist the idea of progressive evolution and argue that species change is not the most fundamental process in evolution. According to the teachings of traditional biology, each species possesses certain essential, immutable characteristics. Although a number of less typical attributes may vary among members of the same species, the extent of possible variation is limited. The Darwinian assumption that new species evolve by branching off from parent species was therefore rejected by the biologists of the older Idealist tradition. That crossing between species results in either total failure or sterile hybrids was seen as proof of the distinct nature of species and indicated a physiological basis for these limits. New divergent forms cannot become established: crosses with original types would quickly erase them; variants would inevitably revert back to type upon exposure to crosses with members of the same species (as domesticated varieties produced by artificial selection had frequently been observed to do). Nietzsche makes precisely this same point: that types are distinct units and that consequently there can be no interspecific breeding, no common ancestry: 'Different species traced back to one. Experience

says that union condemns them to sterility and one type becomes master again' (VIII 3, 14[133]). It is for this reason that, like those who pointed to the infertility of hybrids as evidence against gradual species transmutation, he declares: 'There are no *transitional forms*.' For such intermediate structures would be simply wiped out without a trace, like a tiny drop of water in a vast ocean.

But that does not mean that Nietzsche rules out altogether the possibility of further evolution. While he contends that animal species have attained a high degree of adaptive stability within their environment, he adds: 'It is different with man, who is always inconstant and does not want to adapt to one climate once and for all' (V 2, 11[274]). When Nietzsche speaks of evolution, he has in mind principally human evolution. Or, rather, the evolution of exceptional, individual human beings – for he is by no means interested in the future advancement of the species as an entirety: 'That there is an *evolution* of the whole of humanity, that is nonsense: and not even desirable' (VII 3, 34[179]). What he said about the development of animal species applies equally well to the human species as a whole, or what he calls the 'herd': 'the herd seeks to maintain a type . . . The herd tends towards standstill and survival; there is nothing creative in it' (VII 2, 27[17]).

Thus, within a given species or population, Nietzsche distinguishes two conflicting loci of evolution. First, there is the strong, solitary, 'higher' (that is, more complex) individual, for whom, and only for whom, there exists the real possibility of evolution in the truly Nietzschean sense: the limitless expansion and development of life's creative energies. Second, there is the type or 'herd' – the groupings of individually weak centres of power which persist in an 'apparent unchangingness' (VIII 3, 14[133]). On the one hand, then, Nietzsche conceives evolution as individual leaps beyond the ambit of the type which have no influence on phylogeny, on the history of the species. For while higher forms evolve, they do not – and cannot – maintain or perpetuate themselves; only the 'type' is heritable. What is more, their existence is more precarious than that of the herd. Like the genius or the 'Caesar' in human evolution, they represent a brief, ephemeral flowering; as a result, the 'level of the species is *not* raised' (VIII 3, 14[133]). On the other hand, Nietzsche envisages slow, regular progress towards morphological stability in the herd, that is, in the greater mass of weaker, yet more fecund and durable organisms.

The aristocracy of the body

To declare that Nietzschean evolution is centred on the individual begs the question as to what he understands by 'individuality', for that very

concept is one of those which he subjects to a radical critique. Indeed, for Nietzsche the human organism is not an homogeneous whole, but rather a plurality, a 'tremendous synthesis of living beings and intellects' (VII 3, 37[4]). While this claim at first appears extravagant and counter-intuitive, it is hardly original: it was one of the insights into nature offered by the new biology, providing a novel solution to one of the most fundamental problems in the philosophy of biology: that of individuality. Leibniz had placed the discrete, indivisible, unchangeable monad at the centre of his system and, in his wake, the older Idealist biology conceived individuality in qualitative terms; the parts of each individual were assumed to be woven together into a uniform, harmonious whole. It was not until the birth of cytology in the 1840s and the advent of modern evolutionary biology that, as the neo-Kantian philosopher Friedrich Lange put it, 'the question of the nature of the organic individual' was once more opened up. With the abolition of metaphysical essences from biology and the discovery of microscopic individual cells as the elementary building blocks of animal and vegetal life, biological individuality was redefined. An organism was now held to differ only qualitatively from others; each organism is merely the expression of the sum of its qualities.[17]

Nietzsche probably first became aware of these debates through Friedrich Lange's *Geschichte des Materialismus* (*History of Materialism*), a work that exerted a considerable influence on Nietzsche's thought; it also contains a lengthy discussion of the theory of evolution, and probably provided Nietzsche with his first introduction to the main issues in the controversies surrounding Darwin's ideas.[18] In his chapter entitled 'Darwinism and Teleology', and in a passage later underlined by Nietzsche, Lange also discusses the forerunners of the modern conception of the organism, the earliest of which, he claims, was Goethe: ' "Every living thing," he teaches, "is not a single thing, but a plurality; even in so far as it appears to us as an individual, it still remains a collection of living independent beings." '[19] However, it was the pioneering work of the cytologist and pathologist Rudolf Virchow, which, as Lange points out, really opened the way to analysing organisms as multicellular composites. Virchow, who viewed the cell as the fundamental unit of life, described aggregates of individual cells as autonomous 'citizens' forming a 'cell state' (*Zellenstaat*). The analogy between the organism and the state is of course an ancient one, and has been drawn by political thinkers in every

[17] Rádl, *The History of Biological Theories*, pp. 293–9.

[18] See Jörg Salaquarda, 'Nietzsche und Lange', *Nietzsche-Studien* 7 (1978), 236–53; George J. Stack, *Lange and Nietzsche* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1983).

[19] Friedrich Lange, *History of Materialism*, trans. by E. C. Thomas, 3 vols. (London: Trübner, 1877–81), vol. III, pp. 37–8. This passage is marked in Nietzsche's copy of the third edition (1887) of the work.

age from Plato to the Romantics. But with the rapid advances in biology in the nineteenth century, the comparison between the interdependency of systems of organs within the organism and the relationships between social structures gained in detail; the metaphor became increasingly concrete. For sociologists such as Albert Schäffle (*Bau und Leben des sozialen Körpers*, 1875–8) and Paul von Lilienfeld (*Die soziale Physiologie*, 1879), the social organism was a stage – perhaps the ultimate stage – in the evolution of the natural world. But if sociology resounded with biological metaphors, then biology was rife with imagery drawn from an expanding and industrialising society, such as cellular production, cultures, colonies, cellular migration and the division of labour. And while contemporary sociologists likened society to an organism, biologists compared the organism itself to a community. Virchow's model was perhaps the first and most significant – not least because his own political views demonstrably influenced his biology (he pursued a double career as biologist and as Reichstag deputy for the Progressive Party). Ideologically opposed to hierarchical concepts of controlling substances or regions, he conceived the organism as an egalitarian republic, 'a free state of individual organisms with equal rights, if not equal talents, which holds together because the individuals are dependent upon one another and because there exist certain centres of organisation'.[20]

In stark contrast to Virchow's brand of physiological liberalism, Haeckel, whose politics became increasingly conservative with age, formulated a more hierarchical concept of the organism. For him, cells only formed republics in plants; in animals, however, aggregates of cells evolved into a monarchy – that is, into a supposedly higher form of bio-political organisation.[21] Although contemptuous of the new German Reich whose absolutist pretensions Haeckel sought to vindicate through his biological theories, Nietzsche develops a similarly hierarchialised model of the organism as an 'aristocracy in the body' (VIII 1, 2[76]). Radically opposed to what, in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, he disparages as the 'idiosyncratic democratic prejudice' prevalent in contemporary biology, he complains that such egalitarianism traduces nature as will to power and denies 'even the dominating role of the organism's highest functionaries, in which the vital will [*Lebenswille*] manifests itself actively and in its form-giving capacity' (*GM* II, 12). While the rhetoric of the cell state usually stressed accommodation and co-operation between an organism's constituent parts, Nietzsche emphasises the command structure and competitive *struggle* that necessarily takes place within organisms.

[20] Rudolf Virchow, *Cellular-Pathologie*, quoted in Mann, 'Medizinisch-biologische Ideen und Modelle', 5.

[21] Paul Weindling, 'Theories of the Cell State in Germany', in Charles Webster (ed.), *Biology, Medicine and Society, 1840–1940* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 119.

The human being is for him a 'plurality of living beings which, partly struggling with one another, partly adjusted and subordinated to one another, unintentionally affirm the totality by affirming their individual existence' (VII 2, 27[27]).

In formulating this model of the organism, Nietzsche drew heavily on the work of the embryologist Wilhelm Roux, who had been a student of Haeckel.[22] Like Lange and Nägeli, Roux was convinced that Darwin's theory of natural selection was not sufficient to explain the manifest functional harmony of an organism or the myriad correlative changes that must occur in each phylogenetic step, and located the primary process of evolution in the internal activity of organisms. In his 1881 treatise *Der Kampf der Theile im Organismus* (*The Struggle of the Parts in the Organism*), Roux proposes that organs, tissues, cells and even molecules of organic matter are found in an unceasing struggle for existence with one another for food, space and the utilisation of external stimulation. This struggle arises as a result of the excessive growth (*Uebercompensation*) of individual parts (analogous, in orthodox Darwinism, to the overproduction of offspring by organisms) and the disequilibrium which necessarily results. Again in analogy with Darwin, Roux asserts that only those parts which are better adapted to the obtaining conditions of existence can survive, i.e. can themselves produce 'offspring'. As a result of this selection, a temporary equilibrium is established. For, just as in orthodox Darwinism even the best-adapted organisms cannot reproduce without constraint (only within the bounds of what is possible in their particular conditions of existence), so the overcompensation of parts is limited in so far as the function of the dominant structure must not be impaired – for that would threaten the destruction not only of the organ in question, but of the entire organism. Because the internal environment (like the external one) is not constant, because it is always changing, causing new selective pressures to arise, intra-organismic equilibrium is temporary and must also be constantly adjusted. It is for this reason that Roux posits the capacity of self-regulation, together with overcompensation, as one of the fundamental properties of life. Self-regulation is the mechanism by which the random variations produced by overcompensation are ordered or selected by the functional requirements of the whole. In consequence, the most adapted parts of the organism prevail, producing the most efficient structure.

As the copious entries in Nietzsche's notebooks attest, Roux's physiology had a profound effect on his thinking, both on his 'anti-Darwinism'

[22] Wilhelm Roux, *Der Kampf der Theile im Organismus* (Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann, 1881). Roux's influence on Nietzsche has been discussed in detail by Wolfgang Müller-Lauter in 'Der Organismus als innerer Kampf: Der Einfluß von Wilhelm Roux auf Friedrich Nietzsche', *Nietzsche-Studien* 7 (1978), 189–223.

and his formulation of the will to power more generally. Nietzsche makes his own Roux's conception of the organism as a spontaneously self-organising complexity, a nexus of antagonistic forces, a 'struggle of the parts (for food, space, etc.)' (VIII 1, 7[25]). Developing Roux's own militaristic metaphors (he speaks of 'victory', 'mastery' and 'autocratic rule'), but eschewing the mechanistic paradigm favoured by him, Nietzsche envisages the internal struggle for existence as leading to the establishment of a hierarchy (*Rangordnung*), and describes higher and lower structures within that hierarchy as 'commanding' and 'obeying' units respectively. Just as Nietzsche claims that every peak of cultural evolution has been the work of an aristocratic civilisation, a society which believes in a 'great ladder of hierarchy and value differentiation between people and that requires slavery in one sense or another' (*BGE* 257), so he links biological evolution to an aristocracy of the body. The development of such 'aristocratic' hierarchies, in which the strongest parts within the organism direct and subdue the weaker ones, is for Nietzsche – and here he is again following Roux – the means by which specialisation of function takes place, with a more complex organic structure emerging through the subsumption of lower forms by higher ones: cells by tissues, tissues by organs and so on. Once again, Nietzsche distances himself from the prevailing model of the physiological division of labour as a devolution of central power to outlying regions; he prefers to describe this process as a form of 'slavery', involving the '*subjugation*' of a subordinate form so that it becomes a 'function' (VIII 1, 2[76]). The drives, for example, the highest and most powerful structures within the organism, bind together simpler organs to create 'higher organs': 'The hand of the piano player, the connection to it and a region of the brain together comprise one organ.' Using what was in his day a common metaphor to describe the relationships between organs within the cell state, Nietzsche suggests that discrete parts of the organism are 'telegraphically connected' by virtue of their being functions of the same drive (VII 1, 7[211]). This telegraphic link consists in an elaborate chain of command. The execution of a 'command', which originates in a higher structure, typically a drive, depends on the collusion and enforced co-operation of an 'enormous number of individuals', the 'obedient' elements that constitute the lower levels within the hierarchy:

> they must understand [the command] and also their special task; that is, there must be commanding (and obeying) all over again right down to the smallest units, and only when the command is dissected into a vast number of tiny sub-commands can the movement take place, which commences *with the last and smallest* obeying structure (VII 2, 27[19]).

This conception of the aggregate structure of the will expressed here is by no means as outlandish as it might at first appear. Nietzsche is again simply employing metaphors prevalent in contemporary biological theory. For example, in his *Text Book of Physiology* (1877), a book which Nietzsche owned in German translation, the distinguished Cambridge physiologist Michael Foster describes how automatism and irritability are defining characteristics of all living matter, even in its most primitive form.[23] The movement of protoplasm is the result of a stimulus triggering an explosion of previously latent energy. This automatic activity means, of course, that 'the activity of contractile protoplasm is in no way essentially dependent on the presence of nervous elements'.[24] In other words, volition is not a product of complex organisation, something that emerges only in more highly evolved structures, but is present even in unicellular organisms. Seeking to explicate this automatism, Foster lapses into, as he puts it, 'simpler but less exact language'. The anthropomorphism which this entails cannot have failed to make an impression on Nietzsche. A mass of protoplasm such as an amoeba, he says, 'though susceptible in the highest degree to influences from without, "has a will of its own" '. Furthermore, a more complex organism like a hydra

> has also a will of its own; and seeing that all the constituent cells (beyond the distinction into ectoderm and endoderm) are alike, we have no reason for thinking that the will resides in one cell more than in another, but are led to infer that the protoplasm of each of the cells (of the ectoderm at least) is automatic.

Foster concludes, then, that, like the organism, volition itself is an aggregate structure, a compound of myriad minor 'wills': 'the will of the individual being the coordinated wills of the component cells'.[25] Nietzsche appeals to this self-consciously anthropomorphic language in his own attempts to express his conception of the organism. Even the most rudimentary life-form, he often claims, possesses both consciousness and will. As he considers more highly evolved organisms to be a synthesis of an original plurality of relatively simple parts, there must consequently be a '*mass of consciousnesses* and wills in every complex organic being' (VII 2, 25[401]). The 'will' is for Nietzsche, as it was for Foster, in reality an extended, interlocking chain of 'underwills'. Volition, he writes in *Beyond Good and Evil*, is a 'matter of commanding and obeying, based on a social structure of many "souls" ' (*BGE* 19). As with Foster, Nietzsche's preference for such overtly anthropomorphic language to describe apparent

[23] Michael Foster, *A Text Book of Physiology* (London: Macmillan, 1877). Nietzsche annotated his copy of the German translation of this work, which was published as *Lehrbuch der Physiologie* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1881).
[24] Foster, *Text Book*, p. 35.
[25] *Ibid.*, p. 74. These passages are heavily marked in Nietzsche's copy of Foster's book.

volitional behaviour in primitive organisms masks a more familiar (but no less anthropomorphic) explanation in terms of the automatic accumulation and discharge of 'force'.

But what does he mean when he speaks of countless 'souls' or 'undersouls' inhabiting each organism, or when he claims that 'the entire organism thinks, that all organic forms participate in thinking, feeling, willing – that the brain, therefore, is only an enormous centralising apparatus' (VII 2, 27[19])? The simple answer is that the soul is for Nietzsche not an intangible, ethereal essence. Like the 'will', it is a ubiquitous biological phenomenon: '*Self-consciousness* [*das Ich-Geistige*] *itself* is already present in the cell. Before the cell there is *no self-consciousness*' (VII 2, 26[36]). He even characterises the inorganic world as 'consciousness without individuality'; all that differentiates the organic from the inorganic world is that the former has developed a degree of subjectivity, a 'perspective of egoism' (VII 2, 26[37]). One example of such primitive, 'pre-organic' thought that he cites is the creation of forms in the process of crystallisation (VII 3, 41[11]). Consciousness, then, is not the exclusive prerogative of human beings, or even of highly developed organisms, but is rather an amplification, an evolution of patterns and processes present in the inorganic world as well as the most basic organic material: 'That which is commonly attributed to the *intellect* [*Geiste*] *seems to me to constitute the essence of the organic*: and in the highest functions of the intellect I find only a sublime kind of organic function (assimilation, selection, secretion, etc.)' (VII 2, 25[356]). These ideas are reminiscent of the widespread hylozoism in nineteenth-century German biology, and it is instructive to compare Nietzsche's thought with that of, say, Ernst Haeckel. For Haeckel, too, the 'soul' is not a supernatural entity, but merely the outgrowth of the rudimentary sensibility (*Empfindlichkeit*) of undifferentiated protoplasm, or what he preferred to call 'psychoplasm'. Accordingly, the single cell is the basic unit of mental life, although, in contrast to Nietzsche, he denies that each cell possesses a 'developed self-consciousness [*Ichbewußtsein*]'.[26]

[26] Ernst Haeckel, *The Riddle of the Universe at the End of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Joseph McCabe (London: Watts, 1900), p. 182. He does concede, however, that cytologists were split on the issue of whether cells could be credited with 'a certain degree of consciousness, and even self-consciousness' (p. 157). In a later work, *The Wonders of Life*, Haeckel also quotes from several authors to underline his thesis that 'spirit' or 'soul' is present throughout nature, including Carl Nägeli ('The mind of man is only the highest development of the spiritual processes that animate the whole of nature') and Albrecht Rau ('perception or sensation is a universal process in nature') (*The Wonders of Life: A Popular Study of Biological Philosophy*, trans. by Joseph McCabe (London: Watts, 1904), pp. 467–9). Nietzsche also claims that there is 'perception' in the inorganic world; see VII 3, 35[53].

In his *Theorie der Zellseele* (*Theory of the Cell-Soul*, 1866), he argued, as he later recalled in *The Riddle of the Universe*: 'that every living cell has psychic properties, and that the psychic life of the multicellular animals and plants is merely the sum-total of the psychic functions of the cells which build up their structure'.[27] In other words, higher levels of psychic organisation such as the 'tissue-soul' (*histopsyche*) are the mental equivalent of the cell state, comprising 'all the separate "cell-souls" of the social cells – the mutually dependent citizens which constitute the community [*Zellenstaat*]'.[28] In human beings and higher animals, finally, a centralising nervous system subjugates and directs the subordinate psychic structures to create a 'nerve-soul' (*neuropsyche*): 'The arrangement and action of this psychic mechanism [*Seelen-Apparat*] have been frequently compared with those of a telegraphic system; the nerves are the wires, the brain the central, the sense-organs [and muscles] subordinate stations.'[29] The similarities with Nietzsche's concept of the organism are immediately obvious. What is more, Haeckel attributed souls not only to cells and 'plastids', the constituent molecules of a cell, but to other entities down to, and beyond, the atom (crystal-souls, molecule-souls, atom-souls, electron-souls, ether-souls). The only distinction between the 'souls' of living matter and those present in inorganic nature is that the former are endowed with 'memory' – and even here Nietzsche is in agreement with Haeckel. Haeckel argues that the 'unconscious memory' present in plastids is 'the chief difference between the organic and the inorganic worlds'.[30] In an age when the mechanism of heredity was still largely a mystery, and conflicting, yet equally fanciful, theories of inheritance vied for public and scientific support, the analogy between memory and heredity was a widespread one. According to Haeckel, life consists in the passive repetition of acquired characteristics. Ontogeny is the automatic sequential unfolding of characters in the order of their phyletic acquisition; it is, in other words, the organism's 'memory' of its past history. This blatantly anthropomorphic and wholly Lamarckian conception was also put forward by Ewald Hering (*Ueber das Gedächtnis als eine allgemeine Funktion der organischen Materie*, 1870) and Samuel Butler (*Unconscious Memory*, 1880). Nietzsche, too, repeatedly claims that 'memory' is present in all organic matter (VII 2, 25[403]). The organic, he maintains, is distinct from the inorganic world in so far as it '*accumulates experiences*' (VII 1, 12[31]); there is 'another memory' whose operations can be glimpsed in inheritance and evolution (VII 3, 36[29]). There is no evidence to

[27] Haeckel, *Riddle*, p. 156. Haeckel even speaks of 'will-cells' (p. 117).
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 160. [29] *Ibid.*, p. 166. [30] *Ibid.*, p. 122.

suggest that Nietzsche was familiar with any of these theories, nor need he have been; for, as the biologist E. S. Russell once remarked, the memory–heredity analogy 'is a thought likely to occur to any unprejudiced thinker'.[31]

To be sure, Nietzsche, like Goethe before him, is at times wary of committing himself entirely to a 'vitalistic' explanation of natural processes; such an account has for him only heuristic or symbolic value:

> Neither of the two explanations of organic life has been hitherto successful, neither the one from the perspective of mechanics, *nor the one from the perspective of the mind*. I emphasise *the latter*... The governance of the organism occurs in a such way that both the mechanical *as well as* the mental world can be invoked only *symbolically* as a means of explanation (VII 2, 26[68]).

But why should he favour vitalism over mechanism? Because, Nietzsche argues, mechanism can only describe, but not explain the natural world. (This is a good example of the way in which he often postulates two levels of cognition, one 'truer' than the other – despite his claim that all conceptual knowledge is groundless and metaphorical.) He rightly points out that reducing all phenomena to attraction and repulsion is not in itself sufficient to explain them; for this fundamental activity itself would then require elucidation. In seeking to make good this explanatory deficiency, however, he claims: 'one must grasp all motion, all "phenomena", all "laws" only as symptoms of an internal process and pursue the analogy of the human to its logical conclusion' (VII 3, 36[31]). Quite how this is supposed to increase our understanding of the world is unclear – simply ascribing a metaphysical 'inner world' to the concept of force no more 'explains' natural processes than does the mechanistic model of attraction and repulsion. But Nietzsche cites another reason for adopting a vitalistic model of nature and evolution. At least from around the time of *Beyond Good and Evil*, that is, during the period in which he begins to elaborate his notion of a 'will to power', Nietzsche attempts to explain the world within a framework that purports to represent a more deliberate and sustained anthropomorphism than the mechanistic paradigm to which nineteenth-century biology supposedly conformed. His theory of the world as will to power grows out of his awareness that we can never transcend the limitations of our human perspectives; it therefore places our humanity at its centre, and proposes to interpret non-human processes in terms of the only reality of which we are immediately aware: that of our instincts and desires. When Nietzsche suggests that the inorganic

[31] E. S. Russell, *Form and Function* (London: John Murray, 1916), p. 341. See also Stephen J. Gould, *Ontogeny and Phylogeny* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977). On other occasions, Nietzsche was content to admit that the 'essence of heredity is quite obscure to us' (VII 1, 12[38]).

world should be understood as a 'more rudimentary form of the world of emotions, holding everything in a powerful unity, all the potential of the organic process to develop and differentiate' (*BGE* 36), he aims to invert what he sees as the prevailing model of scientific explanation. Life is no longer reduced to matter and the forces of Newtonian physics; instead, the clockwork universe is itself represented in terms of human biology. But this is hardly as radical a step as he seems to think. Nietzsche appears to be genuinely oblivious of the fact that not only is his formulation of a 'dynamic interpretation of the world' itself conspicuously metaphysical in character, but that his anthropomorphic vision of a world permeated by spirit and will is also strikingly reminiscent of the pan-animism of Leibniz (who had argued that minute organisms, souls joined to organic bodies, exist below the level of inanimate extension) and its derivatives in German *Naturphilosophie*. Aside from the fact that Nietzsche is careful enough to stress that his conception of nature is merely an interpretation with no more epistemic justification than any other, it seems to me that it is virtually indistinguishable from the widespread crypto-Idealism of contemporary German biology. The only difference, perhaps, is that he drops all pretence of a mechanistic explanation.

But let us return to the idea of the organism as a 'struggle of the parts'. Like Roux, Nietzsche insists that the hierarchies of which all life-forms are composed are by no means static, enduring structures: 'the centre of gravity is something variable; the continual *production* of cells, etc. results in a continual change in the number of these beings' (VII 3, 34[123]). Each component part of the organism is striving to grow, to develop further at the expense of its neighbours. Such constant pressure inevitably means that old hierarchies dissolve and new ones form. There is a natural ebb and flow; 'a fluid determining of the limits of power' is essential to life (VII 3, 40[21]). Although this dynamic of shifting hierarchies ultimately provides the momentum for all variation, what prevents the organism as a whole from disintegrating either in response to the pressure of environmental change or, as is more likely, to shifts in the internal 'relations of power'? Nietzsche's answer is to adopt Roux's notion of a self-regulative mechanism, defined in Nietzschean terms as the centralising capacity in an organism of 'mastery of a community'. The 'further development of the organic' is a direct consequence of precisely this self-regulatory 'commanding and ability to command' (VII 2, 26[272]). For Roux, self-regulation is the precondition for, the essence of, self-preservation; similarly, Nietzsche claims that the organism which 'was able to *regulate*, to *discipline* itself the best, *to judge* – with the greatest excitability and even greater self-mastery – has always survived' (VII 2, 25[427]). Ultimately, self-regulation relies on the supreme power of a dominating drive or system of drives. Yet for all Nietzsche's emphasis on the oligarchic structure

of the organism, the relationship between the subordinate and dominant members of the hierarchy is characterised far more by interdependence than his brutal metaphors initially suggest: 'The hierarchy has established itself through the *victory* of the stronger and the *indispensability* of the weaker for the stronger and of the stronger for the weaker' (VII 2, 25[430]). The superior drive or organ needs the weaker structure in order to preserve itself; it is therefore in its own interests to sustain in turn the subservient functions and organs: 'that the commander, too, must do everything which ensures the survival of the obedient element, is consequently itself *conditioned* by its existence' (VII 3, 34[123]). For if a subordinate organ should atrophy, or a dominant one enjoy unconstrained growth, the entire organism would collapse. That is to say, commanding structures must, like Hegel's masters in the *Phenomenology of Mind*, in a certain sense also be slaves, 'and in more subtle cases the role between them must temporarily change, and the one which otherwise commands obey for once' (VII 3, 34[123]). Thus, commanding and obeying are not only a 'self-preservative function' (VII 2, 25[430]), but also a perpetuation of the struggle: '*Ruling* is bearing the counter-weight of the weaker force, therefore a kind of *continuation* of the struggle. *Obeying* likewise a *struggle*: so much force as *remains* for resisting' (VII 2, 26[276]). The constant tension between the organs is thus regulative, maintaining an internal balance of power that is subject to constant renegotiation.

Given the competing power structures within the organism, however, it does not survive as 'identical [*sich-selber-gleich*]', but rather as 'ruling – obeying – nourishing itself – growing' (VII 2, 25[427]). Form is thus not fixed and congealed. By emphasising the dynamic nature of organic forms, Nietzsche believes he is able to side-step Darwin's principle of utility – the assumption that variations are selected on the basis of their survival value in the struggle for existence – to which, like many non-Darwinians, including Carl Nägeli and Friedrich Lange, he is staunchly opposed. Darwin's position struck many as being implicitly teleological, for, in seeking to assign a use to each and every organ, he appeared to suggest that this use somehow explained the development of that organ; that all variations arose solely in order to meet a prior functional requirement. (This is a view more commonly associated with Lamarck, whose Second Law states that the production of a new organ results from the arising of a new need (*besoin*).) One of the most consistent themes in Nietzsche's writings on biology – and which is supported by almost all of the biologists whose works he read – is his frequently repeated assertion that an organ's present function cannot account for its development; he believes instead that form is anterior to function. This means that, since organic structures are in a perpetual state of flux and have passed through various

intermediate stages of development, the function which those structures perform is also constantly evolving and changing. Function arises as a result of a provisional equilibrium between power structures, determined and redetermined according to the changing hierarchical relationship between these several rival centres of power. The apparent purposiveness of randomly arising variations is simply 'an *expression* for an arrangement of spheres of power and their interplay' (VIII 2, 9[91]). Whilst organs evolve through an aggregation of random variations, and thus do not develop in direct response to a functional requirement ('that the *new* forms developed from within are *not* formed with an end in view'), the struggle of the parts ensures that newly occurring forms 'do not remain for long without being related to a partial use'. The imbalance caused by the appearance of a new form is quickly restored by self-regulation; the new form is then integrated into a hierarchy and a function immediately imposed upon it by the victorious and dominant part. Structures which evolve as a result of random variation are then refined through enhanced functional activity, as the new form, 'according to its *use*, develops itself more and more completely' (VIII 1, 7[25]); this corresponds to Roux's concept of functional adaptation, which, as he freely admits, is purely Lamarckian in inspiration.[32] These variations are heritable (indeed, Nietzsche claims, at least in one note, that only functions which ensure the organism's survival are inherited – a position no different to the one he attributes to Darwin) and, over time, these have been gradually refined in the external 'struggle of the organisms' (VII 2, 25[427]). The basic ideas contained in the scattered notes from which I have reconstructed Nietzsche's account of the development of function are more succinctly expressed in a well-known passage of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, which highlights the role of the will to power in both biological and cultural evolution:

> [A]ll aims, all uses are merely *signs* indicating that a will to power has mastered something less powerful than itself and impressed the meaning of a function upon it in accordance with its own interests . . . 'Development' of a thing, a custom, an organ does not in the least resemble a *progressus* towards a goal, and even less the logical and shortest *progressus*, the most economical in terms of expenditure of force and cost. Rather, this development assumes the form of the succession of the more or less far-reaching, more or less independent processes of overcoming which affect it . . . The form is fluid, but the 'meaning' even more so . . . Even within each individual organism the situation is no different: with each essential stage of growth of the whole, the 'meaning' of the individual organs also changes (*GM* II, 12).

[32] Lamarck's Third Law states: 'The degree of development of organs and their force of action are always proportionate to the use made of these organs' (quoted in Russell, *Form and Function*, p. 221).

As his many and often detailed notes on the dynamics of evolutionary physiology indicate, Nietzsche made his own the concept of the organism as a 'struggle of parts', and this forms part of what he calls the 'physiology of power' – his attempt to describe organic processes in terms of the activity of a 'will to power' operating in nature. Or rather, not just *a* will to power. For unlike Schopenhauer's indivisible 'will to life', which it is intended to supersede, the will to power is really a plurality of '*wills* to power'. These centres of force, or *Willens-Punktationen*, exist in a state of permanent conflict with one another, each seeking to impose itself upon the other, so that all events, all movement, all change and becoming in the organic as well as the inorganic world can be seen as 'a determination of relationships of degree and force, as a *struggle*' (VIII 2, 9[91]). In other words, Nietzsche envisages life itself – the will to power – as a struggle of unequal parts. The concept of struggle is not, as it was for Darwin, merely confined to the antagonistic relationship between organisms or between organisms and their environment. According to Nietzsche, there is not only a struggle *for* existence; existence is *itself* an incessant struggle. For the complex aggregate of wills to power which constitutes each organism, the organism itself is an expression of this battle, a means by which '*the struggle desires to preserve itself, desires to grow and desires to become aware of itself*'. But Nietzsche not only asserts the ubiquity of conflict; in opposition to Darwin, he denies that this struggle is primarily one of self-preservation: 'When two organic beings collide, if there were *only* struggle *for* existence or for food: then what? There must be struggle for struggle's sake' (VII 2, 26[276]). Let us now look at Nietzsche's rejection of the principle of self-preservation in more detail.

Evolution and the increase of life

One of the characteristic features of Nietzsche's concept of the will to power – 'the innermost essence of being' (VIII 3, 14[80]) – is its internal capacity 'precisely *not* to want to preserve itself' (VIII 3, 14[121]). Explicitly taking issue with both Schopenhauer's 'will to life' and Spinoza's assertion that at the core of each being is a *conatus*, an innate, essential tendency to endure, Nietzsche argues that all striving is 'essentially a striving for more power' (VIII 3, 14[82]). Instead of seeking primarily to sustain and consolidate itself, the will to power endeavours to expand and grow beyond itself, to obtain a maximum quantity of power: in every centre of force there is a 'desire to become master, to become more, to become stronger' (VIII 3, 14[81]). This ceaseless accumulation and expenditure of energy not only governs all events at all levels of existence, from pre-organic chemical processes to the motion of the planets; it is also the motor of Nietzschean evolution.

In developing this aspect of the will to power, Nietzsche drew heavily on the ideas of an obscure Anglo-German zoologist called William Rolph. In his only major work, *Biologische Probleme* (*Biological Problems*), which Nietzsche probably acquired during mid-1884,[33] Rolph seeks to refute the orthodox Darwinian conception of the 'struggle for existence', and proposes a novel mechanism by which to explain the origin of variation and diversity in nature. But his anti-Darwinian theory of evolution is intended only as a foundation on which to construct a moral theory rooted in biological 'facts' and formulated as an explicit rebuttal of Herbert Spencer's system of evolutionary ethics. It should be obvious, then, why Nietzsche might be interested in Rolph's work. Of even greater interest, perhaps, was the basic thesis underlying both Rolph's discussion of basic physiological processes and his thoughts on the development of human morality from primitive biological imperatives. For Rolph denies the existence of an instinct for self-preservation – or at the very least rejects the notion that such a drive represents the principal motivation of animal behaviour. Rather, life seeks primarily to expand itself.

This elementary proposition is expressed as a law of assimilation, a law operative in both the organic and inorganic world. Growth, Rolph argues, is determined by a process of diffusion, in which endosmosis predominates over exosmosis. All organic functions, from nutrition and reproduction right up to evolution, can be explained by, and reduced to, this fundamental activity; they are not, as most contemporary biologists assumed, a manifestation of the instinct for self-preservation. For this process of assimilation by endosmosis is limitless, leading Rolph to describe each cell, and consequently each more complex organism, as effectively 'insatiable' (*unersättlich*), impelled by an involuntary 'urge to assimilate' constantly to increase its intake of nutriment: 'In the economy of nature, therefore, it is not a question of merely covering expenditure, but rather of increasing the income, of the turnover of material.'[34]

From 1884 onwards, Nietzsche's notebooks are littered with jottings and comments which suggest that Rolph's influence on him was no less profound than that of Roux. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that Nietzsche incorporated all the basic premises of Rolph's biology into his own thought. Without enumerating the many instances of his borrowing here,[35] it is nevertheless worthwhile to pick out some of the main threads of his Rolph-inspired notes. For example, like Rolph, he regards

[33] William Rolph, *Biologische Probleme, zugleich als Versuch zur Entwicklung einer rationellen Ethik* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1884). In a lengthy note written between May and July 1885, Nietzsche cites the publication date of *Biologische Probleme* as 1881 (VII 3, 35[34]). This was the date of the first edition; Nietzsche, however, owned the revised second edition.

[34] Rolph, *Biologische Probleme*, p. 61.

[35] For a complete list of the correspondences between Nietzsche's writings and Rolph's work, see my 'Beiträge zur Quellenforschung', *Nietzsche-Studien* 27 (1998), 535–51.

assimilation as 'that basic organic function on which all growth rests' (VII 3, 40[7]). The only difference is that Nietzsche holds the assimilative activity observable in both the organic and inorganic worlds to be further reducible to the behaviour of the will to power. Yet he defines the will to power itself as a process of assimilation, and even, echoing Rolph's terminology, as an 'insatiable appropriation [*unersättliche Aneignung*]' (VIII 1, 2[76]). In other words, Nietzsche once again adds an 'inner world' to what is ostensibly a purely mechanical process of diffusion; he raises Rolph's principle of insatiability to the level of an *ens realissimum*. Nietzsche further claims that all organic functions – and he lists amongst these nutrition, reproduction, adaptation, heredity and the physiological division of labour – are reducible to the will to power (VII 3, 39[12]). All such organic processes – and, as we have already seen, the organism itself, as the totality of these processes – are means employed by the will to power to increase the extent of its influence; nutrition, for example, is merely 'a consequence, a practical application of that original will to become *stronger*' (VIII 3, 14[174]). Following Rolph, Nietzsche maintains that this insatiable acquisition of nutriment – and thus power – would suggest that organisms are not driven by an instinct for self-preservation: 'one cannot derive the most basic and primordial activity in protoplasm from a will to self-preservation: for it takes in absurdly more than would be necessary for survival' (VIII 2, 11[121]).

Rolph further argues that the principle of insatiability explains the reproductive behaviour of primitive organisms – indeed, the two forms of reproduction which he differentiates, conjugation and division, are in fact disguised forms of nutrition. Conjugation involves the merging of two unicellular organisms to form one single organism, and takes place when normal food supplies are scarce. It is, in fact, simply 'a particularly favourable form of taking in food', a process of 'isophagous' nutrition brought about by the organism's original 'striving for satiation'.[36] Cell division, on the other hand, takes place in more favourable circumstances: it is a consequence of the cell's insatiable assimilation of organic matter when there is abundant nutriment. The nucleus of the cell is a 'centre of attraction [*Attractionscentrum*]' which exercises a unifying and ordering influence on molecular changes that take place inside the cell. But during cellular growth an imbalance arises between the surface and the interior of the cell: while the peripheral protoplasm receives enough nutriment, the nucleus does not. This increase in the mass of peripheral protoplasm eventually overcomes the 'centralising force of attraction' exerted by the nucleus.[37] In short, the cell's appetite has outstripped its

[36] Rolph, *Biologische Probleme*, p. 147. [37] *Ibid.*, p. 122.

capacity to process the material effectively, and, as a consequence, it 'dissolves into two separate individuals, it remains in existence as a double being'.[38]

These ideas are echoed in numerous notes which Nietzsche composed between 1885 and 1887. In one of the first such instances, he writes:

> The weaker presses towards the stronger because of a shortage of food; it wants to take shelter, possibly to become *one* with it. Conversely, the stronger defends itself, it does not want to go under in this way; rather, in growing it divides into two or several more organisms (VII 3, 36[21]).

But for Nietzsche these processes of division and conjugation do not only take place amongst organisms; he elevates Rolph's discussion of reproduction in primitive organisms to the level of a universally valid principle describing the behaviour of entities in the inorganic as well as the organic world.

> Struggle of the atoms, like that between individuals; where there is a certain difference in strength, however, two atoms develop out of a single atom and two individuals out of a single individual. Likewise when, conversely, two develop from one when the inner state contrives a disintegration of the centre of power (VII 3, 43[2]).

Nietzsche concludes this passage with the remark: '*Therefore against* the absolute concept "atom" and "individual"!' Given the issues that it raises, it is unsurprising that Nietzsche seizes upon Rolph's account of cellular reproduction to explore the concept of the 'individual'. From the 'standpoint of the theory of descent' (VIII 1, 7[9]), even cells, the most elementary organisms known to nineteenth-century biology, are not absolute, indivisible monads. And this is just as true for what Nietzsche terms the 'soul-monad' (VIII 1, 2[68]). For if, as he maintains, 'spirit' or 'mind' is indeed an integral part of organic matter, and is therefore present in the most basic organisms, then the idea of an indivisible soul or subject cannot be sustained. For, during the inevitable process of cell division – or even in more complex forms of reproduction – that unity of which a rudimentary 'spirit' is a part collapses. Language lacks the means 'to designate the degrees of intensity on the path to the individual, to the "person". Two develop from one, one from two: this one sees with one's own eyes in the reproduction of the lowest organisms' (VII 3, 40[8]).

Ultimately, it is the will to power which 'propagates' itself in this way. Only weak centres of power, those which are spent and in decline, seek first and foremost to preserve themselves; only they are driven by 'hunger', an impulse to obtain a 'restoration of a loss' (VIII 3, 14[174]). That is

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 124.

why they endeavour to unite with others; conjugation is always the result of hunger, of impotence. On the other hand, the very voracity of the strong, ascendant will to power undermines its integrity and survival; its intrinsic 'desire not to preserve itself', its accumulation of more energy than it is able to assimilate, leads to the development of a 'counter-will', a new 'centre of organisation [*Organisationscentrum*]' (Rolph's 'centre of attraction'). A struggle between the two wills ensues, with the emergent, stronger will ultimately detaching itself from the original, whereupon the whole process starts over again (VIII 1, 5[64]). But in describing the will to power in this way, Nietzsche speaks of it not merely in terms of a vague impulse at work in nature, but implies that it, too, is an entity, an organism that itself feeds and procreates. In other words, power itself seems to have a 'physiology'. This involves a degree of circularity – inasmuch as he reduces physiological processes to functions of the will to power, but at the same time derives the characteristic activity of the will to power from those same physiological processes as described by Rolph and others. What is more, however, in describing 'processes of power' as analogous to the behaviour of primitive organisms, he appears to revert to the same Romantic conception of the universe as organism that he had criticised in *The Gay Science*: 'Let us beware of thinking that the world is a living being. Where should it expand? On what should it feed? How could it grow and multiply?' (*GS* 109).[39]

In formulating his conception of the will to power, Nietzsche commits another metaphysical error which he had earlier studiously avoided. He had questioned the necessity of positing a separate instinct for self-preservation as early as 1876–7:

> Why assume an *instinct for self-preservation* [*Erhaltungstrieb*] at all? Among countless non-purposive developments there arose viable ones, ones capable of *continuing* to live; the individual human organs required millions of years of adaptation until finally the present body could arise regularly and until those facts regularly appear which are usually ascribed to the instinct for self-preservation (IV 2, 23[9]).

In this passage and, as we shall see in the next chapter, in other contexts, Nietzsche regards such an instinct for self-preservation as superfluous and teleological; he expresses the hope that it might one day be possible to trace the phenomena attributed to it back to 'their chemical and mechanical laws'. But while the later Nietzsche also repudiates the notion of an instinct for self-preservation because he claims that it is a redundant teleological principle, he is perfectly happy to replace it with a *Trieb* that is no less teleological than the one which he rejects.

[39] In his earlier Schopenhauerian phase, Nietzsche also construed the primordial 'Will' in organismic terms. See chapter 3.

Although I have only sketched the outlines of Rolph's theory, much of his critique of Darwinism has already been prefigured in the foregoing discussion. His main bone of contention is that Darwin fails to address what he, Rolph, regards as the central problem of evolution: the role of nutrition in variation and heredity. Like other non-Darwinian biologists, Rolph insists that natural selection is a purely secondary phenomenon in evolution, a claim based on his mistaken assumption that Darwin regarded the 'struggle for existence' *primarily* or *exclusively* in terms of a Malthusian intra-specific competition for scarce resources. Malthus had argued that human population growth, if unchecked, tended to expand in geometrical progression, while food supply increased at best arithmetically. In practice, however, population was constantly controlled by famine, disease and war. According to Rolph, Darwin's debt to the Malthusian law of population means that he envisages the struggle for existence as essentially a 'competitive struggle for dwindling supplies of food' fought by rival groups within an overpopulous species.[40] Given his emphasis on the scarcity of resources, Darwin is unable to explain how variations in organic structure arise, because, Rolph contends, such variations demand an increase in energy and consequently an increase in available nutriment:

> The increase in the amount of food will generally result in the strengthening, acceleration and intensification of growth, in a more rapid attainment of sexual maturity, in the accumulation of reserve materials, in the development of a greater and often new vital activity, and will thereby be the cause of manifold variations. A decrease in intake will everywhere bring about the reverse.[41]

If a rise in the intake of nourishment leads to the rapid development of random and useful variations, then evolution can only take place in favourable conditions where there is an abundant supply of food: 'Variability in general, but particularly the variations which produce so-called perfection, [are] concomitant with the prosperity of the conditions.' Darwin, however, is forced to the illogical conclusion that variation occurs as a result of the exigencies of the struggle for existence, and that the more meagre the resources, the greater the degree of variation.[42]

[40] Rolph, *Biologische Probleme*, p. 84. In fact, Darwin distinguishes three levels on which the struggle for existence operates: between an organism and its environment; between an organism and those of other species; and between an organism and those of the same species. The struggle between conspecifics is the most intense because they have the same needs and thus compete for the same resources.

[41] Rolph, *Biologische Probleme*, p. 72. Rolph is wrong to claim that Darwin ignores this role of nutrition in variation. In *The Origin of Species*, he concedes that 'variability may be partly connected with excess of food' (*Origin*, p. 71).

[42] Rolph, *Biologische Probleme*, p. 77. Rolph is of course mistaken. Darwin never saw the scarcity of resources itself as the engine of change, but primarily as a means to eliminate less well-adapted organisms. Such inaccuracies in Rolph's argument led a reviewer of

Darwin's assumption of the scarcity of resources leads him to conjecture that hunger is merely a manifestation of the instinct for self-preservation, for the organism supposedly acquires only sufficient food to survive and does not cover the physiological costs of evolution. The Darwinian struggle for existence is, therefore, conceived in primarily defensive terms – as a struggle for mere survival. But this explanation is inadequate, Rolph continues, and not only because such a struggle would retard evolution – or even, ultimately, bring about the decline and extinction of a species – but because the organism, as we have seen, 'also [supports] the reproductive function out of its intake, which is by no means related to self-preservation'. If an organism is driven only by an impulse for self-preservation, then growth and procreation, and thus evolution, which all depend on a surfeit of nutriment, are impossible. But, as we saw above, all organisms, Rolph believes, seek to obtain not only enough food to survive, but much more. Darwinism cannot account for this 'need for nourishment which goes beyond the extent necessary for maintaining the status quo of life', a problem which Rolph regards as the most fundamental of the theory of descent. Rolph claims to have found the solution to this puzzle in his principle of insatiability: 'And it is only this insatiability which can explain the growth, reproduction, the perfection and the individual evolution of organisms. Without it, the world would still be populated only by primitive amoebae, and all eternity would not have sufficed for them to evolve to a higher level.'[43] Thus although he repudiates the concept of a *Bildungstrieb* in nature, the evolutionary mechanism which Rolph proposes – the automatic, involuntary 'assimilative activity' – is essentially a restatement of older theories in mechanistic terms: an endogenous impetus to achieve an advance in organisation. This advance consists for Rolph in an increased power of appropriating the material which the environment supplies – and not merely structural complexity.

The true struggle for existence is thus not a struggle for simple survival, but for an increase of life. Every new point reached by an organism in its progress is a limit which it again strives to pass beyond. The impulse to improve the conditions of life is universal. Thus there is an active struggle among organisms, not a mere defensive war; each struggles to obtain the greatest possible advantage for itself. The categorical imperative of what Rolph calls the 'animal or natural ethic' is not simply self-maintenance, not 'to live normally', but to pass beyond the limit that has hitherto been

the first edition of *Biologische Probleme* to remark that 'the author, like most of Darwin's opponents, is fighting with windmills and phantoms of his own creation' ('Review of *Biologische Probleme*', *Kosmos* 2 (1882), 146).

[43] Rolph, *Biologische Probleme*, pp. 92, 94, 95.

the normal, to develop new needs and to satisfy them:

> Then the life-struggle is no longer waged for existence, it is no struggle for self-preservation, no struggle for the 'acquisition of the most indispensable requirements of life', but, rather, a struggle for an increase in one's acquisitions . . . It is constant, it is eternal; it can never be extinguished, for there can be no adaptation to insatiability . . . Furthermore, the life-struggle is then no defensive struggle, but rather a war of aggression . . . But growth and reproduction and perfection are the consequences of that successful war of aggression . . . While the Darwinists hold that no struggle for existence takes place where the survival of the creature is not threatened, I believe the life-struggle to be ubiquitous: it is first and foremost precisely such a life-struggle, a struggle for the increase of life, but not a struggle for life![44]

If all this sounds somewhat familiar, it is because Nietzsche incorporates all the main points of Rolph's anti-Darwinian argument – the claim that the struggle for existence is an exception, occurring only in rare conditions of scarcity; that there is in fact an abundance of resources to fuel the rapid evolution of organisms; that the basic impetus in nature is towards an increase in life – into aphorism 349 of *The Gay Science*, in the fifth book that was added to the second edition of 1887. Once again, the only significant change he makes is to translate Rolph's terminology into his own, with the latter's term the 'increase of life' (*Lebensmehrung*) becoming the more recognisably Nietzschean 'expansion of power' (*Machterweiterung*):[45]

> The wish to preserve oneself is the symptom of a condition of distress, of a limitation of the really fundamental instinct of life which aims at the *expansion of power* and, wishing for that, frequently risks and even sacrifices self-preservation . . . [I]n nature it is not conditions of distress that are *dominant* but overflow and squandering, even to the point of absurdity. The struggle for existence is only an *exception*, a temporary restriction of the life-will [*Lebenswille*]. The great and small struggle always revolves around superiority, around growth and expansion, around power – in accordance with the will to power which is the will of life (*GS* 349).

With slight modifications, and under a more explicitly anti-Darwinian rubric, the same argument reappears the following year in *Twilight of the Idols*: 'life as a whole is *not* a state of crisis or hunger, but rather a richness, a luxuriance, even an absurd extravagance – where there is a struggle, there is a struggle for *power* . . . Malthus should not be confused with nature' (*TI* IX, 14).

What all this means is that organic change is for Nietzsche – as it is for Rolph – merely the by-product of the acquisition of power. This

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 97. This passage is heavily marked by Nietzsche in his copy of Rolph's book.

[45] Even Rolph speaks of the *Grundtrieb* of life as the acquisition of 'wealth, power and influence' (*Biologische Probleme*, p. 222). Elsewhere, Nietzsche echoes him more closely when he speaks of the '*intensification of life* [*Lebenssteigerung*]' (VIII 2, 11[83]).

perspective allows him once again, he believes, to circumvent the issue of utility. For Darwin, as we have seen, the use of a particular adaptation is determined by its value in securing an advantage in the struggle for existence. Nietzsche, on the other hand, is utterly unconcerned with the fact whether an organism survives or not – indeed, the truly evolving organism precisely does not endure, but is inevitably destroyed by its own pregnant potency. He understands evolution not in terms of the gradual accretion of adaptive and self-preservative variations, but as the sudden eruption of life's creative energies:

> 'Useful' in the sense of Darwinian biology – that means proving itself advantageous in the struggle with others. But it seems to me that the feeling of increase [*Mehrgefühl*], the feeling of *becoming stronger*, is itself, quite apart from its utility in the struggle, the real *progress*: only from this feeling does the will to struggle arise (VIII 1, 7[44]).

However, only by positing this universal thirst for power is it possible, Nietzsche believes, to account for what Darwin refuses to acknowledge: that the 'struggle for existence' does not always result in the survival of the 'fittest' – by which Nietzsche means the 'stronger, better-constituted'. In fact, as the history of humanity attests, the very opposite is the case: 'the elimination of the strokes of luck, the uselessness of the more highly developed types, the inevitable ascendancy of the average, even the *below average* types' (VIII 3, 14[123]). How does the will to power explain this topsy-turvy state of nature, this '*inverted* struggle for existence'? The answer lies in the fact that both the strong and the weak seek to improve the conditions of their existence, to obtain power. But on the one hand, as we have seen, higher forms are rare and radically unstable. Such is their profligacy in expending the energy which they so voraciously acquire; such is their immanent diversity that these exquisite creatures are prone to disintegration and are thus short-lived: 'the higher type represents an incomparably greater complexity, – a greater sum of co-ordinated elements, thereby also making disintegration incomparably more likely' (VIII 3, 14[133]). On the other hand, the weak tend to congregate in herds, thereby consolidating and increasing their collective power as compensation for their individual impotence. (In other words, the evolution of the individual and the herd are moments in the endless self-propagation of the will to power, constituting processes of either conjugation or division. As such, they can be explained in terms of the fundamental law which Nietzsche had earlier formulated: 'The greater the urge towards unity, the more one can infer weakness; the greater the urge towards variety, difference, inner disintegration, the more power there is' (VII 3, 36[21]).) Against these organised herd instincts, the 'strong' are relatively

powerless. The weak, then, prevail not through brute strength, but by sheer force of numbers and as a result of developing various adaptive strategies for survival – pre-eminently, of course, morality.

And it is to Nietzsche's account of the evolution of morality that we now turn. In doing so, we shall take up and elaborate the major themes of Nietzsche's theory of evolution as they have been expounded in the foregoing discussion: the rejection of an instinct for self-preservation, the relationship between the individual and the herd, and the concept of the social organism.

Before we move on, however, we should remind ourselves that, far from advancing a radical, coherent and effective critique of Darwin, Nietzsche simply reiterates the many errors and misunderstandings perpetrated by his contemporaries. Like them, he dresses up a metaphysical and anthropomorphic view of nature in the language of modern evolutionary biology. The will to power is essentially a *Bildungstrieb*, and is, as it were, an amalgam of a number of competing non-Darwinian theories: Nägeli's perfection principle, Roux's concept of an internal struggle, and Rolph's principle of insatiability. And although Nietzsche refuses to equate evolution with 'progress' or a linear ascent of organic forms; although he argues that the apparent purposiveness of organs arises as a result of a process of contingent struggle and denies that an instinct for self-preservation guides the actions of all organisms – despite all this, he reintroduces a teleological aspect to evolution by claiming that there is in nature a vital force that seeks the increase of power. Ironically, Nietzsche's evolutionism is more representative of nineteenth-century thought than Darwin's theory of natural selection.

2 The physiology of morality

After receiving from Darwin a copy of *The Origin of Species* and reading it with mounting horror, the Revd. Adam Sedgwick, professor of geology at Cambridge, wrote to his former pupil to admonish him:

> There is a moral or metaphysical part of nature as well as a physical. A man who denies this is deep in the mire of folly. 'Tis the crown and glory of organic science that it *does* through *final cause* link material and moral . . . You have ignored this link; and, if I do not mistake your meaning, you have done your best in one or two pregnant cases to break it. Were it possible (which, thank God, it is not) to break it, humanity, in my mind, would suffer a damage that might brutalize it.[1]

Unsurprisingly, Darwin bitterly resented this stinging rebuke from his erstwhile mentor, yet for many later commentators Sedgwick's objections seem wholly justified. Darwin may not, as Sedgwick assumed, have actively sought to divest nature of ulterior moral purpose and deprive human ethics of a firm foundation, but this is nevertheless precisely what the revolution which he set in motion accomplished. And its consequences were indeed potentially 'brutalising'. For if humanity was merely one species of animal amongst others, subject to the same ceaseless struggle for life in a world bereft of the guiding hand of Providence, then selfishness had been bred into the very marrow of its being. Victorian gentility was only a thin veneer beneath which lurked a savage beast bent only on individual advantage. This, Gertrude Himmelfarb has concluded, was the 'traumatic effect' of Darwinism: it 'de-moralized man' by displacing 'man by nature, moral man by amoral nature'.[2] But how accurate an assessment is this of the shift in human self-understanding occasioned by the rise of evolutionary theory? To be sure, there were many in the nineteenth century who, like one dispirited young man after reading *The Origin of Species* at the age of sixteen, found themselves haunted by 'a feeling of utter insignificance in face of the unapprehended processes of nature . . . a sense of being aimlessly adrift in the vast universe of consciousness, among an

[1] Francis Darwin (ed.), *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, vol. II, p. 249.
[2] Himmelfarb, *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution*, p. 79.

infinity of other atoms, all struggling desperately to assert their own existence at the expense of all the others'.[3] But, as Robert J. Richards has exhaustively demonstrated, many – if not most – nineteenth-century evolutionists took a rather different view of the ramifications of Darwinism for human affairs.[4] Their object was not to wrench apart the 'material and moral'; on the contrary, they believed that they were able to knit these two worlds more closely together. Life could be reinfused with ethical significance by enlisting biology itself to legitimate and sustain the inherited values of Judaeo-Christian civilisation. Ernst Haeckel, for example, dismissed in typically robust fashion the notion that evolution might entail 'a subversion of all accepted moral law and a destructive emancipation of Egoism'; rather, he, like a whole host of scientists and philosophers, sought to formulate 'a system of Ethics erected upon the indestructible foundation of unchanging natural law'.[5] A moral sense could no longer be regarded as the sole prerogative of Man, for all social animals appeared to demonstrate a 'sense of duty', a willingness to sacrifice themselves for the greater good of their community. Non-human systems of ethics represented merely a stage in the gradual refinement of those noble instincts and patterns of co-operative behaviour which provided the best adaptive response to the demands of a given environment. In short, evolution was envisaged as a moral process – the progressive development towards ever more perfect expressions of altruism, compassion and love.

That the fundamental idea which lay behind all nineteenth-century theories of evolutionary progress was a moral and religious one is perhaps indicated most clearly by Darwin's own account of the development of morality in *The Descent of Man* (1871), which is obviously motivated by a strong desire to leave inviolate the moral 'truths' of Christian teaching instilled in him during his childhood. Although Darwin believes that a moral sense originated through the natural selection of those tribes in whom the social instinct was strongest, he recognises that this primitive ethic gradually developed into a 'higher morality' through the effects of habit, rational reflection and religious instruction. Not 'the survival of the fittest' but 'as ye would that men should do to you, do ye to them likewise' has come to be regarded as the true maxim of human conduct. Nor is

[3] Gamaliel Bradford, *Darwin* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1926), pp. 245–7.

[4] Richards, *Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Theories of Mind and Behavior*. Even Christianity itself soon adapted to the new orthodoxy; see James R. Moore, *The Post-Darwinian Controversies: A Study of the Protestant Struggle to Come to Terms with Darwin in Great Britain and America, 1870–1900* (Cambridge University Press, 1979).

[5] Haeckel, quoted in C. M. Williams, *A Review of the Systems of Ethics Founded on the Theory of Evolution* (London: Macmillan, 1893), p. 27. See also Jürgen Sandmann, *Der Bruch mit der humanitären Tradition: Die Biologisierung der Ethik bei Ernst Haeckel und anderen Darwinisten seiner Zeit* (Stuttgart: Fischer, 1990).

moral progress at an end. 'Looking to future generations', Darwin prophesies, 'there is no cause to fear that the social instincts will grow weaker, and we may expect that virtuous habits will grow stronger, becoming perhaps fixed by inheritance. In this case the struggle between our higher and lower impulses will be less severe, and virtue will be triumphant.'[6] This theistic notion of evolution as an ever-upward progression away from earlier forms of animal life and towards spiritual and social perfection came to be inseparable from the way Darwinism was received and interpreted.

It is against this historical backdrop, I believe, that we must reconsider Nietzsche's naturalistic critique of traditional morality. For his own attempts to formulate an ethics which would conform to, and derive its values and legitimacy from, an underlying biological reality is conceived in opposition not only to the other-worldly, metaphysical moral systems of Kant and Schopenhauer, but also to those nineteenth-century theories of evolutionary ethics which aimed merely to shore up the old values by constructing a new, this-worldly foundation for them. His dissatisfaction with his contemporaries' reluctance to rise to the challenge of devising a 'genuine Darwinian ethic, seriously and consistently carried through' (*UM* I, 7, p. 30) made itself felt as early as 1873. One of the many follies for which he lambasts the Bible critic David Friedrich Strauss in the first essay of *Untimely Meditations* is the latter's misguided attempt, in his *Der alte und der neue Glaube* (*The Old Faith and the New*, 1873), to reconcile the moral teachings of Christianity with the new evolutionary world-view. Although this self-professed 'free-thinker' dresses himself in the 'hairy cloak of our ape-genealogists', Nietzsche contends, he lacks the courage to countenance the implications of a truly 'Darwinian' perspective. Instead of grasping the opportunity to derive 'a moral code for life out of the *bellum omnium contra omnes* and the privileges of the strong', he perversely praises the English naturalist as one of the 'greatest benefactors of mankind' for having established a new, non-transcendental groundwork for ethical conduct (*UM* I, 7, pp. 29–30). But Strauss, Nietzsche would soon discover, was not the only thinker to shrink from making the radical break with traditional systems of morality which the theory of evolution would seem to demand.

Nietzsche takes his first faltering steps towards an evolutionary understanding of morals with *Human, All Too Human*, published in 1878. With this work he publicly announces his emancipation from the intellectual enthralment to Schopenhauer and Wagner which characterised his youthful writings. The pessimistic and idealistic tenor of *The Birth of Tragedy* has been replaced by a new positivistic outlook, an awareness that

[6] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 2nd edn, 2 vols. (London: Murray, 1877), vol. I, pp. 124–5.

human existence and values are not rooted in some remote metaphysical realm but are, rather, historically determined: 'everything *essential* in the development of mankind took place in primeval times . . everything has become: there are *no eternal facts*, just as there are no absolute truths' (*HA* 2). How then do moral evaluations arise? Nietzsche's answer – to which he would remain committed for the rest of his life – is that they are products of this historical process itself. What distinguishes *Human, All Too Human* from Nietzsche's later thought, however, is that here he does not yet portray morality as the legacy of humanity's animal ancestry; there is no attempt, as there later would be, to view moral imperatives as merely the rationalisation of feelings accompanying certain physiological states. The 'history of the moral sensations' which he sketches here is a narrative that unfolds primarily on the plane of cultural or social, rather than biological, evolution.[7]

Nietzsche argues that the authority of moral commands derives solely from habit and the weight of tradition. All communities originate through coercion: a loose band of individuals is subjugated by a powerful ruler and organised into a collective. Certain practices and forms of behaviour – these vary according to the precise circumstances in which the group finds itself – are thereby imposed upon the population of this embryonic society in order not only to ensure the survival of the community as a whole against external aggressors, but also to restrain the innate, destructive egoism of its members. What we understand as morality, then, is nothing more than the refinement and codification of this obligatory conduct: originally merely compulsion, it later 'becomes custom, later still voluntary obedience, finally almost instinct' (*HA* 99). The virtuous person is thus merely someone who 'does what is customary as if by nature, as a result of a long inheritance' (*HA* 96) – this is what, in *Daybreak*, Nietzsche would later call the 'morality of custom' (*Sittlichkeit der Sitte*). Acts are judged in accordance with their utility for the collective: good is that which promotes the survival of the community. Nietzsche thus accounts for moral value by appealing to the same theory which, in the *Genealogy*, he would later ridicule for its psychological implausibility and historical naïveté: the equation of the good with the useful and the notion that non-egoistic actions were originally designated good by those for whom they were useful, before the causal link between utility and goodness was

[7] This is itself evidence of the influence of John Lubbock's *The Origin of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man* (1870) and Walter Bagehot's *Physics and Politics, or Thoughts on the Application of the Principles of 'Natural Selection' and 'Inheritance' to Political Society* (1872), both of which were in Nietzsche's library. See the following articles by David S. Thatcher: 'Nietzsche's Debt to Lubbock', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44 (1983), 293–309; 'Nietzsche, Bagehot and the Morality of Custom', *Victorian Newsletter* 62 (1982), 7–13.

then forgotten through habit – so that ultimately the good was no longer experienced as 'good' because it was useful but instead as good in itself.

In keeping with the spirit of optimistic rationalism that pervades *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche regards morality as a temporary, albeit unavoidable phase in human development, the vestiges of a primitive and superstitious conception of the world. Though it is true that everything in the domain of morality 'has become and is changeable, unsteady, everything is in flux', '*everything is also flooding forward*, and towards *one* goal'. That goal is the transformation of mankind '*from a moral to a knowing mankind*' – a process of enlightenment that may require thousands of years to be consummated, but which will nevertheless eventually 'bestow on mankind the power of bringing forth the wise, innocent (conscious of innocence) man as regularly as it now brings forth – *not his antithesis but necessary preliminary* – the unwise, unjust, guilt-conscious man' (*HA* 107). Already, then, Nietzsche has set himself against the prevailing model of evolution as the gradual realisation of some moral ideal embedded in the natural order itself.

The absence of any explicitly biological understanding of morality or of moral development in *Human, All Too Human* is all the more surprising because this work was conceived during a period of close intellectual collaboration with the young philosopher Paul Rée. It was Rée's book *Der Ursprung der moralischen Empfindungen* (*The Origin of Moral Sensations*) which, Nietzsche later admitted, gave him the 'first impetus to give expression to some of my hypotheses on the origin of morality' (*GM*, Preface, 4), and indeed many of Nietzsche's ideas – the rejection of the concept of free will and moral responsibility, of any qualitative difference between good and evil actions – had already been anticipated by his friend, whose rather dry, academic treatise appeared a year before his own work. But unlike Nietzsche, Rée *had* read Darwin (and Lamarck), and his arguments are supported at each turn by a whole raft of contemporary biological theories. Even the central thesis of his book – that 'moral man stands no closer to the intelligible world than does physical man', an assertion which Nietzsche quotes with approval in aphorism 36 of *Human, All Too Human* – is derived from the proposition that 'the higher animals have, through natural selection, evolved from the lower animals, human beings from the apes'.[8] But nowhere is Rée's biologistic approach more evident than in his own account of the role played

[8] Paul Rée, *Der Ursprung der moralischen Empfindungen* (Chemnitz: Schmeitzner, 1877), p. viii. For a more detailed discussion of Rée's influence on Nietzsche, see Charlotte Morawski, 'Der Einfluß Rées auf Nietzsches neue Moralideen', Ph.D. thesis, University of Breslau (1915); Brendan Donnellan, 'Friedrich Nietzsche and Paul Rée: Cooperation and Conflict', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 43 (1982), 595–612.

by habit in reinforcing ethical conduct. Like Nietzsche, Rée rejects the notion of moral progress in the conventional sense: neither Darwinian natural selection nor the Lamarckian principle of use and disuse will result in the gradual strengthening of non-egoistic impulses. The human animal has not, during the millennia of social evolution, become less selfish; it has merely become more domesticated, learning to restrain its bestial impulses. This process, though, *is* explicable in terms of Lamarckian physiology. Self-mastery – imposed as a moral demand by state and society – requires the exertion of certain nerves and muscles; the more frequently these are exercised in order to suppress a particular passion, the greater the individual's success in achieving this end because the flow of 'nervous fluid' to those parts increases. These internal adaptations to the prevailing moral circumstances are heritable: 'the altered disposition of the muscles and nerves is transmitted to offspring so that later generations can from birth master themselves more easily than earlier ones'.[9] For Rée, then, morality not only emerges out of our evolutionary history, it can also have a retroactive effect on present and future biological evolution.

Nietzsche himself did not begin to indulge in speculation about the 'physiology of morality' (VII 2, 27[14]) until several years after *Human, All Too Human*. The catalyst – or at least one of the catalysts – of this change from a cultural towards a more overtly biologistic understanding of the question of the genesis and development of morals was one of those 'English psychologists' whom Nietzsche ruthlessly mocks in the *Genealogy*: Herbert Spencer. Spencer is rarely, if at all, mentioned in discussions of the development of Nietzsche's thought. This is remarkable, because although Nietzsche restricts himself to only a few curt and dismissive remarks about Spencer in his published works, his notebooks reveal a long-running critical engagement with the British philosopher's *Data of Ethics* (1879), a book which Nietzsche initially greeted with enthusiasm, even going so far as to urge his publisher Ernst Schmeitzner to acquire the German rights for its translation (*KGB* II 5, p. 466). That Nietzsche studied Spencer is certainly significant: for more than anyone else it was Spencer who was associated with the idea that evolution was an intrinsically moral force; it was he who advanced perhaps the most influential nineteenth-century system of evolutionary ethics. His 'physiological utilitarianism'[10] constituted the point of departure for any number of subsequent theorists – regardless of whether, like Ernst Haeckel or Jean-Marie Guyau, they sought to elaborate his insights

[9] Rée, *Ursprung der moralischen Empfindungen*, p. 128.
[10] As the social Darwinist Alexander Tille described Spencer's ethics in *Von Darwin bis Nietzsche*, p. 72.

further, or, like William Rolph, they took issue with his conclusions. In this respect, Nietzsche was no different from many of his contemporaries in using Spencer as the launch pad for his own 'physiological ethics' (V 1, 6[123]), a project that took shape between the years 1880 and 1883. But Nietzsche's thorough reading and ultimate rejection of the *Data of Ethics*, which he eventually acquired in 1880, had consequences not only for his moral philosophy, but also for his understanding of the process of evolution itself. Indeed, as we shall see, Nietzsche's own conception of evolution is in many ways not only anti-Darwinian, but also 'anti-Spencerian' in character. In what follows, I shall first outline the theory of behaviour which he develops in opposition to Spencer, and describe how he effectively turns on its head the British philosopher's conviction that evolution tends towards the refinement of altruistic impulses. In the second half of this chapter, I shall return to the concept of the 'social organism' in order to explicate Nietzsche's physiological definition of morality, demonstrating at the same time how the two loci of biological evolution which he distinguishes – the sovereign individual on the one hand and the herd or species on the other – give rise to two conflicting forms of morality, a distinction that clearly anticipates his more famous differentiation of master and slave moralities in *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*.

Nietzsche contra Spencer

When, in a note written in 1885, Nietzsche dismissed Spencer's work as a mixture of '*bêtise* and Darwinism' (VII 3, 35[34]), he was certainly flying in the face of contemporary public opinion. Spencer may be little read today – many modern critics share Nietzsche's estimation of his achievements – but in his own time he enjoyed an unequalled reputation, in Europe and especially in the United States, as the pre-eminent 'philosopher of the doctrine of Development'.[11] It was he, not Darwin, who popularised the term 'evolution' and he who coined the phrase 'survival of the fittest'. Yet these are today his only legacies; by the time of his death in 1903 the vast edifice of his 'Synthetic Philosophy' – an ambitious, somehow typically Victorian attempt to unify the sciences of biology, psychology, sociology and morality through the theory of evolution – had

[11] Alexander Bain, in a letter to Spencer, quoted in Richards, *Darwin and the Emergence*, p. 244. Even Darwin himself hailed Spencer as 'our great philosopher' (*Descent of Man*, vol. I, p. 123). For recent appraisals of Spencer's thought, see: J. D. Y. Peel, *Herbert Spencer: The Evolution of a Sociologist* (London: Heinemann, 1971); James G. Kennedy, *Herbert Spencer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Richards, *Darwin and the Emergence*, chapters 6 and 7; Peter J. Bowler, 'Herbert Spencers Idee der Evolution und ihre Rezeption', in Eve-Marie Engels (ed.), *Die Rezeption von Evolutionstheorien im 19. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), pp. 309–23.

already begun to crumble, not least because it rested on rather shaky, Lamarckian foundations.

Nietzsche may have described Spencer's thought as a brand of 'Darwinism', but the latter's conception of 'Evolution' (note the capital 'E'!) – which was adumbrated in his first major work, *Social Statics*, as early as 1851, and elaborated further in his essays 'The Development Hypothesis' (1852) and 'Progress: Its Law and Cause' (1857) – has in truth very little in common with that of the author of *The Origin of Species*. Spencer believed that biological evolution was just one instance of a developmental process unfolding on a cosmic scale, which he derived from the principle of the conservation of energy. Throughout the universe, matter and motion were being constantly redistributed. Evolutionary change consisted in the simultaneous integration of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion, leading to the progressive and wholly necessary development of all phenomena from simple and incoherent states to conditions of structural complexity through the differentiation and combination of their constituent parts.[12] The emergence of life was an inevitable consequence of the tendency for matter to organise itself, as was the increasing diversity and sophistication of biological forms evident in the gulf that separates the primitive amoeba from human beings. Organic change takes place through an adaptive mechanism which Spencer calls the principle of equilibration: each organism exists in a delicate balance which it struggles to maintain between itself and its environment. Because the latter is in constant flux, however, the internal systems of adjustments by which life preserves itself have also to be continuously reorganised, producing shifting equilibria until either the organism fails to adapt to its new circumstances or eventually succumbs to the processes of dissolution. Successful adaptations, however, are gradually translated to offspring over many generations through the Lamarckian device of the inheritance of functionally acquired characters.

These same rhythmic forces propel social and moral progress. Indeed, Spencer admitted that he had conceived his entire 'Doctrine of Evolution' first and foremost as a means of finding, 'for the principles of right and wrong in conduct at large, a scientific basis'.[13] This quest rests on the assumption that nature, especially human nature, is intrinsically moral. What he terms 'morality' is nothing but a particular instance of

[12] Like the activity associated with Spencerian Evolution, the will to power is a development from the simple to the complex, and takes place not only at the level of organic nature, but on a cosmic scale. Nietzsche's concept of *Entwicklung* thus has more in common with Spencer's understanding of evolution than it does with Darwin's.

[13] Spencer, *The Data of Ethics* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1879), p. iii. Nietzsche owned the German translation of this work, which was published as *Die Thatsachen der Ethik* (Stuttgart: Schweizerbart, 1879).

the incessant adaptation of internal relations to external relations which characterises the universal process of Evolution. Morality is the adjustment of acts – the external motions of animate beings – to particular ends. This alignment becomes more complex and elaborate as organisms evolve; in the lowest forms of life, conduct is constituted of actions so little adjusted to ends that an organism survives only as long as the accidents of life are favourable. The ultimate end of all conduct is the prolongation and increase of life – in other words, the preservation of the individual organism and the species to which it belongs. Actions are thus 'good' or 'bad' according to whether they are relatively more or less adapted to these ends. Organisms are led to perform these acts because 'there exists a primordial connexion between pleasure-giving acts and continuance or increase of life, and, by implication, between pain-giving acts and decrease or loss of life'.[14] Self-preservation is therefore necessarily bound up with the striving for pleasure, for those organisms in whom life-sustaining activity generally and consistently produced misery would perish in the struggle for existence. But the organism strives not only for the increase of its own pleasure, but for the greatest possible happiness; self-sacrifice for the good of the species is no less primordial than self-preservation. Once again, the organism is led to acts of renunciation because these acts are innately pleasurable, and when pleasure is associated with repetitive actions, it introduces principles of reinforcement and habit that justify increasingly complex social behaviours.

Moral evolution thus involves the greater refinement of these primitive altruistic impulses, and ultimately leads to the reconciliation of egoism and altruism: all selfish (pleasure-seeking) acts serve to maximise the collective happiness and all altruistic acts benefit the individual members of society. This development necessarily runs parallel to biological evolution, and culminates in what Spencer calls the 'ideally moral man'. The members of this future race will exist in a state of perfect equilibrium, of complete internal adaptation to both their physical and social environment; the 'moral man is one whose functions . . . are all discharged in degrees duly adjusted to the conditions of existence'.[15] These beings will have achieved the greatest general good, equal freedom and eternal peace, upheld by harmonious co-operation of all members of a society. Here, the feeling of moral obligation, present in lower stages of evolution, is lost; moral actions become, under the guidance of evolved 'moral sentiments', self-evident and natural, so that organic and moral behaviour are one and the same thing.

In a note written in 1882 (and which later became section 108 of *Beyond Good and Evil*), Nietzsche famously declares that there are no

[14] Spencer, *Data of Ethics*, p. 82. [15] *Ibid.*, p. 76.

moral phenomena in and of themselves, only moral interpretations of those phenomena. In other fragmentary jottings from this period he is more specific; what we call 'morality' is really a system of interpretations of *physiological* phenomena: 'Moral states are *physiological* states' (V 1, 6[445]). Moral philosophy is akin to alchemy and astrology; a discipline which has been rendered obsolete by the advancement in scientific knowledge: 'Once the religious explanation stood in for the scientific one: and even now the moral explanation is standing in for the physiological one' (VII 1, 3[1], p. 99). Morality is an illusion. Like that of all organisms, our action is determined not by the impotent promptings of our intellect or the chimerical imperatives of moral injunctions, but by the complex interaction of our instincts and drives. Consciousness, Nietzsche argues in *Daybreak*, is a mere epiphenomenon, 'a more or less fantastic commentary on an unknown, perhaps unknowable, but felt text' – an unpolished mirror which reflects dimly the primordial organic functions of the human body. Moral judgements are just such reflections, mere 'images and fantasies based on a physiological process unknown to us' (*D* 119). Or, as he later puts it in an image to which he frequently returns, morality is nothing but an 'inadequate kind of sign language . . . by means of which certain physiological facts of the body *would like* to communicate themselves' (VII 1, 7[125]).

What do the signs of this elaborate biological semiotics express? In what does the illusion of morality primarily consist? Morality, Nietzsche argues, is the illusion of end-directed behaviour. Human action does not differ in any essential way from the instinctive, reflexive behaviour of animals. Moral judgements are our attempts to explain and understand this kind of behaviour in more familiar, teleological terms, to create 'motive' and 'purpose' where neither is necessary: 'moral judgements are "explanations . . . in terms of purposes"' (V 1, 6[292]). Nietzsche thus rejects the central claim of Spencer's evolutionary ethics: that moral judgements of 'good' and 'bad' can be defined as the 'collection of experiences about what is expedient and inexpedient' (V 1, 6[456]) – or, in other words, efficient or inefficient adjustment of means to ends. Indeed, the very fact that illusory moral judgements have developed in the first place contradicts Spencer's blindly optimistic assertion that humanity 'has always arrived *unnoticed* at the right answers regarding what is necessary to it – at judgements which accord with the *truth*!!' (V 1, 10[B48]). The idea that 'the expediency of the means has increased throughout the whole history of organisms (as Spencer believes)' is, he says (with his characteristically low opinion of all things British), 'a superficial English conclusion'. Although our ends have become increasingly complex, 'the stupidity of the means', he mordantly observes, has remained unchanged (VII 3, 40[4]). But Nietzsche not only dismisses what he sees as the fundamental error

underlying all Western moral philosophy from Plato to Spencer, the belief that human action is motivated by a conscious choice between certain goals and purposes; he also rejects the contemporary, biologistic twist given to teleological accounts of human behaviour: that 'the end of the human being is the *preservation of the species* and *only to that extent* also the preservation of his own person' (VII 1, 7[238]). Nietzsche's physiology of morality is an attempt to explain organic behaviour without recourse to the language of ends – in particular, the interlinked ends of self-preservation, the preservation of the species, and the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

As we saw in the last chapter, Nietzsche's rejection of survival as a primary biological imperative is a key component of his anti-Darwinian theory of evolution. But long before he sought to replace the instinct for self-preservation with his own conception of the will to power, he tried to find other ways to account for the behaviour which Spencer and others attributed to this superfluous and teleological principle. In a note written in 1880, for example, he writes: 'There is no instinct for self-preservation. Rather, to seek what is pleasant, to avoid what is unpleasant – this explains everything which is attributed to that drive' (V 1, 6[145]). Like Spencer, Nietzsche believes that the universal allure of pleasure and avoidance of pain can be used to explain human conduct (and, *a fortiori*, morality) as an extension of more primitive animal behaviour. In contrast to Spencer, however, he holds that the acts which give rise to pleasure and pain are not goal-directed; they are, rather, merely 'playful expressions of the impulse towards action'. When the hungry organism feeds, for example, 'satisfaction is achieved, but not *willed*'. The organism strives not for satiation, but for the 'momentary sensation of pleasure which accompanies each bite for as long as hunger lasts' (V 2, 11[16]). Though there is nothing beyond the fugitive feeling of delight or discomfort that accompanies certain actions, the impression of purposive behaviour is reinforced because what is pleasurable often coincides with what is beneficial to the organism. Those actions which both stimulate agreeable feelings and, in Nietzsche's words, 'serve the purpose of survival' are preserved through the agency of natural selection (*Selektion*) (V 1, 6[366]).[16] Although Nietzsche himself carelessly lapses into speaking of 'ends' here, his point is that the maintenance of life is not the work of some mysterious vital principle; it is, rather, the accidental by-product of a purely contingent set of circumstances. In this respect, his early evolutionism is far more 'Darwinian' – and certainly less teleological – than his later theory of

[16] When Nietzsche restates his position in a later note (V 2, 11[5]), he even uses, for the first and only time, the term 'Zuchtwahl', the standard contemporary German translation of Darwinian 'selection' introduced by Viktor Carus in 1866. Heinrich Bronn, in his original 1860 translation, had rendered it as 'natürliche Züchtung'.

the will to power. Spencer, on the other hand, although he too argues that those organisms for whom life-sustaining acts are not pleasurable are eliminated in the struggle for existence, implies that this process of selection, as well as the coincidence of pleasure and utility which results from it, is an entirely necessary development. For moral evolution is a predetermined, wholly predictable procession towards what he calls an 'absolute ethics' – that is, the perfect adjustment of acts to ends in the ideal society of the future – and from the point of view of which conduct in a transitional, evolving polity can be explained, judged and remedied. But neither pleasure nor utility, Nietzsche counters, is an absolute, an 'in-itself'. Evolution is open-ended; there is no 'absolute goal' and there can be therefore no 'absolute morality [*absolute Sittlichkeit*]' (V 2, 11[37]). As he puts it in *Daybreak*:

> It is not true that the *unconscious goal* in the evolution of every conscious being (animal, man, mankind, etc.) is its 'highest happiness': the case, on the contrary, is that every stage of evolution possesses a special and incomparable happiness neither higher nor lower but simply its own. Evolution does not have happiness in view, but evolution and nothing else (*D* 108).[17]

The same argument by which Nietzsche disputes the existence of an instinct for self-preservation also applies to the unconscious drive that supposedly impels all organisms to work towards the survival of their species. Spencer sees the most fundamental expression of altruistic impulses in reproduction, maintaining that a dividing cell 'sacrifices' its mass and that, even in higher species, parent organisms bequeath parts of their bodies in order to reproduce. Unsurprisingly, Nietzsche disagrees, retorting: '*Quite wrong* of *Spencer* to see in the care for progeny and already in reproduction an expression of the altruistic instinct' (V 1, 6[137]). Sexual behaviour, he argues, does not necessarily conclude in reproduction; it is merely 'a frequently occurring, accidental consequence of *one* form of satisfaction of the sexual impulse: *not* its end' (V 1, 6[141]). The conservation of the species – like self-preservation – is merely an indirect result of an organism's response to a more basic biological imperative: the pursuit of pleasure:

> Generation is a matter of pleasure: its consequence is reproduction; that is, without reproduction neither this specific kind of pleasure nor any kind of pleasure would have been preserved. Sexual desire has nothing to do with the propagation of the species! The enjoyment of food has nothing to do with survival! (V 1, 6[145]).

[17] That Nietzsche's target here is Spencer is indicated by an earlier note in which he expresses similar sentiments: 'Happiness is attained by conflicting paths, *for this reason* an ethics cannot be determined (against Spencer)' (V 1, 8[12]).

Nietzsche pours scorn on Spencer for suggesting that the most fundamental organic functions are selfless in nature, so that 'passing urine might even count among the altruistic activities in England' (VII 3, 35[34]). Spencer is merely projecting his own moral prejudices onto the animal kingdom (V 1, 8[35]). There is nothing remotely altruistic in the expression of the sex drive; on the contrary, it is one of the purest manifestations of egoism (V 1, 6[155]). But this is not just true of the sex drive; all apparently altruistic acts, Nietzsche claims, in a much later note written around the time he was working on his projected major work, *The Will to Power*, are merely 'a *species* of the egoistic' (VIII 2, 10[57]).

Nietzsche's assumption of the primordiality of egoism later found support in William Rolph's *Biologische Probleme*, a work which, Nietzsche believed, contained 'enough wit, acid and scholarship' to refute comprehensively Spencer's claims that altruistic tendencies are prefigured in a wide range of animal behaviours and that only those organisms that exhibit the greatest degree of co-operation survive and prosper (VII 3, 35[34]). In a note from the year 1884, Nietzsche – presumably with Spencer in mind – finds suspicious those 'physiological-historical moral scientists' who maintain that 'the moral instincts' – what Spencer calls the innate tendency of an organism to perform selfless acts – are 'true', that is to say, useful for the preservation of the species solely because they continue to be part of our biological inheritance. But if the persistence of such instincts is the only 'proof' that altruistic behaviour promotes the survival of a species, then surely the '*immoral* instincts' have equal claim to veracity: 'but something other than just the will to survive manifests itself therein, namely the will to advance, to acquire more . . . For is survival the only thing that an organism desires?' (VII 2, 26[369]). In another note written three years later, he argues once again that acts that are supposed to be expressions of altruism are in reality egoistic in nature; now, however, he views this egoism in terms of the will to power:

> Against the theory that the isolated individual has in view the good of the *species*, of its offspring, to the detriment of its own good: that is only an *illusion*.
>
> The tremendous importance which the individual attaches to the *sexual instinct* is not a *consequence* of its importance for the species; rather, procreation is the true *achievement* of the individual and consequently its highest interest, *its highest expression of power* (VIII 1, 7[9]).

Here, too, Nietzsche is appealing to Rolph's authority to support the claims of his own philosophy. For Rolph argues in the following way:

> That one ought not to ascribe to animals such a tender concern for the preservation of the species is, I believe, something that hardly requires proof; all the less as reproduction is a wholly involuntary process . . . On the contrary, one must maintain that the more perfect the structure of organisms, the fewer offspring

they produce. More and more the individual seizes the intake in as it were egoistic fashion by utilising it for those organs which are advantageous to itself, or for a vital activity which extends and deepens life. But in doing so, reproduction is restricted . . . The animal [exhibits] the extremely self-evident desire to raise and to improve as far as possible its own life and its own situation, and in doing so it is not led astray by an ideal regard for the existence of the species.[18]

It is worth pointing out here that Nietzsche employs Rolph's arguments to counter not only Spencer, but also the French thinker Jean-Marie Guyau, whose work of evolutionary ethics, *Esquisse d'une morale sans obligation ni sanction* (1885), has often been seen as having exerted a considerable influence on the development of Nietzsche's own moral philosophy.[19] Though there are indeed similarities between the will to power and Guyau's claim that a tendency towards 'sa plus large expansion' is intrinsic to the processes of life, Guyau, like Spencer before him, tries to argue that this impulse must be regarded as the physiological basis of altruism. Morality is thus conceived not as a repressive external authority, as with Kant, but as a natural, internal power for good which translates itself into action by means of the gradual accumulation and explosive release of an individual's vital forces. Guyau also follows Spencer when he suggests that one of the ways in which this current discharges itself is in generation: when two cells unite to form a new individual there begins 'a new moral phase for the world'. As we have already seen, however, Nietzsche's 'will to power' has more in common with Rolph's notion of the insatiability of organic material, and it is therefore no surprise that, in a remark written on the title page of his copy of *Esquisse*, Nietzsche uses an example drawn from Rolph's biology to reject Guyau's assertion that morality has its source in the concentration of life's creative energies:

This book makes a *strange* mistake: in his efforts to prove that the moral instincts have their seat in life, Guyau has overlooked the fact that he has proved the opposite – namely, that *all* the basic instincts of life are *immoral*, including the so-called moral ones. The highest intensity of life does indeed stand in a necessary relationship to *sa plus large expansion*: but this is contrary to all 'altruistic' facts, – this *expansion* expresses itself as unrestrained *will to power*. Just as little is *procreation* the symptom of a basic altruistic character: it arises out of discord and struggle in an organism overladen with captured food and lacking sufficient power to incorporate all of that which it has conquered.

[18] Rolph, *Biologische Probleme*, pp. 92–3. The passage is heavily marked in Nietzsche's copy of the book.

[19] The first critic to argue Nietzsche's indebtedness to Guyau was the latter's father-in-law, Alfred Fouillée, in *Nietzsche et l'immoralisme* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1902). Of especial interest is his discussion of Nietzsche's annotations to his copy of Guyau's book, pp. 151–79. See also Adolf Reybekiel, 'Das biologische Prinzip in den moralphilosophischen Anschauungen W. Rolph's, M. Guyau's und Fr. Nietzsche's', Ph.D. thesis, University of Zurich (1906). Curiously, and despite his title, Reybekiel does not actually discuss Nietzsche's thought.

In Spencer, Nietzsche encountered once again that idea which, in 1873, he had found so repellent in David Strauss's attempt to reconcile evolutionism with the teachings of Christianity: the idea that all moral conduct is essentially 'a self-determination of the individual according to the idea of the species' (*UM* I, 7, p. 30). Spencer's system of evolutionary ethics, too, like so many in the nineteenth century, does not represent a truly radical break with traditional morality. Rather, his biologisation of morality is merely an attempt to legitimate, to re-establish values cut adrift from their metaphysical anchorage. For both Strauss and Spencer – and for many other nineteenth-century evolutionists – moral action still serves a superordinate, abstract purpose, though this end is no longer the will of God, but rather the preservation of the species. This elevation of the species to the supreme moral end is the guiding principle of what Nietzsche calls 'herd morality', and he brands Spencer himself 'cattle' (*Hornvieh*),[20] because the Englishman celebrates the herd in much the same way that Zarathustra would later hail the *Übermensch*. Like Spencer, who dreams of the 'disappearance of conflict in some future time, where, through continued adaptation, the egoistic is simultaneously also the altruistic' (VIII 2, 10[57]), Nietzsche also understands his moral philosophy as an attempt to negotiate between the claims of the individual and those of the species, to overcome the conflict between egoism and altruism. But whereas Spencer envisages both moral and biological evolution in terms of the refinement of altruism and the deselection of the most brutish egoistic impulses, Nietzsche posits the exact converse.[21] As we saw in chapter 1, he shifts the unit of selection away from the group: organic change is a process of progressive individuation, an 'evolution towards the individual' (V 1, 6[163]). Accordingly, he interprets 'Darwinism' as depicting a return to the Hobbesian state of nature in which independent and unallied individuals struggle amongst themselves for supremacy and power; despite Strauss's injunction not to forget 'that you are a man and not a mere creature of nature', Nietzsche insists that

> according to Darwin, [man] is precisely a creature of nature and nothing else, and has evolved to the height of being man . . . precisely, in fact, by always forgetting

[20] Nietzsche scrawled this insult in the margin of p. 57 of his copy of *Thatsachen der Ethik*.

[21] It must be said, however, that Nietzsche does not seem to have fully grasped Spencer's position, for, like Nietzsche, Spencer asserts that all altruistic acts are impossible without being motivated at first by egoistic desires. The difference between them lies in Nietzsche's inversion of the latter's claim that egoism and altruism will merge at a higher stage of evolution in what Spencer called the paradox that 'the pursuit of the altruistic pleasure has become a higher order of egoistic pleasure' (*Data of Ethics*, p. 325). In the margin of another passage in which Spencer describes this reconciliation of interests, Nietzsche scribbled the word 'nonsense [*Unsinn*]' (*Thatsachen der Ethik*, p. 263).

that other creatures similar to him possessed equivalent rights, precisely by feeling himself the stronger and gradually eliminating the other, weaker examples of his species (*UM* I, 7, pp. 30–1).

That the strongest individual emerges from the *bellum omnium contra omnes*, that the concept of species is quite insufficient as the basis of morality, remains the fundamental insight which informs not only Nietzsche's distinctive conception of evolution, but also his ethics based on this process. Both moral and biological evolution lie for Nietzsche – and here he abandons once again his commitment to a dysteleological explanation of nature – in the development and refinement of egoism, which, in phylogenetic terms, represents 'something recent and still exceptional' (V 2, 11[185]). Altruism, as a rudimentary form, a 'preliminary stage' of egoism, most clearly discernible in the 'crude egoism of the animals' (V 1, 6[163]), must gradually become extinct – in one note, he even suggests that human beings are, more than any other organism, 'originally *altruistic*' (VII 1, 8[11]). As we have seen, the human being is for Nietzsche the only life-form which is not yet fully adapted to its conditions of existence, the only one which still has the potential to evolve further. Yet any future ennoblement would be compromised by Spencer's 'morality of what is expedient for the species [*Moral der Gattungs-Zweckmäßigkeit*]', which is geared towards uniformity and fixity. For the true prerequisite of the 'Spencerian ideal of the future' is not, as Spencer claims, the increasing complexity and heterogeneity of life, but rather that '*greatest similarity* between all human beings' which makes altruism possible: because altruism can only exist when 'one actually sees oneself in the other', he seeks to erase the natural distinctions between individuals and their needs (V 2, 11[40]). What Spencer calls the 'ideally moral man', a future being existing in a perfect state of physical and moral adaptation to his environment, and to whom Nietzsche disparagingly refers as the 'enduring man' (*Dauermensch*)[22] (and who later becomes Zarathustra's 'last man'), can hardly be described as progress: 'the complete *adaptation* of all to all and each person within himself (as with Spencer) is an error' (V 2, 11[73]). Rather, this 'beautiful, idle humanity' represents stagnation and degeneration (V 2, 11[43]) – which is why Nietzsche, in *Twilight of the Idols*, would later label 'Mr Herbert Spencer' a '*décadent*' (*TI* IX, 37). Only evil – as the bovine adherents of herd morality mistakenly call natural egoistic acts – promotes and stimulates organic evolution, the 'permanent *dissimilarity* and greatest possible *sovereignty* of the individual' (V 2, 11[40]). This process of progressive individuation culminates, as

[22] This is a reference to Spencer's assertion that the supreme end of evolution is the increased duration and quantity of life.

we shall see, in the shadowy figure of the *Übermensch* – or at least in his precursor, to whom Nietzsche refers in some jottings of 1881 (two years before the *Übermensch* would be heralded by Zarathustra) as the 'liberated man' (*freigewordener Mensch*) (V 2, 11[182]) or the 'exceptional man' (*Sondermensch*) (V 2, 11[209]) – and who is conceived, as his notes would appear to suggest, as the antithesis of Spencer's 'ideally moral man'.

Nietzsche's critique of Spencer should not, however, blind us to the fact that both thinkers maintained that biological imperatives could account for 'moral' behaviour; that both saw moral and biological evolution as facets of the same progressive development towards a type of human which would be biologically and morally superior to his predecessors. The difference is that, unlike Nietzsche, Spencer held that there 'need be no transvaluation of values to carry out the work of Evolution'.[23] So how does Nietzsche account for the emergence of moral judgements? The answer can be found in a closer examination of the physiology of the drives.

Self-regulation and the social organism

In a lengthy note written in 1885, in which he discusses the achievements – or rather, the failings – of various contemporary moral philosophers, Nietzsche complains that the distinction between egoism and altruism originally made by Auguste Comte is superficial (VII 3, 35[34]). Nietzsche is led to this conclusion in the first place because, as we have seen, he denies that altruism as such really exists, except as a rudimentary, undeveloped form of egoism. Related to this, however, is the fact that, from 1880 onwards, he elaborates a more sophisticated and complex model of the ego, which has profound repercussions for his understanding of moral evolution. The ego is for him no longer a fixed, immutable entity; it does not exist above and beyond the drives, it *is* precisely this agglomeration of drives. These are engaged in a ceaseless battle for supremacy within the organism, with the constantly shifting balance of power determining the temporary character of the subject: 'as the drives are embroiled in a struggle, the feeling of the ego is always strongest where the supremacy resides at that moment in time' (V 1, 6[70]). But if the 'ego' *per se* does not really exist, how can Nietzsche still talk of an *evolving* 'egoism'? He can do so because this nexus of warring drives that constitutes the so-called ego is one manifestation of the intra-organismic struggle for existence which he regards as the engine of evolution – a development understood as the moral and physiological

[23] Crane Brinton, *A History of Western Morals* (New York: Paragon, 1990), p. 345.

advance from the 'herd egoism' (V 2, 12[132]) of animals and modern humans to the higher egoism of the *Übermensch*. The internal relationship of these drives to one another and their relationship to various external pressures – to the environment and to other organisms – constitute various stages in that evolution. This should become clearer in what follows, but let us look first of all at how morality originates in this struggle of the drives.

In and of themselves, all drives exist beyond good and evil – or rather, *before* good and evil. All contribute to the well-being, the full development and expression of the individual organism; all are pleasurable. Pain is not caused, as Spencer believes, by the discharge of the 'bad' drives in themselves, that is, drives which are not yet adapted to the ends of life. On the contrary, 'the evil drives are certainly not unpleasurable; rather, both evil and good ones are pleasurable' (V 1, 6[110]). Only when the natural expression of a drive is inhibited by the activity of others do feelings of discomfort first arise, and this occurs when the stronger drives inevitably prevail over and subdue the weaker ones in their struggle for mastery of the organism. The hierarchy which results from this process, in which the discharge of the accumulated energy of some drives is accompanied by sensations of pleasure and the restraint of others leads to feelings of distress, establishes the distinction between 'good' and 'bad' that forms the basis of all morality:

> Morality arises a) when one drive dominates over others, e.g. fear of a powerful person or the drive towards social existence. Here weaker drives must be felt, but *not* satisfied. The answers to the why? which arises here are as rough and false as possible, but they are the beginning of *moral judgements*, fixing the value-difference of actions between necessarily admissible and inadmissible. To have a drive and feel repugnance towards its satisfaction – that is the 'moral' phenomenon (V 1, 6[365]).

Although Nietzsche first articulates the idea that moral judgements arise through the hierarchisation of the instincts – or rather through the rational interpretation of this process – as early as the autumn of 1880, he remains committed to this position throughout the remainder of his career. And while he seems to have developed his notion of a 'struggle of the drives' by himself, he would later find confirmation of the idea of internal conflict not only in the work of Wilhelm Roux, but also in that of the evolutionary psychologist Georg Heinrich Schneider. In a group of notes from the year 1883, in which he quotes from, and takes issue with, Schneider's *Der thierische Wille* (*The Animal Will*, 1880), Nietzsche returns to the idea that the inner life of human beings comprises 'a *battling* of the instincts, an expansion of one, a diminishing of the others' (VII 1, 7[239]). Schneider, who follows Spencer in arguing that all

organic behaviour is purposive and geared towards both self-preservation and the perpetuation of the species, maintains that action is the result of a mental occurrence which he terms an 'end-idea' (*Zweckvorstellung*): 'Every idea of a momentarily purposive expression of the will also stirs a weaker or stronger drive to action; and if this drive has sufficient strength the movement takes place.' Before an action takes place, however, these ideas may be succeeded by others, either representing alternative ends or serving to reinforce the original. This is the psychophysical basis of what we call a state of deliberation or indecision. There then takes place a 'struggle of the ideas for the upper hand', with each one seeking 'to engage the muscle-power of the body and to effect the action', but being prevented from doing so by the remainder.[24]

Schneider describes in the following passage, which Nietzsche quotes in his notebook, how this struggle for energy fought between competing mental representations is resolved:

> 'Which *idea* leads to action? The one which arouses the *strongest* drive. Which one is that? The one which *promises* the greatest comforts, the *most pleasant*. That is not a rule which permits of exceptions, but *a law*, and herein lies the *dependence* of the human will' Schneider p. 75 (VII 1, 7[239]).

According to Schneider, then, each end-idea causes a pleasant or unpleasant sensation, followed by a reaction of either attraction or repulsion; if this reaction is of a certain intensity, then an action will take place. In other words, instincts respond to the influence of an original mental representation. Taking issue with Schneider's account, Nietzsche retorts: 'But the *drive itself* first *brings about* **this** idea!', and then adds: 'the *ends* are only *chosen* in the service of the *instincts*' (VII 1, 7[239]). Thus, for Nietzsche, the strongest drive itself produces the most alluring representation and then emerges victorious in the 'struggle of the drives'; it is the drives that determine the direction in which the accumulated force is released: 'when the drive enters into consciousness, *it promises pleasure* . . . where ideas lead to action, the person *must* follow the idea which *promised the most pleasure*: the strongest drive *decides* on the *choice*' (VII 1, 7[239]). Schneider's theory that an 'end-idea' motivates action by stimulating the relevant drive describes only the secondary aspects of the action – in other words, the relationship of the action to the epiphenomena of pleasure and pain (VII 1, 7[149]). Revising somewhat his early thoughts on the primordiality of the impulses of pleasure and pain, Nietzsche now suggests that the supposed 'end' of action – pleasure – is actually the *means*, the stimulus for the involuntary series of explosions which constitutes action (VII 1, 7[77]). We

[24] G. H. Schneider, *Der thierische Wille* (Leipzig: Abel, 1880), p. 75. Nietzsche also owned Schneider's *Der menschliche Wille* (Berlin: Dummlers, 1882).

succumb to the illusion that we perform an action in order to achieve a particular end because we are unaware of the real impulse of that action – the drive or instinct – and are conscious only of its mental projection, the motive.[25]

Like Paul Rée before him, Nietzsche believes that morality – like all regular patterns of behaviour – marks a change in the physiology of the human being; the '*chemical constitution* of the body' has been altered (VII 1, 4[217]). The activity or inactivity of certain drives, the creation of a hierarchy of instincts, which Nietzsche defines as 'long-established routines of action, *ways* of *expending* the *energy* at one's disposal' (VII 1, 7[239]) – all this modifies the internal power structure of the human organism:

> in every action, certain forces are exerted, others *not* exerted and therefore temporarily neglected: an affect always affirms itself at the expense of the other affects, from which it takes energy away. The actions that we *most frequently perform* are in the end like a solid casing around us: they make use of the energy without further ado . . . This is the **first consequence of every action**: *it continues to shape us – physically* as well, of course (VII 1, 7[120]).

The strongest drives, then, triumph in the internal struggle within the organism; it is these which, by dint of their domination over the weaker ones, give rise to what we call 'morality' by sanctioning and reinforcing particular kinds of behaviour. But surely this account of the physiology of the instincts risks ignoring the fact that morality is essentially a social phenomenon, that it evolves as a means of regulating behaviour within a group? It is for this reason that Nietzsche claims that our strongest – and oldest – drives are what he calls the 'social instincts'. Humans evolved not as solitary organisms, but in communities – as 'herd animals'. Consequently, our drives and instincts – like the rest of human physiology – have been formed by generations of ancestral inheritance, evolving 'throughout tremendous periods of time in *social* and *family groups* [*Gesellschafts-* und *Geschlechtsverbänden*] . . . (and before that in ape *herds*)' (V 2, 11[130]). The relationship (the 'social relations') between the constituent drives of the 'ego' is conditioned by, is a mirror of, those same 'social habits which we have vis-à-vis humans, animals, landscapes, objects' (V 1, 6[70]). Whilst Nietzsche holds that all social relationships can be traced back to

[25] Under Rolph's influence, Nietzsche would later revise again his understanding of the relationship of pleasure and pain to action. Rolph argues that it is not the pursuit of pleasure, but rather the flight from pain – as manifested in the organism's 'insatiability' – that is the primary motivation of action. This idea is echoed in Nietzsche's notes from 1887 onwards. See e.g.: 'The normal *dissatisfaction* of our drives, e.g. hunger, the sex drive, the drive to motion, contains in it absolutely nothing depressive; it works rather as an agitation of the feeling of life' (VIII 3, 11[76]). See my 'Beiträge zur Quellenforschung', 535.

egoism, he argues that it is also the case that 'all egoistic inner experiences' can in turn be derived from our inherited and habitual interaction with other organisms. In short, our egoism is what he calls 'herd egoism', the egoism of a collective consciousness, since the drives in which the ego is located have a shared origin. We are parts of a whole, organs within a social organism, sharing and participating in its 'conditions of existence and functions', and assimilating '*the experiences which are thereby undergone and the judgements which are made*' (V 2, 11[182]). The interior world of our instincts and their relationship to one another is a microcosm of the relationship between the parts of the social organism.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the idea of the social organism was a commonplace one in the nineteenth century. As advances in biology and evolutionary theory lent this ancient metaphor increasing detail, the social organism was seen as a stage – indeed, the final stage – in the evolution of the natural world. Rudolf Virchow compared the cell to an individual 'citizen', and an aggregate of cells formed an egalitarian cell state (*Zellenstaat*). Spencer, too, argues in *The Study of Sociology* (1873) that 'there is a real analogy between an individual organism and a social organism',[26] an analogy which depends on the continuity of all phenomena; on the universality of the evolutionary process; and, more specifically, on the similarity of the 'organic' relationships prevailing between a human being and his constituent biological elements on the one hand, and between a society and its constituent elements – human beings – on the other. If society is conceived as an organism, then the controlling mechanism between its parts – that is, morality – becomes what, in *Social Statics* (1851), Spencer calls a 'species of transcendental physiology'.[27] Nietzsche's own approach to this idea bears more than a passing resemblance to Spencer's in this respect, as we shall presently see. But his thought here is not directly inspired by Spencer, but by two very different sources: the French biologist Alfred Espinas's 1877 book *Des sociétés animales* (which Nietzsche owned in German translation) and the embryologist Wilhelm Roux's theory of ontogenetic development as an internal 'struggle of the parts'.

Espinas, whose thinking is profoundly influenced by Spencer and who had earlier translated the Englishman's *Principles of Psychology* into French, takes literally the conceit that, just as every complex organism is essentially a society of simpler life-forms, a colony of cells, so these higher organisms themselves will unite to form societies – such as swarms,

[26] Herbert Spencer, *The Study of Sociology* (London: Henry S. King, 1873), p. 330. Spencer elaborates his conception of the social organism in astonishing detail in his *Principles of Sociology* (London: Macmillan, 1969).

[27] Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics* (London: John Chapman, 1851), p. 436.

herds, tribes and, ultimately, states. He assumes, then, that there exists an intrinsic connection between biological and social evolution, a trajectory that is characterised by a transition from the 'I' (*Ich*) of the solitary, destructive infusorium to the 'we' (*Wir*) of the increasingly complex social groups in which mammals co-exist. In a passage marked by Nietzsche in his own copy of this work, Espinas describes how this 'we' represents not only a collective identity, but also designates a collective consciousness, which manifests itself in the high degree of 'sympathy' amongst animals, a bond so strong that they are even prepared to surrender their lives for one another. Would such self-sacrifice be possible, he asks, 'if the I of each individual did not really encompass the I of all the others, if the self-awareness of each individual was not ruled by its awareness of the community?'[28] Like Nietzsche after him, he argues that not only does this 'social consciousness' constitute a self-contained individual entity (see e.g. *GS* 354), but that altruism is thus also a form of egoism: the evolution of social feelings is characterised by the transition from the pursuit of self-interest (in the form of the 'I') to the pursuit of the interests of a whole, which takes the form of an all-embracing, collective ego (the 'we'), in which 'several I's are fused together in a single I'.[29] In a section that once again was heavily marked by Nietzsche, Espinas concludes: 'a member of a highly organised animal society is more closely bound to the collective consciousness and its prosperity than to its own consciousness and interests' and that, for this reason, the social instincts must 'prevail by a long way over the individual ones, the noble inclinations over the selfish ones'.[30]

When Nietzsche appropriates the idea of the 'social organism', he makes two important changes to the model proposed by Espinas. First of all, the social organism is held together by force, not mutual 'sympathy'. Sympathy, Nietzsche remarks in a note written in 1883 paraphrasing the passage from Espinas quoted above, is a feeling that can only exist between truly independent individuals who feel themselves to be such. Though altruistic acts performed within primeval societies presuppose 'a feeling of selfhood [*Ichgefühl*]', this feeling is connected to a 'collective self [*Collektiv-Ich*]'; such acts are therefore fundamentally different from sympathy (VII 1, 8[9]). Secondly, as we have already seen, Nietzsche reverses the direction of evolution described by Espinas. Evolution is not a gradual, inevitable progression towards a collective, 'altruistic' consciousness. On the contrary; Nietzsche envisages evolution as the refinement of egoism, starting with the 'crude egoism of the animals', and advancing towards

[28] Alfred Espinas, *Die thierischen Gesellschaften: Eine vergleichend-psychologische Untersuchung* (Braunschweig: Viewig, 1879), p. 512.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 535. [30] *Ibid.*, p. 526.

true individuality: 'Self-consciousness [*Ich-bewußtsein*] is the last thing to develop when an organism is functioning completely' (V 2, 11[316]).[31]

These ideas are discussed in a remarkable cluster of notes from the year 1881, which have never received the attention they merit. This is all the more surprising, since they reveal Nietzsche's first attempts to apply what he had learnt from Wilhelm Roux's biology. In his 1881 treatise, *Der Kampf der Theile im Organismus*, Roux surmised that organs, tissues and cells were found in the organism in a state of constant conflict with one another for food and space – a kind of internal struggle for existence. This theory had, as we have seen, a profound influence on Nietzsche's understanding of the development of the individual organism, which he envisages as a social structure, an 'aristocracy of the body'. What is interesting, however, is that his initial encounter with Roux in 1881 led him in the opposite direction: towards a vision of society conceived in biologistic terms, as a social organism – a development which reflects the mutual influence of the discourses of biology and sociology at this time. Needless to say, the body politic, like the body physiological, is for Nietzsche itself an aristocratic structure – a model of the social organism which represents the antithesis of what, in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, he dismisses as the 'idiosyncratic democratic prejudice' prevalent in modern, Spencerian biology. To support his rejection of Spencer, he quotes with approval the English biologist Thomas Huxley's criticism of Spencer's laissez-faire theory of the social organism, namely that it amounts to 'administrative nihilism' (*GM* II, 12). What is the force of this remark? Huxley, who found Spencer's individualism abhorrent, argues that the real force of the analogy between social and individual organism is 'totally opposed to the negative view of state function':

> Suppose that, in accordance with this view, each muscle were to maintain that the nervous system had no right to interfere with its contraction, except to prevent it from hindering the contraction of another muscle; or each gland, that it had a right to secrete, so long as its secretion interfered with no other; suppose every separate cell left free to follow its own 'interests', and *laissez faire*, Lord of all, what would become of the body physiological? The fact is that the sovereign power of the body thinks for the physiological organism, acts for it, and rules the individual components with a rod of iron . . . Hence, if the analogy of the body politic with the body physiological counts for anything, it seems to me to be in favour of a much larger governmental interference than exists at present.[32]

[31] If Nietzsche intends this argument to apply to Spencer, too, then he is mistaken. Not unlike Nietzsche, Spencer understands evolution as the growth of individual sovereignty and rationality. But this process culminates in the 'Ethical Society', where altruism is the product of personal autonomy and deliverance from the exigencies of labour.

[32] T. H. Huxley, 'Administrative Nihilism', *Fortnightly Review* 10 (1871), 534–5. Espinas partially quotes this passage from Huxley's essay. See my 'Beiträge zur Quellenforschung', 550.

As we have seen, Roux's biology supports a similarly centralised, autocratic structure of the organism.

Like the social organism, the human body itself is for Nietzsche a 'tremendous synthesis of living beings and intellects' (VII 3, 37[4]). This aggregate of mutually antagonistic parts arranged in a hierarchical structure – consisting of cells, tissues, organs and, ultimately, drives – is held together by the mechanism of self-regulation, which Nietzsche defines as the centralising capacity in an organism of 'mastery of a community'. Just as Spencer described morality as a 'species of transcendental physiology', so the moral instincts are for Nietzsche 'the history of self-regulation and arrangement of functions within a whole' – but in this case the organic totality is the state or community, the social organism (VII 1, 24[36]). This similarity is even more pronounced if we bear in mind the fact that, like Roux, Spencer also held there to be rivalry over resources within each individual organism (as well as within the social organism), a process which stimulated the growth and development of vital parts: 'All other organs therefore, jointly and individually, compete for blood with each organ. So that though the welfare of each is indirectly bound up with that of the rest; yet directly, each is antagonistic to the rest.'[33] For Nietzsche, too, the social organism evolves in an exactly analogous way to the physical organism – through a 'struggle of the parts'. He often claims that the highest stages of evolution, the states and societies that comprise the human social organism, can be utilised as a means of 'instruction about the first organisms'; and it is by studying the so-called 'moral drives' that we can trace the evolutionary history of the human social organism, and from there the physiology and phylogeny of the lowest organisms (VII 1, 24[36]). That is to say, our 'moral' or 'social' instincts are merely outgrowths of primitive organic impulsions, which prompt even the most rudimentary organism to create a supra-individual organisation through a process of struggle and absorption: 'Physiologically speaking, morality is the expression of the drive to assimilate which attracts the weak to the strong' (VII 1, 3[1], p. 99). The 'duty' of each individual is thus 'the formation of colonies' (VII 1, 24[36]) – precisely those colonies of organisms which Espinas discusses in great detail – with the primordial ego resembling an 'organic cell' or infusorium in its voracious assimilation and subordination of weaker individuals, which become merely a '*function*' of the whole. Nietzsche describes this process in more detail in the following passage:

If we translate the characteristics of the lowest living being into terms comprehensible to our 'reason', they become *moral* drives. Such a being assimilates its

[33] Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, pp. 75–6.

neighbour, transforms it into its property (property is originally nutriment and the accumulation of nutriment); it seeks to incorporate as much as possible, not only in order to *compensate* for loss – it is **greedy**. In this way, it *grows* alone and thus finally becomes *reproductive* – it divides into 2 beings. Growth and generation follow the unrestrained *drive to assimilate*. – This drive impels it to exploit the weaker, and, in competition with similarly strong beings, it struggles; *that is*, it **hates**, *fears*, *dissembles*. Already, assimilation means to *make* a foreign object alike, to *tyrannise* – **cruelty** . . . *Slavery* is necessary for the development of a higher organism, likewise *castes* . . . Obedience is compulsion, a condition of life, ultimately a stimulant to life. – Whoever has the most power to reduce others to a function, rules – the subjugated, however, have their own subjugated in turn – their perpetual struggles: their maintenance is to a certain extent condition of life for the whole (V 2, 11[134]).

Nietzsche here places himself in opposition to both Espinas (who claims: 'It is no regression, but rather a progression for an individual when it becomes the organ of an extended living whole') and Spencer, who argues, as we have seen, that the goal of evolution is the reconciliation of altruism and egoism, the merging of individual egos in the interests of the totality. According to Nietzsche, this is not the future, but rather the original state of man: '*pre*-egoism, herd instinct are older than "wanting to preserve oneself". First the human being *evolves* as a *function*' (V 2, 11[193]). As a function of the whole rather than as a fully-fledged, independent organism, the 'herd man' is not capable of self-regulation. His behaviour is determined by the internalised 'herd morality', a pattern of obedient, heritable behaviour which promotes the self-regulation of the social organism, imposed and enforced by the ruling structure upon its functions, and raised by those functions, as a rational justification of their behaviour, to the status of absolute rules of conduct (V 2, 11[185]). The herd labels 'bad' all that which threatens its continued survival – i.e. the egoistic impulses of its constituent parts which weaken the cohesiveness of the whole; 'good' is that which enables it to maintain itself as an aggregate structure and to increase its power. These ideas later find expression in *The Gay Science*:

Wherever we encounter a morality, we also encounter valuations and an order of rank of human impulses and actions. These valuations and orders of rank are always expressions of the needs of a community and herd: whatever benefits it most – and second most, and third most – that is also considered the first standard for the value of all individuals. Morality trains the individual to be a function of the herd and to ascribe value to himself only as a function . . . Morality is herd instinct in the individual (*GS* 116).

Nietzsche, then, ultimately arrives at the following definition of 'morality'. Morality is the social organism's capacity for self-regulation, the

exact analogue of the controlling mechanism by which the physiological organism governs and maintains itself. Or, as he puts it in *Beyond Good and Evil*, morality is the 'theory of hierarchical relationships among which the phenomenon "life" has its origins' (*BGE* 19).

Now, while Nietzsche initially employs physiological concepts to explain sociological and moral phenomena, he later uses the language of morality to describe the internal relationships between the organs of the evolving, healthy physical organism. Wilhelm Roux conceived the self-regulation of organisms in entirely mechanistic terms; Nietzsche, in contrast, maintains that the 'machinic character' is wholly lacking in organic nature (VII 2, 25[426]). The human body is, he writes, 'something far higher, more refined, complex, perfect, moral than all those human associations and communities known to us' (VII 1, 7[133]). The self-regulation of the hierarchical synthesis of life-forms which comprise the organism, he writes in a note entitled 'Morality and Physiology', is thus 'a moral, and not a mechanistic problem!' (VII 3, 37[4]). But why do these physiological relationships constitute a 'moral' problem? Let us remind ourselves of how Nietzsche defines self-regulation. It is the capacity of 'mastery of a community', a 'commanding and ability to command' which encourages the 'further evolution of the organic' because the organism that can most effectively regulate and discipline itself survives in the external struggle for existence (VII 2, 26[272]). But these characteristics, at least according to Nietzsche, are also constitutive of morality. For firstly, morality, like physiological self-regulation, is characterised by its essentially imperative nature: '*Commanding is its essential quality*!' (VII 1, 7[73]). Its purpose, too, is to effect a synthesis of disparate, mutually hostile units by inspiring obedience in lower levels of the (social) organism. Secondly, we say an organic function is 'moral' if it is performed not in the interest of the agent, but for a higher end (VII 1, 7[174]). A human being is said to act morally if his conduct serves the good of the wider community in which he lives (that is, the social organism). This virtuous behaviour is mirrored by the reciprocity exhibited by the constituent parts of higher individual organisms, whose networks of interdependent cells and systems of organs are forced to sustain one another in order to ensure their own continued existence. (Nietzsche implies, then, that, *pace* Spencer, evolution does indeed tend towards the reconciliation of egoism and 'altruism' – but not among the faceless members of the herd. This process is, rather, the consequence of closer integration and co-ordination within the increasingly complex human being, and is thus an expression of greater individuation.) Taken together, both these principles – the imperativeness of self-regulation and the fact that it involves collusion in the pursuit of a higher goal – mean that every action that is conducive to the

survival of the solitary, higher organism as a whole must, therefore, be regarded as a '*moral* demand'; there is, as it were, a 'thou shalt' for the subordinate organs within a system (VII 2, 25[432]). Nietzsche's notion here of the normative nature of physiological processes is reminiscent of Spencer's claim that, since the end of conduct is the maintenance and prolongation of complete life, 'the performance of every function is, in a sense, a moral obligation . . . All the animal functions, in common with all the higher functions have, as thus understood, their imperativeness.'[34] Finally, in the same way that the struggle of the parts ensures, through the hierarchisation of the organic structures, the physiological division of labour and the assignment of function, so too is it the responsibility of ethics to differentiate values in terms of a '*physiological* order of rank of "higher" and "lower" ' (VII 2, 25[411]).

To conclude this discussion of Nietzsche's 'physiology of morality', let us now briefly look at how he envisages the emergence of the self-governing individual from the herd or social organism, a process that supposedly marks the next stage in human evolution – in biological terms, the transition from organ to the 'amoeba *unity* of the individual'; in moral terms, the passage from 'common interest' (*Gemeinsucht*) to '*self-interest*' (*Selbstsucht*) (V 2, 11[189]). The hallmark of an evolving, higher organism is its ability to regulate the internal relationships of its drives, now severed from a collective, superordinate identity. During the process of evolution the individual becomes ever more complex and differentiated; that is, he himself becomes increasingly a social structure, a commonwealth of organisms: 'The free man is a state and a society of individuals' (V 2, 11[130]). Just as the collective egoism of the herd comprises a plurality of entities, so the evolving individual ego also contains a '*plurality* of beings' (VII 1, 4[189]). Revealingly, in one of the few concrete indications of what he understands by the concept, Nietzsche associates this characteristic with the *Übermensch* himself: 'in the *Übermensch* the thou [*Du*] of many I's [*Ichs*] of millennia has become one' (VII 1, 4[188]). The catalyst for this development occurs when, with the natural cycle of growth and decay, the social organism begins gradually to disintegrate. Once the self-regulative capacity which prevented the internal collapse of a mesh of antagonistic constituent parts is destroyed – that is, in periods of moral degeneration and corruption – then 'the liberated egos struggle for mastery' (VII 1, 1[20]). This struggle characterises not only a process of emancipation, but of progressive individuation. Instincts and drives are severed from their old conditions of existence and forced to find new adaptations; the embryonic individual

[34] Spencer, *Data of Ethics*, p. 76. This passage is marked in Nietzsche's copy of Spencer's work.

must *endure* in himself the after-effects of the social organism, he must atone for the inexpedient conditions of existence, judgements and experiences which were suitable *for a whole*, and finally he comes to create within himself *his existential possibilities as an individual* through *re*structuring and assimilation, excretion of the drives (V 2, 11[182]).

Often these '*experimental individuals*' (*Versuchs-Individuen*) perish under the pressure of the internal struggle because 'self-regulation is not there at once. Indeed, on the whole man is a being who inevitably goes under because he has not yet attained it' (V 2, 11[130]). The highest kind of human is able to master and control the full contradictoriness of his drives and instincts, but not in the form of 'the crudest tyranny of one drive over another' (V 2, 11[189]). This latter case (typical of conventional morality) is analogous to the situation in which the whole organism is endangered by the atrophying of a subordinate organ or by the unlimited, hypertrophic development of a dominant one. Self-regulation, which guarantees the 'fluid determining of the limits of power' that is essential to life (VII 3, 40[21]), is intended to prevent precisely this occurrence:

The man who is most free has the greatest *feeling of power* over himself, the greatest *knowledge* of himself, the greatest *order* in the necessary *struggle* of his powers, the relatively greatest *independence* of his individual powers, the relatively greatest *struggle* within himself: he is the *most discordant* being and the *most varied* and the *longest living* and the one which desires, which feeds itself extravagantly, the one which *excretes* the most and *renews* itself (V 2, 11[130]).

This physiological self-regulation comprises Nietzsche's naturalistic ethics, his 'moral naturalism' (VIII 2, 9[86]): it is a form of self-mastery and self-determination that is itself an expression of evolving life, in which the world's 'warlike oppositions' act as a provocation, 'one stimulant and incitement to life *the more*' (*BGE* 200). It is an 'individual morality' founded on life's inherent imperativeness, conflict and tendency towards greater individualisation and organic complexity – in other words, an ethics founded on the will to power.

I have tried to suggest in this chapter that Nietzsche's moral evolutionism in some respects represents a mirror image of that of Herbert Spencer, whose work he used as a foil to elaborate his own ideas. Whereas Spencer posits a gradual advancement from egoism to altruism, Nietzsche argues the opposite: altruism is an underdeveloped form of egoism, the egoism of the herd. He does not demand a return to a pre-moral animality, as many of his interpreters have supposed – for that would mean an atavistic regression to a lower form of egoism. Moral evolution involves for him the refinement of these egoistic impulses, with the individual progressing from being merely a part of a whole, an organ within a social

organism, to a self-legislating 'cell state'. Where Spencer's 'ideally moral man' is the embodiment of herd consciousness, Nietzsche's *Übermensch* is a being who can master the conflicting perspectives and impulses that constitute his existence, who has emancipated himself from the alienating experience of serving ends which are not his own, and who is thus free to posit his own goals and values. 'Moral' evolution is therefore merely another aspect of the same process of individuation which, as we saw in the previous chapter, is the hallmark of biological evolution. But although Nietzsche declares 'morality' to be an elaborate misunderstanding of biological processes, he never wholly frees himself from moral ways of thinking. In simply substituting egoism for altruism, he merely reverses the valuations without truly transcending them. More fundamentally, however, by conceiving of evolution as a progression towards some preordained goal (the perfection of egoism), he, too, interprets evolution in moral terms. In this respect his thought has more in common with Spencer's than he suspects.

3 The physiology of art

Aesthetics, Nietzsche famously declares in *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, is 'nothing but a kind of applied physiology' (*NCW*, Where I Offer Objections). Yet for all the familiarity of this suggestive claim, critics have rarely discussed in any detail Nietzsche's frequent allusions to a projected 'physiology of art' in the last two years of his productive life. Heidegger's refusal to take seriously such utterances, arguing that it constitutes a 'fatal misunderstanding on our part when we isolate such physiological thoughts and bandy them about as a "biologistic aesthetics"', is no more than typical of a long tradition of Nietzsche scholarship which has viewed his characteristic appeal to the language and concepts of biology as mere rhetorical posturing, as an ironic counterweight to the otherworldliness of traditional Idealist aesthetics.[1] But Nietzsche's 'alleged biologism' cannot and should not be dismissed in so casual a manner. For to do so is to ignore the historical backdrop against which he formulated the ideas that were to underpin his planned work on the 'physiology of art'.

In this chapter, I shall accordingly suspend judgement about the metaphoricity of Nietzsche's naturalistic claims about aesthetics, locating instead this strand of his thought within the context of a more general trend in the nineteenth century towards accounting for the origin and function of art in terms of evolutionary biology. Nietzsche's project, I argue, can be viewed as a plausible and consistent enterprise when seen as one aspect of this widespread contemporary biologism. This claim rests on a second: that this unstated commitment to an 'evolutionary aesthetics' is a continuous thread connecting the many developments and shifts of emphasis in his philosophy of art.[2] If his so-called 'physiology of art'

[1] Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. I, p. 127. Other examples of this tendency include Julius Zeitler, *Nietzsches Ästhetik* (Leipzig: Hermann Seemann Nachfolger, 1900), pp. 269–70; Helmut Pfotenhauer, *Die Kunst als Physiologie: Nietzsches ästhetische Theorie und literarisches Schaffen* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1985).

[2] For the historical development of Nietzsche's aesthetics, see Volker Gerhardt, 'Von der ästhetischen Metaphysik zur Physiologie der Kunst', *Nietzsche-Studien* 13 (1984), 374–93; Julian Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge University Press, 1992).

only achieves its fullest expression in the notes of 1887 and 1888, when the direction of his thought tends ever more consistently and obsessively towards a reductive biologism, the link between art and evolution is nevertheless implicit even from the time before *The Birth of Tragedy*.

The fact that Nietzsche was by no means the first thinker to seek to explain aesthetic effects or states of consciousness by reducing them to biological processes has been consistently ignored by his commentators, thereby inevitably giving rise to the impression that his enterprise really does represent a radical departure not only from the nineteenth century, but from the tradition of aesthetic thought as a whole. Yet a number of eighteenth-century British empiricist thinkers had based their theories of art on just such a 'physiological' approach. For example, in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1759), Edmund Burke first distinguishes the sublime from the beautiful by means of a psychology of pleasure and pain and of the passions, then isolates the material properties which aroused those feelings, before finally conjecturing at a nervous physiology to account for the production of aesthetic sensations. Accordingly, the experience of the sublime is, he suggests, grounded on the impulse towards self-preservation; that is, on feelings of pain which, though stretching the nervous fibres beyond their normal tone so that the motions of the soul are suspended as if in fear, are yet 'so modified as not to be actually noxious', and thus give rise to 'a sort of delightful horror, a sort of tranquillity tinged with terror'. The apprehension of beauty, on the other hand, is linked to the multiplication of the species, producing 'the passion of love in the mind' and the accompanying pleasurable sensations of melting or languor by causing the fibres of the body to relax below their natural tone.[3] Uvedale Price, a disciple of Burke, inherited this materialist physiology and used it to explain the 'picturesque', a sensation that gives rise to curiosity, which 'by its active agency keeps the fibres to their full tone, and thus picturesqueness when mixed with either of the other characters, corrects the languor of beauty, or the terror of the sublime'.[4] Finally, Daniel Webb's *Observations on the Correspondences between Poetry and Music* (1769) also accords a dominant role to physiological causes in explaining aesthetic effects – in his case, the mechanical 'movements' impressed on the nerves and 'animal spirits' by poetic and musical impressions.[5] It was Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790) which put an end to this line of inquiry

[3] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, 2nd edn (London: Dodsley, 1759), part IV, sections vii and xix.

[4] Uvedale Price, *Essays on the Picturesque, As Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful; and on the Use of Studying Pictures, for the Purpose of Improving Real Landscape*, 3 vols. (London: Mawman, 1810), vol. I, pp. 88–9.

[5] James S. Malek, 'Physiology and Art: Daniel Webb's Aesthetics', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 71 (1970), 691–9.

in aesthetics for almost a century, with Kant explicitly formulating his 'transcendental' demonstration of aesthetic judgements as the antithesis of the 'physiological exposition' typified by Burke and his followers.[6]

Only after the publication of *The Origin of Species*, when Darwinism suddenly deprived aesthetics of its transcendental foundation, were renewed efforts made to discover the bodily processes involved in the creation and enjoyment of art – although now the new evolutionary biology was invoked, rather than the nervous physiology of the previous century. Hippolyte Taine's *Philosophie de l'art* (1865), a work which Nietzsche owned, is one of the first post-Darwinian attempts to account for the artistic impulse and to describe and categorise artworks in terms of the influence of heredity and the environment on the human organism. What Taine refers to as the 'moral temperature' of civilisations is the equivalent of environmental and climatic pressures in organic evolution, and acts as the selective principle for different species of talent. Through this mechanism particular art-forms develop and flourish at particular periods in particular countries.[7]

A more typical example of the numerous systems of evolutionary aesthetics which proliferated in the late nineteenth century, particularly in Germany, is the work of Konrad Lange, professor of art history at the University of Tübingen. In his *Das Wesen der Kunst* (*The Nature of Art*), he views the aesthetic faculty as a biological function which has attained ever greater degrees of perfection in the natural world because the production and appreciation of artistic forms secured an advantage in the struggle for existence and promoted the survival of the species. Aesthetic value judgements can therefore be derived in the following way:

> All art corresponding to that nature of art which has evolved over time, that is, to the aesthetic instinct of the human species, is good; all art that does not coincide with it is bad. Or, in other words: all art which is beneficial to the species is good; all art which is injurious to it, bad. Therefore the task of the study of art is simply to investigate and elucidate this instinct of the species.[8]

Announcing his planned work on a 'physiology of aesthetics' in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche describes this problem area as 'a field which has so far remained completely untouched and unexplored'

[6] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. by James Creed Meredith (Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 130. Eighteenth-century attempts to construct a physiological aesthetics were not confined to Britain. See e.g. Herder's *Kritische Wälder. Viertes Wäldchen* (1769) and *Plastik* (1770/1778).

[7] Hippolyte Taine, *Philosophie de l'art* (Paris: Baillière, 1865).

[8] Konrad Lange, *Das Wesen der Kunst*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Grote, 1901), vol. I, pp. 13–15. See also Max Burckhard, 'Die Kunst und die natürliche Entwicklungsgeschichte', in *Aesthetik und Socialwissenschaft* (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta, 1895); Max Nordau, 'Evolutionary Aesthetics', in *Paradoxes*, trans. by J. R. McIlraith (London: Heinemann, 1906), pp. 243–59 (originally published 1885).

(*GM* III, 8). But this is not quite true. Though it was Nietzsche's slogan and ideas which inspired later works such as Georg Hirth's *Aufgaben der Kunstphysiologie* (1897) and Gustav Naumann's *Geschlecht und Kunst. Prolegomena zu einer physiologischen Aesthetik* (1899), the British thinker and novelist Grant Allen, apparently unbeknownst to Nietzsche, had already set foot upon this virgin territory some ten years earlier in his 1877 treatise *Physiological Aesthetics*. Allen, a disciple of Herbert Spencer, set out to 'prove that our existing likes and dislikes in aesthetic matters are the necessary result of natural selection', and furthermore to 'exhibit the purely physical origin of the sense of beauty, and its relativity to our nervous organisation'.[9] Curiously enough, though, the attempts of Allen and Spencer to account for the origin of aesthetic sensibility along evolutionary lines involved the resurrection of a concept borrowed from Idealism: Schiller's 'play-impulse' (*Spieltrieb*), the drive which, as the synthesis of man's spiritual and sensuous nature, is the well-spring of human creativity. In contrast to the approach exemplified by Lange, which emphasises the strict biological utility of aesthetic activity, Spencer and Allen argue that such behaviour is in essence a variety of play because 'neither subserve, in any direct way, the processes conducive to life'.[10] Art provides recreation for the higher faculties, a means of discharging their superfluous energy in simulated actions, just as sport provides an outlet for the lower powers. What makes any experience 'aesthetic' is its intensity and separateness from biological needs. Or, as Allen puts it: 'The aesthetically beautiful is that which affords the Maximum of Stimulation with the Minimum of Fatigue or Waste, in processes not directly connected with the vital functions.'[11] As we shall see, this attempt to reformulate Kantian aesthetics using the language and concepts of modern biology has little in common with the way in which Nietzsche understands the origin and function of art.

If, then, we have established in brief outline a 'tradition' of physiological or evolutionary aesthetics, the question remains as to how we situate Nietzsche within this context. That is the task of the following chapter, each section of which highlights a particular aspect of his evolutionary aesthetics at a particular point of his intellectual development. Proceeding chronologically, I shall begin by exploring his early notebooks from the period immediately before and after the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which he elaborates his conception of a 'Kunsttrieb' operating in nature beyond the realm of human agency. In the second section, I shall address the issue of evolutionary epistemology and demonstrate how his

[9] Grant Allen, *Physiological Aesthetics* (London: Henry S. King, 1877), pp. viii and 2.
[10] Spencer, *Principles of Psychology*, vol. II, p. 627.
[11] Allen, *Physiological Aesthetics*, p. 39.

conception of cognitive processes is 'artistic' in character and thus forms a component of his evolutionary aesthetics. Finally, I shall discuss the later writings in which Nietzsche outlines his plans for a 'physiology of art', focusing on the way in which he believes art and evolution to be linked by the sexual impulse.

The *Kunsttrieb* and evolution

Perhaps the most important and influential nineteenth-century figure to advance a system of evolutionary aesthetics was the German biologist Ernst Haeckel. His monistic philosophy, an idiosyncratic blend of *Naturphilosophie* and Darwinism, seeks to account not only for the existence of 'natural beauty' – that is, the awe-inspiring symmetry and order of living structures produced by the processes of evolution – but also for the origin of human invention. Both, he concludes, are the visible manifestation of an intrinsic creative force operating throughout the universe: the *Kunsttrieb*. The concept of the *Kunsttrieb* is an old one. Coined by the natural theologian Hermann Samuel Reimarus in his *Allgemeine Betrachtungen über die Triebe der Thiere, hauptsächlich über ihre Kunst-Triebe* (1760), it originally explained certain spontaneously creative behaviour observable in animals, referring to those instincts, for example, which prompt the bird to build its nest or the beaver its dam – this is the sense in which Schopenhauer, for example, employs the term in the chapter entitled 'Vom Instinkt und Kunsttrieb' in the second volume of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*. Gradually, though, it also began to be applied by eighteenth-century aestheticians such as Friedrich Schiller to man's impulse to produce fine art (*schöne Kunst*).[12] Haeckel's use of the term unites both meanings by giving the idea of the *Kunsttrieb* an evolutionary twist: human artistry is simply a more refined expression of the same primordial creative instincts which all organisms possess to a greater or lesser degree. At the same time, however, he also implies that this *Kunsttrieb* is a supra-individual vital force identical with the developmental processes of life itself – a more aestheticised version of Blumenbach's *Bildungstrieb*, as it were. He even goes so far as to suggest that 'artistic functions' are already present in the mother cell and in the fertilised ovum, a claim that rests on his theory of the *Zellseele*, according to which, as we have seen, *all* organic structures – even the most elementary – are held to be endowed with spirit. Haeckel accordingly posits 'nerve-souls', 'tissue-souls'

[12] See e.g. Schiller: 'How early or late the aesthetic artistic impulse [*Kunsttrieb*] should develop will depend simply on the degree of fondness with which Man is capable of lingering at mere appearance' (*On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. by Reginald Snell (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1994), p. 127).

and 'cell-souls', all of which are agglutinations of a mysterious substance called 'psychoplasm', the basis of mental life, and which ultimately combine to form the souls of higher animals and human beings. This theory of the cell-soul, he writes, 'is alone able to make comprehensible to us [the cell's] plastic activity, its "Kunsttrieb"'.[13] Precisely how this is so is explained in his *Kunstformen der Natur* (*Art Forms of Nature*), an immensely popular and luxuriously illustrated volume depicting the shape and structures of living organisms:

> Attentive and uninhibited observation of the formative plasm persuades us that, in the production of its stable natural forms, this shapeless 'living substance' proceeds in many respects in a similar fashion to man in the production of his art forms. Similar in both cases is the purposiveness, as well as the beauty of the created forms; similar, too, is in both cases the basic physiological functions of sensation (feeling) and of movement (will) which combine in this process. We must therefore attribute to all living plasm a kind of rudimentary mental activity, which, in a word, we call 'soul'. The assumption of such a *plasm-soul* (*plasmapsyche*) is warranted for the reason alone that all living substance possesses *memory*. Without this faculty of memory, countless *species* of organisms would not be able, in reproduction, to bring forth again and again the same specific form by means of *heredity*. But the fundamental difference between these two similar processes lies in the fact that the universal protoplasm-soul of rudimentary organisms operates *unconsciously* and without purpose in itself; the soul of the higher animals and of man, in contrast, does so in a *conscious* and purposive manner.[14]

This creative power, which is manifested even in the most primitive life-forms, is for Haeckel the very engine of evolution. His invocation of the *Kunsttrieb* is typical of the vitalistic undercurrents in much nineteenth-century German biology, and he was by no means the only thinker to delude himself into believing that the new evolutionary world-view lent credence to the Romantic conception of nature as a self-begetting organism with 'artistic instinct [*Kunstinstinkt*]'.[15] Haeckel's scientifically

[13] Ernst Haeckel, *Die Natur als Künstlerin* (Berlin: Vita Deutsches Verlagshaus, 1924), p. 10.

[14] Ernst Haeckel, *Kunstformen der Natur* (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut, 1904), p. 8. Haeckel's book influenced the rhythmic forms of the emerging Art Nouveau movement; see Christoph Kockerbeck, *Ernst Haeckels 'Kunstformen der Natur' und ihr Einfluß auf die deutsche bildende Kunst der Jahrhundertwende* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1986); Robert Schmutzler, 'Der Sinn des Art Nouveau', in Jost Hermand (ed.), *Jugendstil* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971), pp. 296–314.

[15] Novalis, *Schriften*, Paul Kluckhorn and Richard Samuel (eds.), 4 vols. (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut, 1929), vol. III, p. 317. For a more detailed discussion of Haeckel's evolutionary aesthetics and his relationship to Romantic *Naturphilosophie*, see Kurt Bayertz, 'Die Deszendenz des Schönen: Darwinisierende Ästhetik im Ausgang des 19. Jahrhunderts', in K. Bohnen et al. (eds.), *Fin de Siècle: Zu Naturwissenschaft und Literatur der Jahrhundertwende im deutsch-skandinavischen Kontext* (Copenhagen: Fink, 1984), pp. 88–110.

obsolete *Naturphilosophie* was echoed by his friend Wilhelm Bölsche, a novelist and best-selling author of popular works on the theory of evolution. Art, for Bölsche, is a ceaseless, pulsating impulse in nature towards harmony that is manifested in all structures, both organic and inorganic, from snowflakes to the skeletons of animals.[16] What is more, this rhythmic principle, which Bölsche misleadingly equates with Darwinian evolution, also expresses itself 'in the *artistic sensibility* of human beings and in our active attempt to produce aesthetic forms'.[17] Human art thus conforms to the same innate aesthetic principles that guide the creative processes of nature as a whole.

Both Haeckel and Bölsche, then, view evolution as a fundamentally artistic process. And so, too, does Nietzsche. The theorist of the will to power understands evolutionary history as one aspect of a universal, cosmic becoming (*Werden*), as the unfolding of certain creative forces immanent in nature, as a kind of endogenous *Bildungstrieb* propelling organisms towards ever higher levels of structural complexity. Yet the same is true of the younger, Schopenhauerian metaphysician of *The Birth of Tragedy*, for whom 'art' designates not only a mode of human activity or its artefacts, but also a universal, supra-individual phenomenon, the essence of which is *poiesis*. Human artistry is merely 'a *repetition* of the *primordial process* through which the world was created' (III 3, 7[117]), reflecting and imitating the formless, productive energies of life itself, the groundless self-generation of the 'world-Will'. Even if the activity of the 'original artist' (*Urkünstler*) which Nietzsche postulates here is only indirectly compatible with a more explicitly biological theory of evolution, his early thought – even more so than the covert metaphysics of his later evolutionism – has nevertheless much in common with the 'biological Romanticism' prevalent at the *fin de siècle*.[18]

For Nietzsche, then, the world – that is, the world of appearance, the world as 'representation' in Schopenhauer's sense – is itself a work of art, one fashioned by a cosmic process represented by his famous distinction between the Apollonian and Dionysian. These twin principles are not only modes of human artistic expression, but 'artistic powers which erupt from nature itself, *without the mediation of any human artist*' (*BT* 2). They are also explicitly and repeatedly described as 'Kunsttriebe'.[19] This concept

[16] Wilhelm Bölsche, 'Vom Religiösen in unserer Zeit', in *Weltblick: Gedanken zu Natur und Kunst* (Dresden: Carl Reißner, 1904), p. 149.

[17] Wilhelm Bölsche, *Das Liebesleben in der Natur: Eine Entwicklungsgeschichte der Liebe*, 3 vols. (Jena: Diederichs, 1906–7), vol. II, p. 392.

[18] Schmutzler, 'Der Sinn des Art Nouveau', p. 304.

[19] See III 1, pp. 26, 27, 34, 38, 117, 118, 151. I have retained the original German throughout because this allows for greater transparency in tracing Nietzsche's use of the term within a wider context and tradition. None of the existing English translations of *The*

holds the key to the development of Nietzsche's aesthetics, linking as it does his early thought with that of the later years. In the preface to the second edition of *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1886, he laments the fact that he had laboured 'to express strange and new evaluations in Schopenhauerian and Kantian formulations, things which fundamentally ran counter to both the spirit and taste of Kant and Schopenhauer' (*BT*, Attempt at Self-Criticism, 6). This remark is often taken to refer to the major themes of his thought which are prefigured in his first work: for example, the necessity of life-affirming illusions and the heralding of a 'tragic' attitude. But this claim is also true in a way which few commentators have ever recognised. For among these suppressed 'strange and new evaluations' towards which he was groping were ideas he would later revive and elaborate in greater detail during the late 1880s in his efforts to construct a physiology of art. This is particularly evident, as we shall see, in the manner in which he portrays the Apollonian and Dionysian *Kunsttriebe*.

A careful reading of notes made before, during and immediately after the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1872 shows that Nietzsche was already reflecting on the possibilities of a 'physiology of aesthetics', as he puts it in one brief fragment listing potential topics for future writings (III 5/1, p. 111). Around the same time that he wrote this gnomic phrase, that is, between 1870 and 1871, he was also preparing a study of the 'physiological grounding and explanation of rhythm (and its power)' (II 3, p. 322), which was intended as part of a 'Prologemena to a Theory of Classical Rhythmics' (itself part of an uncompleted philological project entitled 'Rhythmical Investigations'). Rhythm, according to these fragments, is fundamental to the processes of life: 'Physiologically, life is a continual rhythmic motion of the cells. The influence of rh[ythm] seems to me to be a minute modification of that rhythm[ic] motion' (II 3, p. 325). Music thus has the power to affect the human body directly by disrupting and redetermining the various internal cellular rhythms of the organism.

Even while he was drafting that supposedly 'metaphysical' work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche was still contemplating the relationship between physiology and art. In an extremely revealing note written between summer 1871 and the beginning of 1872, he writes: 'aesthetics only has meaning as natural science: like the Apollonian and the Dionysian' (III 3, 16[6]). The Apollonian and Dionysian *Kunsttriebe* are thus to be understood 'scientifically'; they are intended as poetic symbols of natural processes. Even in the published text, the 'Apollonian' and 'Dionysian'

Birth of Tragedy retains the conceptual ambiguity of *Kunsttrieb*, which, in the nineteenth century, had currency in both metaphysics *and* biology, and slips easily between the two semantic fields.

designate the two possible means by which cosmic forces are manifested in the bodily functions of the human organism. For both aesthetic states, Nietzsche explicitly declares, are accompanied by 'physiological phenomena', by 'dream' and 'intoxication' (*BT* 1). The aesthetic state is not, of course, wholly reducible to either of these experiences. Dionysian art, for example, is based on a creative 'play with intoxication' (*BT*, p. 120), a conscious manipulation of the physiological state of ecstasy, which is induced either artificially through the ingestion of narcotics or naturally by what Nietzsche often refers to as the 'drive of spring' (*Frühlingstrieb*). The Dionysian *Kunsttrieb*, then, is a kind of sublimation of the libidinous, primal urges of man, the 'panhetaeric animality' celebrated by primitive cults. Because such art originates in an 'unleashing of the lower drives' (*BT*, p. 121), it is able to reveal and simultaneously to transfigure our shared experience and bestial origins. It achieves this – like all art – through the transference of the original 'dreams and states of intoxication' experienced by the artist (III 3, 16[21]). This process provides the basis for an account of how aesthetic judgements are formed by the receiver of art. These judgements are not the products of conscious reflection, but arise as a result of the 'arousal of the artistic capacity' in the spectator (III 3, 16[6]). In other words, the spectator becomes artist: the work of art exerts a direct influence on the physiology of the receiver, in much the same way as Nietzsche envisages the effects of rhythm on the human body. This physiological effect forms the basis of a standard of aesthetic judgements: those art-works which are more capable of arousing the rapturous or oneiric states characteristic of aesthetic experience have greater artistic value.

But what of the *Kunsttrieb* as a non- or supra-human force of nature? In notes written shortly after the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy*, during a period which would see him finally liberate himself from Schopenhauer's influence and gradually move towards the more in-depth study and qualified acceptance of contemporary science which distinguishes his 'middle period', it seems that Nietzsche began to realise that his metaphysics of art was consistent with some form of evolutionism. What he calls 'higher physiology' will reveal, he claims in one note written between 1872 and 1873, the activity of the 'artistic forces' present not only in human, but also all organic evolution (*Werden*). It will show 'that with the *organic* the *artistic* also *begins*' (III 4, 19[50]). In other words, Nietzsche views evolution as an artistic process – just as Haeckel and Bölsche would later. A few notes later, Nietzsche even goes so far as to suggest that the chemical changes which take place in inorganic nature may also be 'artistic processes' (III 4, 19[54]) – despite the fact that he recognises that to conceive of an '*artistic process without a brain*' is to be

guilty of the crassest anthropomorphism. And yet, he concedes, 'this is precisely how it is with the Will, with morality and so on' (III 4 19[79]). In an even earlier passage, he counts the development of both crystals and cells among those phenomena for which the creative world-Will is responsible (III 3, 7[117]). Remarks such as these not only foreshadow the activity later ascribed to the will to power in nature, they also express more clearly ideas which he had entertained prior to the completion of the final draft of *The Birth of Tragedy*. While in the published work he avoids detailing the wider operations of the 'artistic double drive in nature' (*BT* 6) in the organic and inorganic world, Nietzsche sketches a rough outline of its activity in his notes. Again anticipating his later claim that artistic idealisation is intimately linked with the sex drive, Nietzsche contends here that the '*unconscious form-creating force*' which manifests itself 'in *procreation*' is the same '*Kunsttrieb* . . . which compels the artist to idealise nature and which compels each and every human being to create a pictorial representation of himself and of nature'. In other words – and this is a theme that Nietzsche would soon elaborate in greater detail in *On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense* – even the processes of cognition and perception are a product of this *Kunsttrieb*, for it is responsible for the 'construction of the eye', as well as the intellect, which he describes as 'a *consequence* of what is first and foremost an artistic apparatus' (III 3, 16[13]).

On the basis of this concept of the *Kunsttrieb*, Nietzsche establishes a hierarchy, graded according to the various levels of its objectification in nature, in much the same way as Schopenhauer orders the natural world according to the progressively more 'adequate' objectification of the Will. Organisms are deemed 'higher' or 'lower' according to their 'artistic' capacities or their sufficiency as media for the expression of the *Kunsttrieb*. Human beings, of course, represent the highest level of objectification: 'The awakening of the *Kunsttrieb* differentiates the animals. That we see nature in a particular way, in a particularly artistic way – this we share with no other living thing. But there is also an artistic gradation of the animals' (III 3, 16[13]).

Yet despite the outwardly biologistic nature of Nietzsche's early thought, the activity of the *Kunsttrieb* remains the solution to a fundamentally metaphysical problem. The function of human art – of Greek tragedy, for instance – is to beautify, to aestheticise the terror and absurdity of the world of becoming, a task which Nietzsche in one note envisions in terms of Schiller's *Spieltrieb* (III 3, 7[29]), and in another describes in pseudo-Darwinian terms: 'The poet overcomes the struggle for existence' (III 3, 16[15]). In much the same way, the creativity of the *Kunsttrieb*, which is manifested in the development of new organic

structures, in new forms of life, and, at the highest point of evolution, in the autopoietic organs of (human) perception and cognition, is a means of attaining metaphysical *Erlösung*. 'To see the forms – that is the means of getting beyond the incessant suffering of the drive [*Trieb*]. It creates organs for itself' (III 3, 16[13]). The Will as *Kunsttrieb* manifests itself as individuated representation, as creative nature, in order to deliver itself from the primal pain (*Urschmerz*), the contradictoriness and horror at the heart of the universe of becoming. As Nietzsche puts it in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

> The more I become aware of those all-powerful artistic drives in nature [*Kunsttriebe*], and of a fervent longing in them for semblance, for their redemption and release in semblance, the more I feel myself driven to the metaphysical assumption that that which truly exists, the eternally suffering and contradictory, primordial unity, simultaneously needs, for its constant release and redemption, the ecstatic vision, intensely pleasurable semblance (*BT* 4).

The fundamental characteristic of the Will, then, is sensation, and the organic world is an 'artistic projection' of this sensate Will: 'Sensation is not the result of the cell; rather, the cell is the result of sensation . . . That which is real [*Das Substantielle*] is sensation' (III 3, 7[168]). Nietzsche's idea that sensation and will are the fundamental properties of the universe is a claim which is reminiscent of Haeckel's theory of the *Zellseele*. But though Haeckel imagines these 'basic physiological functions' to be universal attributes of matter, these are for Nietzsche (at least at this stage of his development) primarily the characteristics of an undifferentiated, unique *ens metaphysicum* – albeit a metaphysical being conceived and described in physiological terms. Falling back on a characteristically Romantic image, Nietzsche envisages the world itself as an 'immense organism that gives birth to itself and sustains itself' (III 3, 5[79]), a cosmic organism that is, more specifically, a 'suffering being' (III 3, 7[204]) which is forced each and every moment to produce a 'strong sensation of pleasure' in order to alleviate its own torment. It is through this pleasure, which is identical with 'the pure contemplation and the production of the art-work' (III 3, 7[117]) – aesthetic pleasure, in other words – that life, in particular human life, is seduced into continued existence. This fundamental sensation of rapture (*Verzückung*) experienced by the Will is exactly analogous to that encountered in human artists; it is, Nietzsche suggests in his notes, 'physiologically grounded' (III 3, 7[202]). The aesthetic activity of the original artist, of the *Kunsttrieb*, is thus itself a '*physiological* process' (III 3, 7[117]).

This, then, is Nietzsche's early physiological aesthetics, two aspects of which look forward to his later philosophy: not only do the activity

and creativity associated with the Apollonian and Dionysian *Kunsttriebe* foreshadow the concept of the will to power in nature, Nietzsche also already conceives art as the expression of certain organic functions.

Art and evolutionary epistemology

'It is unlikely,' wrote Nietzsche in 1885, 'that our "knowledge" should extend further than is strictly necessary to preserve life' (VII 3, 36[19]). With this emphasis on the adaptive function of cognitive processes – not to mention his assumption that emotion and thought are functions of the brain and must therefore be the products of evolution because in 'the morphological chain of animals the nervous system and later the brain *evolve*' (VII 2 11, 25[325]) – Nietzsche's philosophy represents one of the first examples of an attempt to formulate an evolutionary epistemology.[20] Yet it diverges sharply from the earliest such theories of the second half of the nineteenth century. Truth for Darwin and Spencer is still unproblematic. For they assume that the truth-content of a judgement is determined not only in terms of its biological utility, that is, how a particular representation of the world secures an advantage in the struggle for existence, but also that the very utility of a judgement points to at least an approximate correspondence with reality: subjective cognitive structures match objective structures of the world because they originated by adaptation to that world. For Nietzsche, of course, epistemology no longer guarantees access to an absolute, indubitable realm of Truth: the relative utility of beliefs renders them proportionately more likely to be 'a mere idiosyncrasy of certain species of animals' (VIII 3, 14[152]), with no significant relation of correspondence to a metaphysical reality. With stability the necessary condition for the advancement of life, cognitive faculties evolve as a means of ordering and structuring, of projecting constancy, identity and substance onto the Heraclitean cosmos. Truth is itself the product of evolution, refigured as a life-sustaining 'error of identity'. Paradoxically, 'truth' is thus a kind of 'lie' and, as such, an aesthetic phenomenon – for duplicity and falsification represent the oldest form of artistic expression (VII 2, 25[386]). Nietzsche's epistemology, then, is inextricably linked with his aesthetics. Cognition is understood as one aspect of the fundamental creativity inherent in evolutionary processes, a means of constructing, manipulating and controlling the environment, and prevailing

[20] C. U. M. Smith, '"Clever Beasts Who Invented Knowing": Nietzsche's Evolutionary Biology of Knowledge', *Biology and Philosophy* 2 (1987), 65–91; Eve-Marie Engels, *Erkenntnis als Anpassung? Eine Studie zur evolutionären Erkenntnistheorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989).

in the struggle for existence:

> The whole of the organic world consists of a skein of beings with fabricated little worlds around them – in that they project their energy, their desires, their habits into experience, as their *external world*. The ability to create (to shape, to invent, to fabricate) is their most fundamental ability . . . The valuations must stand in some kind of relation to the conditions of existence . . . but by no means to the extent that they might be *true* or *accurate*. The essential thing is precisely their inaccurate, their indefinite character, by means of which there arises a kind of *simplification of the external world* – and just this sort of intelligence is beneficial to survival (VII 3, 34[247]).

If all cognitive acts are aesthetic phenomena and ultimately reducible to biological processes, then the same must be true of art in the restricted, more familiar sense. In what follows below, I want to focus on the artistic nature of those biological processes which constitute cognition, as described in those writings which emerge after Nietzsche had at least privately renounced the 'artiste's metaphysics' of *The Birth of Tragedy*. This linkage of epistemology and aesthetics is a recurrent theme in his writings, even if it is expressed somewhat differently at various stages of his intellectual development. In 1872, Nietzsche had claimed that the '*projection of appearance*' – the construction of the world as phenomenon – was the '*primordial artistic process*' (III 3, 7[167]). A year later, he still envisages cognition as an active, creative process – indeed, as the product of a *Kunsttrieb*:

> To be sure, we live by means of the superficiality of our intellect in a perpetual illusion: that is to say, we need art at every moment in order to live. Our eye holds us tight to the *forms*. But if it is we ourselves who have gradually cultivated this eye, then we see in ourselves an artistic force [*Kunstkraft*] at work (III 4, 19[49]).

By this stage, however, Nietzsche is no longer appealing to Schopenhauerian metaphysics to support his assumptions, but to evolutionary biology and the physiology of the senses. The influence of the philosopher Friedrich Lange, as Hans Vaihinger long ago recognised,[21] is crucial for the development of this key Nietzschean theme. For Lange, who combines a neo-Kantian belief that the phenomenal world is the product of innate human mental categories with a pioneering evolutionary epistemology, metaphysical theories belong to the realm of art and religion, as species of 'conceptional poesy [*Begriffsdichtung*]'.[22] This activity is not

[21] Hans Vaihinger, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob. System der theoretischen, praktischen und religiösen Fiktionen der Menschheit auf Grund eines idealistischen Positivismus* (Berlin: Reuther und Richard, 1911).

[22] Lange, *History of Materialism*, vol. III, p. 337.

illegitimate, but rather an essential human need, an expression of the human yearning for a 'standpoint of the ideal'. The only valid categories for science are those which, like space, time and causality, render nature intelligible in terms of mechanistic paradigms. But these categories have no proper role beyond organising our sense experience: the phenomenal world is an anthropomorphic construction. Lange reinterprets the Kantian distinction between phenomena and things-in-themselves in the light of empirical data provided by recent research into the nature of the human cognitive apparatus conducted by experimental physiologists such as Hermann Helmholtz. For Lange, our 'sense-organs are organs of abstraction [*Abstractions-Apparate*]' which filter and order the chaos of sense data transmitted by our nervous system, ultimately creating a 'wholly one-sided picture of the world depending on the structure of our organs'.[23] The laws discovered by science are thus merely fictions whose objectivity is only an objectivity for us. The idealising, aesthetic attitude of the individual, of 'poesy [*Dichtung*]' in the narrowest sense of the word, is a more refined manifestation of the synthetic, creative force inherent in human nature which shapes the intersubjective, cognitive realm of objects that we call the world.[24] The similarities with Nietzsche's concept of human art as the expression of a supra-individual *Kunsttrieb* should be immediately obvious. And there are other correspondences. Nietzsche summarises the conclusions of Lange's physiological neo-Kantianism in an enthusiastic letter to Carl Gersdorff written at the end of August 1866:

1) The world of the senses is the product of our organisation.
2) Our visible (bodily) organs are, like all other parts of the phenomenal world, only pictures of an unknown object.
3) Our real organisation remains therefore just as unknown to us as the real objects of the external world. We have always before us merely the product of both (*KGB* I 2, p. 160).

All of these ideas resurface a few years later in his post-*Birth of Tragedy* writings, but it is the first proposition which has the greatest influence on the subsequent development of Nietzsche's epistemological thinking. In *On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense*, the most significant and polished of his unpublished works written before the public volte-face of *Human, All Too Human*, he argues that the world is the way it is, or rather the way it appears to us, because of the peculiar structure of the human sensory apparatus – a different biology would deliver an entirely different universe. 'Truth' and 'lie', Nietzsche's basic epistemological categories, are, he asserts in a brief note from this period, 'physiological'

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 218. [24] *Ibid.*, p. 337.

(III 4, 19[102]) – and this is precisely the non-moral sense in which he understands those categories. In later writings, Nietzsche even describes the intellect in terms reminiscent of Lange: 'The entire apparatus of knowledge is an apparatus for abstraction and simplification' (VII 2, 26[61]). And echoing Lange's portrayal of the aesthetically constructed, and thus comprehensible, world as a 'temple of notions [*Tempel von Begriffen*]',[25] Nietzsche, in *Truth and Lying*, likens the phenomenal world to a 'cathedral of concepts [*Begriffsdom*]' (*BT*, p. 147).

Again as with Lange, who reckoned the 'constructive instinct [*Bautrieb*] amongst the *Kunsttriebe*',[26] human cognition appears to Nietzsche as an analogue of the creative instincts of lower animals: 'the human being is an architectural genius who is far superior to the bee; the latter builds with what she gathers from nature, whereas the human being builds with the far more delicate material of concepts which he must first manufacture from himself' (*BT*, p. 147). We produce cognitive categories 'within ourselves and from ourselves with the same necessity as a spider spins' (*BT*, p. 150). By implication, then, this human *Kunsttrieb* is a more highly evolved aspect of the creativity exhibited by the denizens of the animal world. Rather than adapting to an environment by spinning a web of silk, for instance, humans produce a web of concepts, something 'firmer, more general, more familiar, more human' (*BT*, p. 146) within which they can thrive. This conceptualising inherent in the construction of a world-picture is dependent upon a more fundamental aesthetic process: 'artistic production of metaphor' (*BT*, p. 150).

If Nietzsche's contention that the world is a product of our biological organisation is a development of his earlier claim that the 'projection of appearance' is the 'primordial artistic process', his concept of the *Kunsttrieb* undergoes a similar modification. In *Truth and Lying*, this has now become what he calls the 'drive to form metaphors [*Trieb zur Metapherbildung*]', that fundamental human impulse 'which cannot be left out of consideration for even a second without leaving out human beings themselves' (*BT*, p. 151). This instinct is the biological basis for the creativity which Nietzsche sees manifested not only in the metaphors arising from linguistic invention, but those involved in cognition as well. As well as Lange's postulation of an aesthetic 'poesy' inherent in human nature, the influence of Gustav Gerber's *Die Sprache als Kunst* (1871), a work which Nietzsche is known to have borrowed from the library of Basle University during the winter semester of 1872–3, is evident. As the title of his book implies, Gerber's aim is to demonstrate that language is a form of art – indeed, he argues that, as one expression of an unconscious

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 177. [26] *Ibid.*, p. 165.

Kunsttrieb at work in nature, it constitutes the originary medium for human creativity.[27] Tropes and figures are thus not merely ornamental or secondary modes of language use, confined to explicitly poetic discourse; on the contrary, *all* language is essentially metaphorical. But Nietzsche not only appropriates Gerber's notion of the metaphoricity of language in his theory (and perhaps also in his practice) of rhetoric, he also extends it to encompass the more fundamental processes of perception and cognition. What, then, are the physiological and aesthetic processes which Nietzsche sees as characteristic of the activity of the *Metaphertrieb*?

The human cognitive and sensory apparatus is first and foremost concerned with the production of form; it is chiefly for this reason that Nietzsche regards epistemology as a species of aesthetics. More specifically, however, he differentiates two separate but consecutive 'artistic' episodes in the form-giving cognitive process, the first of which is the 'power which produces the abundance of images' (III 4, 19[78]). If we examine this 'artistic force' more closely, he claims, we notice that there is no 'artistic, wholly free invention'. For Gerber, the production of a mental representation (*Vorstellung*) of a sensation is characterised by freedom, and is artistic precisely in this Kantian and Schillerian sense. Art is therefore purposeless: 'it does not turn its products into means for a further goal; it is without utility, and is for that reason *play*, free from service, free from the rigours of life'.[28] For Nietzsche, on the other hand, the activity of the *Kunst-* or *Metaphertrieb* is not characterised by freedom at all; it is, rather, a force of nature. The artistic or cognitive process, whilst appearing on the surface to be a conscious, non-deterministic aspect of human freedom in the manner in which Kant (and Gerber) imagines it, springs rather from the unseen, unfelt 'endless activity' deep within the human organism; the 'artistic process is physiologically absolutely determined and necessary' (III 4, 19[79]). That is to say, the operation of this *Kunstkraft* is constrained by the structure of the nervous system; the images which it generates are based upon the reception of sensory stimuli – the basic biological sensations of pleasure and pain – and the mysterious transformation of these sensations into recognisable 'forms' (III 4, 19[84]).

[27] Gustav Gerber, *Die Sprache als Kunst* (Bromberg: Mittler'sche Buchhandlung, 1871), p. 18. For a detailed discussion of Gerber's influence, see A. Meijers and M. Stingelin, 'Konkordanz zu den wörtlichen Abschriften und Übernahmen von Beispielen und Zitaten aus Gustav Gerber: *Die Sprache als Kunst* (Bromberg, 1871) in Nietzsches Rhetorik-Vorlesungen und in "Ueber Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne"', *Nietzsche-Studien* 17 (1988), 350–68; A. Meijers, 'Gustav Gerber und Friedrich Nietzsche: Zum historischen Hintergrund der sprachphilosophischen Auffassung des frühen Nietzsche', *Nietzsche-Studien* 17 (1988), 369–90.

[28] Gerber, *Die Sprache als Kunst*, p. 3.

In the first instance, then, Nietzsche employs the concept of metaphor in the original, non-allegorical sense of *metapherein*, of transference. The mental representations generated from these nervous impulses – or what he describes as the 'artistic translation of a nervous stimulus into images' (*BT*, p. 147) – represent the first step in a two-stage process of metaphorical transference. Language arises in the second, when the mental image is transmuted into a sound or utterance: 'the mysterious "X" of the thing-in-itself appears first as a nervous stimulus, then as an image, and finally as an articulated sound' (*BT*, p. 145). The activity of the *Metaphertrieb* establishes an '*aesthetic* way of relating' between the '*artistically creative* subject' and the world, an 'allusive transference, a stammering translation into a quite different language' (*BT*, p. 148). That is to say, thought does not adequately represent the world; we are left with 'stimuli, not complete cognitions' (III 4, 19[225]). Language, as the physical expression of thought, is a system of arbitrary symbols representing sensory phenomena. But these symbols represent subjective modifications of our sensory modalities rather than any object in the external world, and do not coincide with the original stimulus, the '"X" which is inaccessible to us and indefinable by us' (*BT*, p. 145). Human consciousness is unable to penetrate to the essence of the world beyond the forms and categories which it imposes upon it, and is condemned, therefore, to play 'with its fingers on the back of things' (*BT*, p. 142).

Given this limited, mediate access to the world, a total correspondence between human knowledge and 'noumenal' reality is impossible. Such correspondence would, Nietzsche suggests, be tautological anyway; A = A does not – cannot – tell us anything useful about the world. Those judgements which are biologically useful are, strictly speaking, illogical, taking the form A = B: 'Every cognition that is beneficial to us is an *identifying of the non-identical*, of the similar, that is to say, is essentially illogical' (III 4, 19[236]). Each such judgement is, then, essentially metaphorical, according to the second sense in which Nietzsche employs the term: as meaning 'to treat as the *same* something which one has recognised as being *similar* in one aspect' (III 4, 19[249]). And it is in this assertion of identity between similar, but non-identical sense-perceptions that the second artistic function of the *Metaphertrieb* lies; it is that which 'selects and emphasises the similar' (III 4, 19[78]). This conflation of superficially congruous sensory impressions, which Nietzsche elsewhere describes as the 'primordial process' (III 4, 19[217]) – it is also, of course, a 'physiological process' (III 4, 19[179]) – is responsible for the simplification and falsification of reality, since it necessarily elides the variety and complexity of the world as it appears to us. As such, it forms the basis of cognition. Without this process of 'comparison', concepts, the basic building blocks

of our cognitive architecture, would not exist: 'The *overlooking* of the individual gives us the concept and with that our cognition begins' (III 4, 19[236]).

It is the *Metaphertrieb*, then, that is responsible for creating the world of objects. What we perceive as an 'object' is merely a tangle of relations, a sequence of 'perceptual metaphors' or basic images generated by nervous stimulation, each of which is 'individual and unique' (*BT*, p. 146). The formation of concepts depends on the congealing of this 'mass of images, which originally flowed in a hot, liquid stream from the primal power of the human imagination' (*BT*, p. 148), and it is precisely this ability to distil concepts and individual objects from the inchoate flood of perceptual metaphors which distinguishes the human being from other organisms.

Finally, the conceptualising activity of the *Metaphertrieb* is based on another artistic process, 'imitation' (*Nachahmen*): '*All comparison (primordial thought) is an imitation.*' Cognition is essentially a 'thinking in pictures', a process of association involving a chain reaction of images triggered by the imitation or repetition of the original stimulus: 'Every perception achieves a multiple imitation of the stimulus, but with transference to various areas.' At the prompting of this repeated stimulus, memory retrieves a similar image from its inexhaustible supply of 'memory pictures'. This process of imitation is really a continued metaphorical transference (*Übertragen*) without the original stimulus, a 'continued transference of the received image in a thousand metaphors' bringing forth 'related images, from various rubrics' (III 4, 19[226–7]). Conscious thought involves the selection of a sequence of similar images based on the equivalencing activity of the *Metaphertrieb*:

> There are far more sequences of images in the brain than are used for thought: the intellect quickly selects similar images: those which are selected produce in turn an abundance of images: but the intellect quickly selects another of these and so on (III 4, 19[78]).

Cognitive and perceptual processes thus take place through the ceaseless interplay of two pre-conscious, artistic impulses. The first imposes form on a chaotic universe, and the second, memory, selects and simplifies those forms, thereby creating that network of familiar images which we call the 'world'.

Eros and evolution

Despite the many theories circulating at the end of the nineteenth century purporting to explain the origin and function of art in evolutionary terms, Darwin himself was largely silent on the subject. The one and

only place in his work where he addresses these issues, however, proved to be influential. In *The Descent of Man*, he suggests that the ability to appreciate beauty is not unique to human beings. Rather, birds and other higher animals also appear to display an aesthetic sensibility, which expresses itself in the mating rituals that form part of the process of sexual selection:

> When we behold a male bird elaborately displaying his graceful plumes or splendid colours before the female, whilst other birds, not thus decorated, make no such display, it is impossible to doubt that she admires the beauty of her male partner. As women everywhere deck themselves with these plumes, the beauty of such ornaments cannot be disputed . . . [T]he nests of humming-birds, and the playing passages of bower-birds are tastefully ornamented with gaily-coloured objects; and this shows that they must receive some kind of pleasure from the sight of such things. With the great majority of animals, however, the taste for the beautiful is confined, as far as we can judge, to the attractions of the opposite sex. The sweet strains poured forth by many male birds during the season of love, are certainly admired by the females . . . If female birds had been incapable of appreciating the beautiful colours, the ornaments, and voices of their male partners, all the labour and anxiety exhibited by the latter in displaying their charms before the females would have been thrown away.[29]

Wilhelm Bölsche would later make this insight into the sexual origin of the aesthetic faculty the basis of his entire philosophy of nature, which he elaborates in his three-volume major work of 1906–7, *Das Liebesleben in der Natur* (*Love-Life in Nature*). The basic premise of what he terms his system of 'erotic monism' is the claim that sexual love is the unifying principle of the universe, the motor of evolution and the fundamental creative force underlying natural beauty and human art. For Bölsche and his mentor Haeckel, the ruthless, mechanistic and, above all, ugly Darwinian struggle for existence threatened to undermine fatally their inclination towards a Romantic vision of nature as a harmonious, aesthetic unity. As we have seen, Haeckel used his concept of the *Kunsttrieb* to play down the importance which Darwin attached to natural selection, and instead portrayed evolution as a linear progression towards ever higher, more beautiful organic forms. Bölsche, on the other hand, thought Darwin's work itself – or at least those aspects of it which appealed to him – could be used to support his own mystical conception of nature. Darwin, he claimed, was not the author of a radically materialist theory of species change, but rather the first thinker to find a means of reconciling the 'inexorable selection of the useful and the apparently selfless world of ideals'. This he supposedly achieved by proving that 'the ideal, the feeling for beauty was originally something useful, conducive to the survival

[29] Darwin, *Descent of Man*, vol. I, pp. 91–2.

of the species. The fundamentally original and decisive idea which helped him here was that the origin of art is intimately bound up with love.'[30] Bölsche, in other words, not only aestheticises evolution – and in particular the process of sexual selection, which he actually describes as an 'aesthetic selection'[31] – in so far as he views the struggle for existence as a contest resolved not in favour of the strongest, but rather the most beautiful individuals. He also sexualises aesthetic activity, seeing in the sex drive, which incites each organism to attract potential mates by evolving beautiful forms, by displaying its brightly coloured plumage or by producing mellifluous sounds, the unconscious, biological basis of all art. Darwin's greatest achievement, at least according to Bölsche's reading of him, was to have demonstrated the 'erotic factor in the genesis of aesthetics'.[32]

In several notes dating from between the years 1871 and 1873, Nietzsche also discusses the relationship between the sex drive and beauty. Written while he was still in thrall to Schopenhauerian metaphysics, these observations are clearly pseudo-Darwinian in character, combining as they do the rhetoric of the struggle for existence with the typically Romantic idea that nature, impelled by a 'will to beauty', is striving towards the realisation of aesthetic forms:

> The plant, which in the ceaseless struggle for existence is able to bring forth only withered flowers, suddenly gazes at us, after it has been removed from this struggle by a happy fate, with the eye of beauty . . . Nature makes efforts to achieve beauty; where this is accomplished, it ensures that the former will be able to propagate itself: to which end it requires a highly elaborate mechanism operating between the animal and vegetable world, if the beautiful individual flower is to be perpetuated (III 3, 7[121]).

> The sense of *beauty* connected with procreation (III 4, 19[152]).

These youthful reflections underline the significance Nietzsche attaches throughout his career to the positive, life-affirming qualities of art, qualities which it possesses because creativity is itself a force of nature, the very essence of life. In these early notes, he associates beauty with abundance, superfluity, strength; it is 'Nature's smile, a surplus of energy and sensation of pleasure enjoyed by existence itself: think of the plant . . . The

[30] Wilhelm Bölsche, 'Charles Darwin und die moderne Ästhetik', *Der Kunstwart* 1 (1888), 125.

[31] Bölsche, *Das Liebesleben in der Natur*, vol. II, p. 387.

[32] Bölsche, 'Charles Darwin und die moderne Ästhetik', 125. See also Grant Allen, 'Aesthetic Evolution in Man', *Mind* 5 (1880), 445–64; Nordau, 'Evolutionary Aesthetics'; P. J. Möbius, 'Ueber Schönheit und Liebe', in *Ueber Kunst und Künstler* (Leipzig: Barth, 1901). Möbius also claims that love, like hunger, is a *Kunsttrieb*: 'Hunger brings about a further development of our own organism, and love the development of a new organism' (p. 131).

purpose of the beautiful is to tempt one to exist' (III 3, 7[27]). Beauty is the means by which nature perpetuates itself; it arouses sexual desire, and, with the promise of a momentary reprieve from the remorseless struggle for existence, entices each and every organism to reproduce itself. Without beauty, then, the world would simply cease to be – just as human beings would yield to pessimism and suicide without the redemptive properties of art. Over fifteen years later, Nietzsche conceives the function of beauty in almost identical terms. His early appreciation of the biological relationship between beauty and reproduction is a clear example of the continuity of his thought which we have been tracing in this chapter, for this will later become a dominant motif in his mature writings on art.

Nietzsche grounds his later physiological aesthetics upon two basic, interrelated claims: 'that aesthetic values rest upon biological values; that aesthetic feelings of well-being are biological feelings of well-being' (VIII 3, 16[75]). Let us look at these two propositions separately. The first follows the pattern which Nietzsche established in his treatment of moral values. In the post-Darwinian world, he realises, aesthetic values, like all ideals, must derive their legitimacy not from an unimpeachable metaphysical or theological source, but from 'biological assumptions about growth and progress' (VIII 3, 17[9]) – in other words, from the 'general category of the biological values of what is useful, beneficial, life-enhancing' (VIII 2, 10[167]). Accordingly, Nietzsche argues that aesthetic judgements have evolved over time: originating in particular kinds of instinctive reactions which offered a selective advantage in the struggle for existence, they were refined by generations of ancestral inheritance until they became apparently 'rational' acts of valuation. It would appear, then, that, in outline at least, his argument differs little from that later advanced by Konrad Lange. But he gives it a typically Nietzschean twist: we label 'beautiful' not only that which is in some way conducive to the survival of either the individual organism or the species (depending, of course, on whether the aesthetic values of the *Übermensch* or those of the *Heerdenmensch* are in question), but also that which arouses in us the 'increase in the feeling of power' that he sees as comprising evolutionary advance. The opposite, of course, holds true for the value judgement 'ugly': 'That which instinctively *repels* us, aesthetically, is proved by man's longest experience to be harmful, dangerous, worthy of mistrust: the aesthetic instinct which suddenly expresses itself (e.g. in disgust) contains a *judgement*' (VIII 2, 10[167]).

The idea that aesthetic value judgements express an organism's 'survival values' (*Erhaltungswerthe*) is inextricably linked with the second claim underpinning Nietzsche's physiology of art: his assertion of the

identity of aesthetic and biological pleasure. What form does this pleasure take; what constitutes the aesthetic state? Art or any 'aesthetic doing and seeing', he claims in *Twilight of the Idols*, is impossible without the 'physiological precondition' of intoxication – thus resurrecting in his last extended, published discussion of aesthetics a concept he had introduced in his first. Intoxication increases the 'sensitivity of the whole machine', while at the same time bringing with it the 'feeling of increased power and plenitude' (*TI* IX, 8). Without this greater excitability, without this feeling of pregnant potency, aesthetic production, which Nietzsche understands essentially as a process of enrichment, of idealisation, cannot take place. Art arises from – is in fact identical with – the ineluctable urge to perfect, to transform the material world.

In the aesthetic state, then, the organism experiences an irresistible feeling of superabundant energy which must be discharged and channelled into creativity. In this, it resembles – or rather, *is actually a species of* – sexual arousal. This conception of aesthetic pleasure Nietzsche explicitly develops in opposition to the Kantian model of pleasure 'apart from any interest',[33] which he attacks in the third essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Kant, of course, argues that the aesthetic attitude involves detachment from appetitive behaviour, from purposiveness, and above all from sexuality. For Nietzsche, on the other hand, the work of art, like the object of sexual attraction, actually stimulates desire. It is impossible (at least for a male, heterosexual viewer) to gaze at a female nude 'without interest' – Pygmalion, he adds facetiously, was by no means an '"unaesthetic man"' (*GM* III, 6). His real target here, however, is not so much Kant as Schopenhauer, who, as he correctly observes, appropriated the 'Kantian version of the aesthetic problem – although he certainly did not view it through Kantian eyes' (*GM* III, 6). Though Kant holds that disinterestedness is a necessary condition for aesthetic pleasure, it is not its end. The object in which we take pleasure is a kind of 'free' orderliness, the kind of orderliness we recognise in an object of perception when we bring it under a concept but which, in the case of the beautiful, is perceived without categorising it in this way. For Schopenhauer, however, the object of pleasure is one's own state of disinterestedness: the pleasure gained from a temporary release from the blind urging of the Will, the celebration of the 'Sabbath after the hard labour of desire'. As a means of restraining the human being's '*sexual* "interest"' (*GM* III, 6), art thus gestures towards the ethic of self-denial which he advocates. This model of aesthetic experience as disinterested contemplation is, however,

[33] Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 50.

self-defeating, Nietzsche contends, because art remains enmeshed within the economy of means and ends: the momentary state of serene detachment is for Schopenhauer itself an object of desire, something which he desperately craved in order to deliver him from the tyranny of his own sexuality. Repudiating the Kantian–Schopenhauerian conception of aesthetic experience, Nietzsche embraces instead the view of Stendhal, 'a no-less sensual but more happily constituted nature than Schopenhauer', whose equally famous definition of beauty as 'a promise of happiness' he makes his own, interpreting it in the more narrow sense as the promise of sexual pleasure, as a means to '*arouse the will*' (*GM* III, 6). In *Twilight of the Idols*, he again attacks Schopenhauer for mistakenly seeing in beauty the means of denying the 'procreative drive'. This claim, he declares, is contradicted by nature: '*Why* is there any beauty in sound, colour, fragrance, rhythmic movements in nature? What is it that *forces out* beauty?' He answers these questions this time by quoting Plato, who, in *The Symposium*, argues that 'all beauty stimulates procreation' (*TI* IX, 22). Backed up by the authority of Stendhal and Plato, Nietzsche thus restates a position he had occupied since the early 1870s.

While Stendhal's equation of beauty with 'a promise of happiness' is often cited in discussions of Nietzsche's later aesthetics, the extent of his debt to the French novelist does not seem to be generally recognised. There are, however, a number of coincidences between the organic processes which Nietzsche outlines in his 'physiology of art' and those described by Stendhal in that work which he himself characterises as a 'physiology of love'.[34] Perhaps the best-known feature of *De l'amour* is the analysis of the role that the creative imagination plays in love – its ability to transfigure the image of the beloved – which he elucidates in terms of the natural phenomenon of 'crystallisation':

> At the salt mines in Salzburg, they throw a leafless wintry bough into one of the abandoned workings. Two or three months later they pull it out covered with a shining deposit of crystals. The smallest twig, no bigger than a tom-tit's claw, is studded with a galaxy of scintillating diamonds. The original branch is no longer recognisable.[35]

Similarly, love arises from a spontaneous and unwilled mental activity which coats the object of desire with a cluster of perfections which do not in reality exist. Love, as the product of this process of crystallisation, belongs to man's biological being; it is an *élan vital* springing from 'Nature, which ordains that we shall feel pleasure and sends the blood to our heads'. Love is an essential, life-enhancing fiction, and beauty is to

[34] Stendhal, *Love* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p. 33. [35] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

a certain extent the product of conscious self-delusion: 'From the moment he falls in love even the wisest man no longer sees anything *as it really is*.' Stendhal even goes so far as to suggest a number of physical causes for this erotic delirium: 'an incipient madness, a rush of blood to the brain, a disorder of the nervous system and the cerebral centres'.[36] For Nietzsche, art is an analogous process of crystallisation, arising from that same '*making perfect, seeing as perfect*' which is peculiar to 'the cerebral system supercharged with sexual energy', from the conjunction of the artist's creative instinct and the 'distribution of semen in his blood' (VIII 1, 8[1]). Nietzsche's artist, like Stendhal's lover, projects a web of perfections onto the world; the aesthetic state '*bathes* the object that gives rise to it with a *magic*... which, however, *is wholly alien to the nature of that object*.' In other words: 'To experience a thing as beautiful means: to experience it necessarily falsely.' Nietzsche even employs Stendhal's own terminology: 'once the aesthetic drive is at work, a whole host of other perfections, with their origins elsewhere, crystallise around "the individual beautiful object"'. As if to confirm the source of his ideas, he links the aesthetic state with the 'sight of a "beautiful" woman' (VIII 2, 10[167]), with the idealising effects of 'love' (VIII 1, 8[1]). If, in 1872, he had tentatively proposed a link between beauty and reproduction, between the sex drive and the evolution of aesthetic sensibility, this claim now becomes absolutely crucial to his mature philosophy of art. Aesthetic pleasure is essentially sexual pleasure, for sexual arousal is the oldest and original form of intoxication. It is erotic ecstasy which constitutes (gives rise to) the aesthetic state: 'The energy which one expends in the conception of art and in the sexual act is one and the same: there is only one kind of energy' (VIII 3, 23[2]). Aesthetic experience is, however, a sublimated form of this libidinous excitement, just as for Plato philosophy is a desire for beauty which transcends the physical: 'sensuality is not cancelled out through the onset of the aesthetic condition, as Schopenhauer believed, but only transfigured and no longer present to the consciousness as a sexual stimulus' (*GM* III, 8).

But Nietzsche goes further than Stendhal (and Plato), and, like Bölsche, asserts a direct relationship between the sex drive and *evolution*. What connects them is the will to power. In those states of sexual arousal in which the organism experiences an overwhelming feeling of '*perfection*', it actively strives for 'the upward movement of its type' (*Aufwärtsbewegung seines Typus*), a movement that is made possible through the 'extraordinary expansion of its feeling of power' (VIII 2, 9[102]). By generating

[36] *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 65, 65n.

this surplus of energy which accompanies the state of erotic intoxication (most potent, of course, during the mating season), the organism is able to bring forth 'new organs, new faculties, colours, forms' (VIII 3, 14[117]).[37] This 'feeling of intoxication', then, is not only the necessary physiological precondition for artistic production, but also for organic change. At lower levels of life, the same energy which in humans is discharged in the artistic process is spent in the development of new organic structures: 'Here it makes no difference if one is man or animal' (VIII 3, 14[120]). In this respect, too, Nietzsche is reiterating a claim which he had first made at the very beginning of his career: art and evolution spring from the same source; evolution is an artistic process. Where the Nietzsche of *The Birth of Tragedy* believed that this process is set in motion by a mysterious *Kunsttrieb*, the well-spring of the creative and procreative impulse in both man and nature, the later Nietzsche calls the 'primordial artistic force' (VIII 2, 9[102]) common to both the aesthetic state and animal life the will to power. Erotic love, as the most potent manifestation of this immanent principle which informs all life, is art as 'organic function' (VIII 3, 14[120]).

The aesthetic state itself is a reflex of this carnal animal potency: on the one hand, art expresses in images and desires the 'excess and overflow of blooming physicality'; on the other, it arouses 'the animal functions' through the images and desires of an intensified life. It is by exciting the muscles and senses, and by inflaming sexual desire, that art acts as an 'enhancement of the feeling of life, a stimulant to it' (VIII 2, 9[102]). Like sexual love, art has the capacity to transfigure and affirm existence by appealing not to the detached, contemplative ego, but to our basest and oldest instincts. In doing so, art *literally* seduces humankind into continued existence. In this life-affirming, life-sustaining state, we are even able to transform the objects and experiences which we have hitherto evaluated as 'ugly' (VIII 2, 10[168]).

But art does not only have the capacity to affirm life. The highest aesthetic achievement is to shape and form life itself, to 'become master of the chaos that one is; to compel one's chaos to become form' (VIII 3, 14[61]). This is life lived as 'the grand style', and it is in the artist – at least at this stage of Nietzsche's thinking – that we apprehend once again the mysterious figure of the *Übermensch*. The frenzy of artistic production, when enormous transformative energies are released and organic memory retrieves distant recollections of a 'distant and fleeting world of sensations'

[37] See also: 'In animals this state produces new materials, pigments, colours and forms: above all new movements, new rhythms, new mating calls and seductions' (VIII 3, 14[120]).

(VIII 3, 14[119]), of 'man's oldest *festal joys*' (VIII 2, 9[102]) – all this makes possible the temporary and individual leaps beyond the ambit of the herd which constitute Nietzschean evolution:

> The sensations of space and time are altered: enormous distances are surveyed and *can*, as it were, *be perceived* for the first time
>
> the *extension* of vision over greater masses and expanses
>
> the *refinement of the organ* for the apprehension of much that is small and fleeting *divination*, the power of understanding with only the least assistance, at every suggestion: 'intelligent' *sensuality* . . .
>
> *strength* as feeling of mastery in the muscles, as litheness and pleasure in movement, as dance, as levity and *presto*
>
> strength as pleasure in the proof of strength, as bravado, adventure, fearlessness, matters of indifference (VIII 3, 14[117]).

In the same way that lower organisms manipulate their erotic potential energy to bring forth new forms and organic structures, so the *Übermensch*, by tapping into his own animal vigour, modulating biological impulses and mastering desire, acquires 'wings and new abilities' (VIII 3, 14[120]) and creates new evolutionary possibilities for the all-too-human. The self-created and self-overcoming *Übermensch* is both artist and artefact, lover and beloved. Nietzsche does not only seek to demonstrate, in Bölsche's words, the 'erotic factor in the genesis of aesthetics'; he also lays bare the aesthetic and erotic aspect of the past and future evolution of the human race.

For Nietzsche, then, art is not only central to his philosophy as a whole, it is also a key component of his typically non-Darwinian conception of evolution. His implicit commitment to an evolutionary aesthetics is a position which he occupied with remarkable consistency from the beginning of his philosophical career right to its very end. Like many of his contemporaries in the post-Darwinian world, he holds not only that the human aesthetic faculty is simply a refinement of certain behaviour prefigured in lower animals, but that evolution itself is an artistic process. This Nietzsche initially sought to explain with his early – and by no means original – notion of a *Kunsttrieb*, by which he understands, rather like Ernst Haeckel, not only a metaphysical force driving all change in both the organic and inorganic world, but also the creative instincts of individual organisms. These ideas were soon superseded by his postulation of an impersonal *Metaphertrieb*, which supposedly organises our impressions of a chaotic universe into a coherent, cognisable unity. This forms the basis of his (evolutionary) epistemology, which, for Nietzsche, is merely a subdiscipline of aesthetics. The concept of the *Kunsttrieb*, of a supra-human, transformative impulse, resurfaces in his later writings in modified form, where it is now called the will to power (we have

already seen in chapter 1 how the will to power has much in common with the notion of the *Bildungstrieb*) and closely connected with the sex drive (*Geschlechtstrieb*). Nevertheless, earlier notes had already foreshadowed many of the ideas which are constitutive of his so-called 'physiology of art'. Evolution takes place, Nietzsche ultimately believes – and here his thought anticipates that of Wilhelm Bölsche – through the transfigurative experience of erotic intoxication.

Part II

Degeneration

4 Nietzsche and the nervous age

When Nietzsche writes in *The Case of Wagner* that perhaps 'nothing is better known today, at least nothing has been better studied, than the Protean character of degenerescence' (*CW* 5), he captures succinctly not only the concerns and fears of his age, but also the very nature of degeneration. For degeneration, or *dégénérescence* (to give it its original French name), is indeed a fluid concept. It was, as Daniel Pick has argued, 'the ultimate signifier of pathology', serving 'to anchor meaning, but paradoxically its own could never be fully stabilised'.[1] Although the medico-psychiatric and natural-scientific language of degeneration resonates throughout much of the writing of the second half of the nineteenth century, the disease entity itself was, like hysteria and neurasthenia – disorders which were later subsumed under the broader category of degeneration – never coherently and consistently defined. 'Degeneration' remained an imprecise, elusive term, without a clear referent, and inherently metaphorical. It is for this very reason, as we shall see in the next few chapters, that this discourse provides an ideal vehicle for Nietzsche's 'medicynical' polemics (*EH* III, 5).

The concept of degeneration had been circulating for a number of decades in the biological sciences, with Buffon having first employed it to describe the reversion of domesticated species to their original type. Nietzsche himself alludes to this older use of the term when, arguing against the Darwinian assumption that permanent variations can be produced by artificial selection, he observes: 'up to now, domestication has

[1] Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, p. 8. Other relevant discussions include: Annemarie Wettley, 'Zur Problemgeschichte der "dégénérescence"', *Sudhoffs Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin und der Naturwissenschaften* 43 (1959), 193–212; Koenraad Swart, *The Sense of Decadence in Nineteenth-Century France* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964); Robert A. Nye, *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline* (Princeton University Press, 1984); Gunter Mann, 'Dekadenz – Degeneration – Untergangsangst im Lichte der Biologie des 19. Jahrhunderts', *Medizinhistorisches Journal* 20 (1985), 6–35; Kelly Hurley, 'Hereditary Taint and Cultural Contagion: the Social Etiology of Fin-de-Siècle Degeneration Theory', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 14 (1990), 193–214.

produced only quite superficial effects – or else degenerescence. And everything that eludes the hand of man returns almost immediately to its natural state. The type remains constant' (VIII 3, 14[133]). But it was the French psychiatrist Bénédict-Augustin Morel who, with the publication of his *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l'espèce humaine* in 1857 – the same year as Charles Baudelaire's *Les fleurs du mal* and two years before *The Origin of Species* – first articulated *dégénérescence* in terms of a theory of human heredity. Both Baudelaire's delight in physical putrefaction and moral corruption, and Morel's potent blend of medicine and eschatology, are expressions of the same *mal du siècle*, what Ortega y Gassett has called the nineteenth century's 'predilection for the pathological'. For the inhuman costs incurred by the industrialisation and urbanisation of modern societies taking place throughout the nineteenth century began to undermine the once unshakeable faith in the inexorable intellectual and material advancement of Western civilisation. Gradually the realisation dawned that, as the American sociologist F. H. Giddings expressed it, 'Progress, like every other form of motion in the universe, starts reactions against itself.'[2] Yet the idea of decadence is, of course, as old as civilisation itself; and the conviction that one is living in an age of irreversible decline is hardly unique to the Victorian prophets of doom, as one of their number, Algernon Swinburne, was astute enough to realise: 'Each century has seemed to some of its children an epoch of decadence in national life and spiritual, in moral or material glory; each alike has heard the cry of degeneracy raised against it, the wail of emulous impotence set up against the weakness of the age.'[3] But what distinguished the pessimism of the *fin de siècle* from that of previous generations was that the idea of decadence had now become a medical as well as a purely cultural concept. Following the development of clinical medicine and the technology of classifying diseases, the rise of scientific empiricism, and the popularisation of racial and evolutionary biology, the perceived deterioration or retrogression of European society – manifested in the epidemics of 'social pathologies' such as alcoholism, sexual perversion, crime, insanity, prostitution and anarchism – was not seen as a sociological or an ethical problem, but as an empirically demonstrable medical fact, as symptomatic of a more fundamental degenerative process within the European races. Civilisation, it seemed to horrified observers, was teetering on the brink of imminent collapse. 'Everyone who studies the social and biological conditions of our present cultural life,' lamented

[2] F. H. Giddings, *Principles of Sociology* (New York: Macmillan, 1896), p. 347.
[3] Algernon Charles Swinburne, 'The Poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti', in *Essays and Studies* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1875), pp. 101–2.

the eminent Austrian psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing, 'must face the sad prospect that modern society is heading for moral and physical ruin.'[4]

For Morel, a devout Catholic, man was not the product of random transformations of the species. On the contrary, he held, in accordance with Genesis, that at the origin of the human species lay a perfect, divinely created, primitive being. Modern humanity, by contrast, was, in Morel's famous definition, the 'morbid deviation from an original type',[5] a biologically inferior descendant of this prelapsarian *Urmensch*, a new urban subspecies characterised by certain hereditary mental and physical deformities or what Morel called 'stigmata'. Yet despite its origins in pre-Darwinian and explicitly Christian thinking, degenerationist psychiatry inevitably became fused with the new evolutionary world-view which *The Origin of Species* ushered in after 1859: if humans can evolve, it was reasoned, then they can, under certain circumstances, also devolve, with both individuals and nations regressing to an earlier stage in their development.[6] Theories of descent not only suggested that human and ape shared a common ancestor; they implied a hierarchy leading from the simian primogenitor, through primitive peoples to civilised Europeans. At the same time, the concept of *dégénérescence* served to characterise other races as degenerate deviations from the ideal white type. These purportedly inferior races could be identified by atavistic skull and brain sizes which revealed their more immediate relation to the ape than those races at a more 'advanced' stage of cultural development. Racial biology, in other words, became a science of boundaries between groups; when these boundaries were transgressed, degeneration threatened. New anxieties about the proper place of different classes, nationalities and ethnicities, as well as the sexes, in society allowed racial biology to become a model for the analysis of the distances that were supposedly 'natural' between the various peoples. What is more, the language of racial degeneration

[4] Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Ueber gesunde und kranke Nerven* (Tübingen: H. Laupp, 1885), pp. 7–8.

[5] B. A. Morel, *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l'espèce humaine* (Paris: Baillière, 1857), p. 5.

[6] Darwin himself cited the example of parasites as organisms which, by adaptating to a passive lifestyle, had inevitably degenerated – that is, had moved from a more complex to a simpler organic structure. Among Darwin's followers it was E. Ray Lankester who, in his *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* (London: Macmillan, 1880), most clearly explored the possibility that evolution by natural selection might in some cases lead to degeneration rather than progress. See Peter J. Bowler, 'Holding Your Head Up High: Degeneration and Orthogenesis in Theories of Human Evolution', in James R. Moore (ed.), *History, Humanity and Evolution. Essays for John C. Greene* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 329–53.

also functioned as a code for other social groups whose behaviour and appearance sufficiently differed from accepted norms so as to threaten society. The urban poor, prostitutes, criminals and the insane were thus viewed as degenerate throwbacks whose supposedly deformed skulls, protruding jaws and low brain weights marked them out as 'races' apart and as the losers in this game of evolutionary Snakes and Ladders.[7] Nietzsche, as we shall see, both shares and exploits these fears.

Nowhere was degeneration more apparent than in the havoc which it supposedly wrought on the nerves of city dwellers. Though some degree of nervousness – a kind of heightened sensibility – was thought to be endemic to modern civilisation, this could easily escalate into more pathological phenomena ranging from neurasthenia to full-blown hysteria. The concept of neurasthenia was introduced in 1869 by the New York physician George Miller Beard, who regarded this ailment as a distinctly 'American disease', as the depletion of an individual's nervous energy caused by intensive economic conditions, the pressures of overwork, and the accelerated pace of life in an industrialised society.[8] It is this overexpenditure of vital force that Nietzsche is referring to when, lapsing into a common cliché and with rather less prescience than usual, he opines: 'The Americans worn out too quickly – perhaps only apparently a future world power' (VII 2, 26[247]). But neither Nietzsche nor his contemporaries believed that nervousness was an exclusively American pathology. Soon the diagnosis became fashionable in Europe too, particularly in Germany, where the rapid industrialisation experienced after unification was perceived by many as heralding the Americanisation of the country's economic conditions. By 1885, Richard von Krafft-Ebing was describing his time as 'our nervous age', an epithet which would soon become a hackneyed phrase in the self-understanding of his contemporaries.[9] In much the same vein, the historian Karl Lamprecht described his age as

[7] Nancy Stepan, 'Biological Degeneration: Races and Proper Places', in J. Edward Chamberlin and Sander L. Gilman (eds.), *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 97–120.

[8] See Beard's 'Neurasthenia, or Nervous Exhaustion', *Boston Medical and Science Journal* 80 (1869), 217–21 and his *A Practical Treatise on Nervous Exhaustion (Neurasthenia): Its Symptoms, Nature, Sequences, Treatment* (London: Lewis, 1890), p. 31 (originally published 1880). For a review of Beard's work, see Charles E. Rosenberg, 'The Place of George M. Beard in American Psychiatry', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 36 (1962), 245–59.

[9] Krafft-Ebing, *Gesunde und kranke Nerven*, p. 1. Other examples include: Willy Hellpach, *Nervosität und Kultur* (Berlin: J. Räde, 1902); Wilhelm Erb, *Über die wachsende Nervosität unserer Zeit* (Heidelberg: Koester, 1894). For discussion of this topic, see Andreas Steiner, *'Das nervöse Zeitalter': Der Begriff der Nervosität bei Laien und Ärzten in Deutschland und Österreich um 1900* (Zurich: Juris Verlag, 1964); Janet Oppenheim, *'Shattered Nerves': Doctors, Patients, and Depression in Victorian England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Joachim Radkau, *Das Zeitalter der Nervosität: Deutschland zwischen Bismarck und Hitler* (Munich: Hanser, 1998).

the 'culture of excitability' (*Kultur der Reizsamkeit*), as an epoch not only characterised by the pre-eminence of impressionism and what he termed 'nerve-artists' (*Nervenkünstler*) in cultural life, but also as conditioned by an underlying *physiological* or *neurological* impressionism.[10] Nietzsche himself spoke of 'our nervous age' in a note written as early as 1880 (V 1, 6[129]). And in *Human, All Too Human* he had already declared that the entire burden of culture has become so great that there is a general danger of an 'over-excitation of the nervous and intellectual powers'; the cultivated classes of Europe are without exception 'neurotic' (*HA* 244). Later he would describe in great detail how the so-called 'progress' of civilisation inevitably brought with it an increase in the '*neuropathic-psychiatric* and . . . *criminalistic*' (VIII 3, 14[182]).

That Nietzsche is one of the foremost philosophers of decadence is well known. Few thinkers, either before or since, have contemplated this problem as deeply or as consistently as he, or have placed it at the very centre of their philosophical inquiry: 'Nothing has preoccupied me more profoundly', he writes in *The Case of Wagner*, 'than the problem of *décadence*' (*CW*, Preface). But what has been frequently overlooked – even by those critics who have explored the rhetoric of health and sickness in Nietzsche's critique of modernity – is that his concept of 'décadence' draws on the same organicist models of society and history underpinning the more general cultural pessimism of the *fin de siècle*.[11] In order to appreciate fully what he calls his 'diagnosis of the modern soul' (*CW*, Epilogue), we must therefore recognise that he chooses to articulate it with the language and concepts of degenerationism; that he believed, as did his contemporaries, that civilisation inevitably brought with it 'the *physiological decline of a race*' (VIII 3, 15[40]). For Nietzsche, too, this deterioration in the racial stock of Europe, occasioned by the deleterious effects of modern urban life, is accompanied by moral corruption, by an outbreak of 'social pathologies'. His notebooks are littered with jottings enumerating such typical 'consequences of *décadence*':

Vice, viciousness
Sickness, sickliness
Crime, criminality

[10] Karl Lamprecht, *Zur jüngsten deutschen Vergangenheit*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Gaertners Buchhandlung, 1902), vol. I, p. 60.

[11] See e.g. Malcolm Pasley, 'Nietzsche's Use of Medical Terms', in Malcolm Pasley (ed.), *Nietzsche: Imagery and Thought* (London: Methuen, 1978), pp. 123–58; Richard S. G. Brown, 'Nihilism: "Thus Speaks Physiology"', in Tom Darby, Béla Egyed and Ben Jones (eds.), *Nietzsche and the Rhetoric of Nihilism: Essays on Interpretation, Language and Politics* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1989), pp. 133–44; Anette Horn, '"Eine Philosophie, welche im Grunde der Instinct für eine persönliche Diät ist?" Krankheit und Gesundheit im Denken Nietzsches', *Acta Germanica* 22 (1994), 39–55; Daniel R. Ahern, *Nietzsche as Cultural Physician* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).

Celibacy, sterility
Hysterism, weakness of will, alcoholism
Pessimism
Anarchism (VIII 3, 14[73])

All over Europe conservative journalists, politicians and physicians were diagnosing the same symptoms of cultural malaise. It seems, then, that Nietzsche's own rejection of contemporary ideals of progress coincides with a wider loss of faith in the perpetual advancement of Western civilisation. But for Nietzsche the alleged depravity of modernity is only part of a far more complex and insidious phenomenon: nihilism. His critique of modern values gains much of its force from his appeal to contemporary fears of racial degeneration; at the heart of his project of transvaluation is the fundamental question: 'How do what have been hitherto the *highest values* relate to this basic *biological* question?' (VIII 3, 15[31]). In pursuing this inquiry Nietzsche deliberately conflates the widely attested medical 'fact' that a moral and biological crisis is imperilling European civilisation with his own diagnosis of the anomic exhaustion of the Judaeo-Christian values on which that very civilisation is based. I shall discuss this aspect of his deployment of the vocabulary of degeneration in more detail in the next two chapters. In what immediately follows, however, I want to trace the development of the concept of decadence in Nietzsche's thought, arguing that from the very beginning it was conceived in biologistic terms. I shall then discuss how both he and his contemporaries deploy the medicalised language of degeneration and eugenics in order to construct, sustain and defend rigid definitions of sexuality and gender.

Degeneration: the physiology of decadence

It has long been a commonplace of Nietzsche scholarship that Nietzsche's concept of decadence, famously defined in *The Case of Wagner* as an 'anarchy of atoms' (*CW* 7), was inspired by a passage in the French critic and novelist Paul Bourget's essay on Charles Baudelaire in his *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (*Essays in Contemporary Psychology*, 1883).[12] But Bourget's importance should not be overestimated. It is true that Nietzsche's notes and published works of the late 1880s evince an increasing preoccupation, even obsession, with the phenomenology of 'décadence'. Yet Nietzsche had read the *Essais* as early as 1883, and although one fragment written at this time foreshadows his later attack on Wagner, the term 'décadence' (at least in the French form he always

[12] The first to point out Nietzsche's debt was Wilhelm Weigand in *Friedrich Nietzsche: Ein psychologischer Versuch* (Munich: Lukaschick, 1893), pp. 67ff.

favoured) does not itself appear in his work, published or unpublished, until 1885–6 and then only sporadically until late 1887, when, as he sharpens his critique of modernity and nihilism, the use of the word explodes in his notebooks. Even before his reading of Bourget, Nietzsche had already described *Parsifal* in a letter to his friend Heinrich Köselitz dated 25 July 1882 as an example of 'décadence' (*KGB* III 1, p. 231). And in a note written in 1877, he observed that Cervantes' *Don Quixote* 'belongs to the Decadence of Spanish culture' (IV 2, 23[140]). Walter Kaufmann is surely correct to claim, then, that the encounter with the French critic 'does not introduce an entirely new turn into Nietzsche's thought; it merely strengthens a previously present motif'.[13] To be sure, the idea of cultural decline runs like a red thread throughout his work. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, for example, Nietzsche speaks of 'the degeneration [*Degeneration*] and transformation of the national character of the Greeks' (*BT* 23), and in an early preparatory note for that work, he describes how the original 'marvellous health' of Greek poetry and music eventually collapsed into 'decay' (*Verfall*), a state characterised by a 'disintegration of that which hitherto had grown from a single drive' (III 3, 1[9]). From the very beginning, then, Nietzsche conceives the decadence of cultures in biologistic terms, as the degeneration of an organic structure caused by the disintegration of a central organising principle. The same ascription of organismic qualities to social, cultural and artistic forms underlies Bourget's own theory of decadence, which draws on the ancient concept of the social organism:

> With the word decadence one denotes willingly the state of a society which produces an excess of individuals unsuitable for the work of communal life. A society must assimilate like an organism. Like an organism, in fact, it may be resolved into a federation of lesser organisms, which may themselves be resolved into a federation of cells. The individual is the social cell. In order that the organism as a whole should perform its functions with energy, it is necessary that the organisms composing it should perform their functions with energy, but with a subordinated energy; and in order that these lesser organisms should themselves perform their functions with energy, it is necessary that their component cells should perform their functions with energy, but with a subordinated energy. If the energy of the cells becomes independent, the organisms which comprise the organism as a whole will likewise cease to subordinate their energy to the energy of the whole, and the anarchy which establishes itself constitutes the decadence of the whole. The social organism does not escape this law, and it immediately enters into decadence as soon as the individual life becomes exaggerated beneath the influence of acquired well-being and of heredity.[14]

[13] Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4th edn (Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 73n.

[14] Paul Bourget, *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (Paris: A. Lemerre, 1883), pp. 24–5.

The motif of cultural degeneration is also the subject of the aphorism entitled 'Ennoblement through Degeneration' in *Human, All Too Human* (*HA* 224). Interestingly, the preparatory notes for this passage, written in 1875, are entitled 'On *Darwinism*'; indeed, Nietzsche's theory of 'ennoblement through degeneration' is explicitly conceived as an anti-Darwinian theory of (social) evolution. The 'celebrated struggle for existence', which he consistently misunderstood as a conflict resolved by mere brute force, is consequently dismissed as a 'philosophy for butcher boys' (IV 1, 12[22]); there are, he claims, others ways of explaining the evolution of both race and individual. According to Nietzsche here, the strongest and healthiest organisms, upon whom Darwin supposedly lays such emphasis, only preserve the 'type'. It is through the weak that evolution actually takes place: 'Degenerate natures are of the highest significance wherever progress is to be effected. Every progress of the whole has to be preceded by a partial weakening' (*HA* 224). Evolution takes place through a dialectical process of augmentation and consolidation of the 'stabilizing force' within a community, which is then partially undermined and weakened by the appearance of certain pathological individuals – Nietzsche is thinking of the genius here – without whom the community would stagnate. The community has to be robust enough to tolerate this influx of infirmity, this temporary 'loosening up'; and the health of the social organism, like that of the individual organism, can be measured by its capacity to assimilate degenerate elements.[15] Already, this account of evolution by degeneration anticipates his later concept of 'health' and the will to power. For the later Nietzsche, health is not merely the absence of disease; following the famous French physiologist Claude Bernard, he regards health and disease, the normal and pathological, not as ontologically distinct entities, but as different degrees of the same condition. In fact, he goes further: health is essentially dynamic; it is measured by '*how much of the pathological* [one] *can take on and overcome* – can *make* healthy' (VIII 1, 2[97]). Disease, in other words, is the stimulus which activates a healthy organism's transformative capacity for self-overcoming. Thus, 'health' in the Nietzschean sense, what he often refers to as the 'great health', is simply a synonym for the will to power (indeed, in *The Gay Science* Nietzsche speaks of a 'will to health'), or merely another term for ascending life, for evolution. Degeneration is accordingly a necessary, an inevitable aspect of the organic process – part of the universal rhythm of integration and dissolution that constitutes

[15] In reality, Nietzsche's claim that the 'variation' (*Abartung*) or 'degeneration' (*Entartung*) of an individual or organ is responsible for evolution is not all that far removed from the Darwinian idea that evolution takes place through random, but ultimately advantageous and inherited mutations.

the innocence of becoming; as Nietzsche later expresses it: '*Waste*, *decay*, *elimination* need not be condemned: they are necessary consequences of life, of the growth of life. The phenomenon of *décadence* is as necessary as any increase and advance of life: one is in no position to *abolish* it' (VIII 3, 14[75]).

While the theme of cultural degeneration is prefigured in his earlier books, it first becomes a major thematic concern in *Beyond Good and Evil*, the work which signals the beginning of Nietzsche's preoccupation with what he terms the 'European disease' (*BGE* 208). As we saw in chapter 1, Nietzsche began during the middle years of the 1880s to envisage both the social and the individual organism as a hierarchical, yet dynamic structure. Any healthy organism is thus conceived as an 'aristocracy' – either as an 'aristocracy of cells' or as a society based on 'hierarchy and value differentiation' between human beings (*BGE* 257). The nineteenth century, however, is an 'age of disintegration' (*BGE* 200); aristocracy has been supplanted by democracy. The democratic emphasis on equality and universal suffrage erases the 'natural distance' and differences between the constituent groups in society, resulting not only in social decay (democracy is a 'decadent form of political organisation' (*BGE* 203)), but also in the 'increasing process of physiological approximations and resemblances' affecting the population (*BGE* 202). Nietzsche's critique of modern democracy thus reflects contemporary anxieties about the proper place of different classes and ethnic groups in society; he, too, employs the language of race to demarcate the supposedly 'natural' boundaries between these groups and anticipates degeneration when these limits are transgressed. The decadence of European society is the consequence of the 'radical mixture of classes and *therefore* of races' (*BGE* 208) caused by the corruption and enfeeblement of the ruling caste, a process that ultimately leads to the '*overall degeneration of man*' (*BGE* 203). Nietzsche elaborates this concept of racial degeneration in *On the Genealogy of Morals*; the 'feeling of physiological inhibition' afflicting the European peoples is caused by

> the miscegenation of two races which are too far removed from one another (or of two classes – classes too always express differences of race and origin: European 'Weltschmerz', the 'pessimism' of the nineteenth century is essentially the result of a senselessly sudden mixing of classes); or conditioned through a mistaken emigration – a race arriving in a climate to which it cannot adapt sufficiently (the case of the Indians in India); or the after-effect of the age and fatigue of a race (Parisian pessimism from 1850 on); or of the wrong diet (alcoholism in the Middle Ages; the nonsense of the *vegetarians*...): or from blood-poisoning, malaria, syphilis, and the like (*GM* III, 17).

In Nietzsche's emphasis on racial senility and miscegenation as causal factors in the degeneration of an aristocratic elite, we are almost inevitably reminded of the ideas of the man who is often described as the founding father of modern racism, Comte Arthur de Gobineau. In his *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1853–5), Gobineau employs the term 'degenerate' (*dégénéré*) to designate a state of irreversible cultural decline, a condition where a 'people has no longer the same intrinsic value as it had before, because it no longer has the same blood in its veins, continual adulterations having gradually affected the quality of the blood'.[16] Nietzsche was almost certainly aware of Gobineau's work to some degree – most probably through the excerpts and introductory essays written by Richard Wagner and others which appeared in *Bayreuther Blätter* in the early 1880s – and there are a number of interesting affinities between the ideas of these two 'aristocratic radicals', even if they are not significant enough to suggest a more substantial relationship based on direct influence in the way that was widespread among early French critics of Nietzsche.[17] For instance, not only does Gobineau, like Nietzsche, prophesy an age of democratisation and mediocrity brought about by the intercrossing of the constituent races of European societies, he was also fascinated, as Nietzsche would later be, by the rigid caste system of India, with its emphasis on order, rule by a hereditary elite and laws proscribing intermarriage. In addition, the aphorism entitled 'Ennoblement through Degeneration' discussed above also evinces certain similarities with Gobineau's theory of civilisational decay. For Gobineau, tribes which are incapable of overcoming their repugnance to blood-mixture maintain a comparative purity which is, however, stagnant and infertile. Since all civilisations are held to derive ultimately from the

[16] Arthur de Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*, trans. by Oscar Levy (London: Heinemann, 1915), p. 25.

[17] See for example: Charles Andler, 'Nietzsche et les dernières études sur l'histoire de la civilisation', *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 35 (1928), 182–91; Maurice Lange, *Le Comte Arthur de Gobineau. Etude biographique et critique* (Publications de la faculté des lettres de l'université de Strasbourg, No. 22, 1924), pp. 270–7; Ernest Seillière, *Apollôn ou Dionysos* (Paris: Plon, Nourrit, 1905), pp. 319–26. Andler lists a number of further works on the subject of the relationship between Nietzsche and Gobineau. Other works not cited by him include: Georges Chatterton-Hill, 'Gobineau, Nietzsche, Wagner', *The Nineteenth Century* 73 (1913), 1088–101; Friedrich Lange, 'Gobineau und Nietzsche', in *Reines Deutschtum: Grundzüge einer nationalen Weltanschauung* (Berlin: Alexander Duncker, 1904), pp. 248–58. More recently, several articles were devoted to this subject in *Etudes nietzschéennes* 4–5 (1949), 37–64, which also includes a bibliography; cf. also E. J. Young, *Gobineau und der Rassismus: Eine Kritik der anthropologischen Geschichtstheorie* (Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Hain, 1968), pp. 270–84. Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche – whose authority must of course be treated with extreme caution – recalls reading one of Gobineau's works aloud to Nietzsche in 1877, but 'without my brother showing especial interest in it' (*Das Leben Friedrich Nietzsches*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: C. G. Naumann, 1904), vol. II, p. 886).

noble and fructifying blood of the White race, and especially from its Aryan branch, primitive cultures require an infusion of this life-giving substance, and thus a certain degree of interbreeding between peoples is necessary for their development. Too much, though, and the 'primordial race-unit' of the social organism is irredeemably diluted, and leads to collapse and disintegration. Furthermore, Nietzsche, like Gobineau, classifies races according to whether they display 'male' or 'female' qualities (*BGE* 48).

But the most telling congruence between Nietzsche's and Gobineau's philosophy of culture, and the one which has hitherto been most overlooked, is that both tend to conflate the concepts of race and class. Nietzsche, as we have seen, understands the word 'race' (*Rasse*) in a somewhat idiosyncratic and ambiguous way. While he sometimes employs it to refer to a biological, national or ethnic group – the Aryan, Jewish, Latin, English race, etc. – the term is often used interchangeably or in close connection with the word *Stand* (estate, class, caste), thus implying the older meaning of any group which shares a common ancestry (such as a clan or dynasty). This explains why, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, he can mourn the disastrous effects of miscegenation in one breath and, in the next, recommend that certain 'races' interbreed (the Jews and the Prussians, for example) in order to create a supranational, pan-European ruling caste. Gobineau's racism originates from his revulsion against a society that rejected the virtues of nobility and his social pessimism begins as fundamentally a matter of class-consciousness. Such a link between class conflicts and racial thinking was not new, and least of all in France. The ancient rivalries of Gauls, Franks and Romans – all readily endowed with racial vices and virtues – and the relationship between their conflicts and the class structure of contemporary France were well-established subjects for historical debate, with this theme being developed frequently and explicitly from the sixteenth century onwards. Gobineau's innovation lies in extending this racial model beyond the narrow confines of French political history to embrace a more universal anthropological perspective. Thus, although he certainly regards the three main races which he distinguishes – the White, Yellow and Black – as real biological entities, he also ascribes to them characteristics that allow this typology to be read as a metaphor for the inequality of human classes. The White race embodies the qualities of the aristocracy: warlike, bound by codes of honour, and demonstrating a love of life and superior intelligence. The Yellow race, which represents the third estate, tends to mediocrity in everything, is practical and end-oriented rather than creative, and craves material pleasures and comfort. Significantly, Gobineau adds that, though this race lacks the 'nerve force' to establish great cultures, 'every founder

of a civilization would wish the backbone of his society, his middle class [*petite bourgeoisie*], to consist of such men'.[18] (Nietzsche, too, often mocks as 'Chinese' anything that smacks of bourgeois contentment – such as Spencer's vision of the future.) And the brutish, violent and sensual Black race, the lowest of the human varieties, clearly represents the volatile, degenerate urban masses from whom Gobineau had recoiled in the revolutions of 1848. But Gobineau's attempts to 'racialise' class distinctions is most apparent in his account of the separate ethnic origin of the various social ranks:

> Every society was founded on three primitive classes, each representative of an ethnic variety: the nobility, whose form more or less resembled that of the victorious race; the bourgeoisie, made up of half-breeds strongly related to the better stock; the populace, enslaved, or at least severely oppressed, as belonging to an inferior human variety – Negroid in the south, Finnish in the north.[19]

Paul Bourget (who, incidentally, later became a member of the *Gobineau-Vereinigung* founded by the Wagnerian Ludwig Schemann in 1894) voiced the concerns of many of his contemporaries when he complained that 'our age is suffering from a disease of the will [*maladie de la volonté*]'.[20] Lassitude, impotence and weakness of will are familiar *topoi* in both the literature and medical writing of the late nineteenth century, the typical symptoms of degenerate nervousness. For Nietzsche, too, scepticism, pessimism and ultimately nihilism had their origin in the depleted reserves of nerve force and universal 'paralysis of the will' of the *fin de siècle*:

> For scepticism is the most spiritual expression of a certain complex physiological condition that in common parlance is called bad nerves or sickliness; it invariably presents itself whenever races or classes that have long been kept apart intermix significantly and suddenly . . . But what is prone most of all to illness and degeneracy in these mixed breeds [*Mischlingen*] is the *will* (*BGE* 208).

The equation of degeneracy and weakness of will forms the basis of the psychiatrist Charles Féré's 1888 work *Dégénérescence et criminalité*, on which Nietzsche was heavily reliant (although by no means exclusively dependent), not only for the vocabulary, but also for his understanding of the symptomatology and aetiology of degeneration.[21] Indeed, I would argue that the word 'décadence' owes its sudden appearance and

[18] Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*, p. 206.
[19] Gobineau, quoted in Michael D. Biddiss, *Father of Racist Ideology. The Social and Political Thought of Count Gobineau* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), p. 166.
[20] Bourget, *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, p. 167.
[21] Charles Féré, *Dégénérescence et criminalité* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1888). On Nietzsche's reading of Féré, see: Hans Erich Lampl, 'Ex Oblivione: Das Féré Palimpsest', *Nietzsche-Studien* 15 (1986), 225–49; Bettina Wahrig-Schmidt, ' "Irgendwie, jedenfalls physiologisch" ', *Nietzsche-Studien* 17 (1988), 434–65.

rapid profusion in Nietzsche's later writings not so much to Bourget's *Essais*, as to his encounter with Féré. For Féré, as for most of his contemporaries, *décadence* is synonymous with *dégénérescence*, a concept which Nietzsche also appropriates and translates as 'Degenerescenz'.[22] According to Féré – ironically, one of those Parisian milieu theorists Nietzsche so derided – the criminal degenerate is produced in an unhealthy social and physical environment that overstimulates him, leads him to a state of neuropathic exhaustion (*épuisement nerveux*), and lowers the resistance of his will. As individuals become less resistant, they become vulnerable to organic disease and to various will-pathologies. This results in a progressive failure to inhibit their instincts and sensual appetites, making them more susceptible to the impulses of immoral or criminal behaviour. It is in precisely such terms that Nietzsche also conceives degenerescence (*Degenerescenz*). In one of many lengthy fragments paraphrasing Féré, Nietzsche notes how overwork and malnutrition in the individual cause an 'increasingly more profound and enduring exhaustion, which brings to light morbid symptoms in the next generation'. It is this 'hereditary *overtaxing*' which is the 'main cause of the degener[ation] of a race' (VIII 3, 15[37]). In a similar vein, he predicts that the energy of the rapidly industrialising Reich will give way to premature racial senility: 'Modern Germany, which is exerting all its energies and counts an overloading and premature ageing among its normal consequences, will already, within 2 generations, have to pay for this with an extreme symptom of degenerescence' (VIII 3, 15[36]). And, again like Féré, Nietzsche claims that the main consequence of both acquired and congenital exhaustion, this 'sickliness', is weakness of 'will'. As we have seen in chapter 1, the will as such does not exist for Nietzsche; it is not a hypostatised, unitary entity. According to his Roux-influenced physiology, the human being is a multiplicity of warring instincts and drives, each a centre of force seeking domination over others. When one drive subdues another, the strength of the weaker is harnessed by the stronger, thereby establishing a hierarchy. Under such a '*dominating passion*' there is a 'co-ordination of the internal systems and their operation in the service of one end'. This is the mark of a strong 'will', of the healthy, self-regulating organism; indeed, Nietzsche suggests that it is practically the very definition of 'healthiness' (VIII 3, 14[157]). It is precisely this organisation, this 'precision and clarity of direction' which is lacking in weak wills (VIII 3, 14[219]).

[22] Although *dégénérescence* was more commonly translated as 'degeneration' in English, the gallicism 'degenerescence' was also occasionally used. Because the term *Degenerescenz* – as least as far I am aware – never became current in German medicine, where *Entartung* and *Degeneration* were preferred, I have, in line with Duncan Large's translation of *Twilight of the Idols*, employed the rarer English variation. Existing translations have accordingly been modified.

In feeble natures there is only confusion, an 'internal discord and anarchism' (VIII 3, 14[157]), a remark which recalls the French psychologist Théodule Ribot's characterisation of the diseased will as manifesting an 'Absence of hierarchic coordination, independent, irregular, isolated, anarchic action'.[23] The inner anarchy prevailing within weak natures is, Nietzsche continues, aggravated by an 'excessive sensitivity', a 'hyper-irritability' (VIII 3, 15[32]). Modernity is a kaleidoscope of disparate, fleeting impressions; unable to digest these sensations, his nervous system further undermined by the ingestion of alcohol and narcotics, the degenerate '**reacts only** to external impulses' (VIII 2, 10[18]). Given Nietzsche's debt to Féré here, it might at first seem rather strange that he dismisses the 'doctrine of the milieu' as a '*décadence*-theory', as itself the expression of a 'disintegration of the personality' (VIII 3, 15[105], [106]), until we realise that he is only rejecting it as a means of explaining strong, vigorous beings. Only the weaker natures succumb to the 'contagion of the *milieu*'; one of the basic propositions of Nietzsche's theory of degeneration – to which he returns again and again – is that 'to be conditioned by one's environment, that, too, is a sign of *décadence*' (VIII 3, 15[80]). Nervous disease, then, is a clear sign that the '*defensive* powers of the robust constitution' are lacking (VIII 3, 14[86]). The 'well-constituted man' (*der Wohlgerathene*), on the other hand, is able to withstand the pressures of the external world, he 'reacts slowly to every kind of stimulus, with that slowness which a protracted caution and a willed pride have bred in him (*EH* I, 2). And here Nietzsche is once again in agreement with contemporary medical opinion. The healthy person, according to Paul Möbius, one of the leading degenerationists in turn-of-the-century German psychiatry, 'is difficult to excite; he exists as it were in a stable equilibrium, absorbing the impressions, yet not ruled by them'.[24]

Sex, degeneration and eugenics

Nietzsche's distinction between the weak-willed, neuropathic degenerate and the 'well-constituted man' evokes a more fundamental biological division in nineteenth-century medical and cultural discourse – that between man and woman. Concepts of manliness and femininity, which had become rigidly defined during the course of the nineteenth century,

[23] Théodule Ribot, *Diseases of Memory, Diseases of the Will and Diseases of Personality*, trans. by J. Fitzgerald (New York: Humboldt, 1887), p. 38. Hans Erich Lampl has argued that Nietzsche was familiar with Ribot's work and incorporated elements of it into his own texts. See Lampl, 'Flaire de livre: Friedrich Nietzsche und Théodule Ribot', *Nietzsche-Studien* 18 (1989), 573–86.

[24] Paul Julius Möbius, *Geschlecht und Entartung* (Halle: Marhold, 1903), p. 5.

reinforced the division of labour which was a requisite of bourgeois society, not only in the socio-economic sphere, but in the family and sexual life as well. The fundamental biological differences between masculinity and femininity were perpetually reaffirmed as imperatives of the modern age – 'The more healthy a person is, the more decisively are they man or woman', wrote Paul Möbius[25] – and sexual differentiation had to be maintained if culture was to flourish. Biology and medicine, and the concept of degeneration in particular, were deployed in order to regulate and normalise bourgeois morality and sexual mores, to pathologise any deviant or unproductive behaviour and to support the ideals of manliness and femininity which had been constructed during the course of the century. Nietzsche's notorious misogyny – one of the most problematic aspects of his thought for many modern readers – is often nothing more than an unquestioning reflection of these contemporary discourses on sexuality and degeneration.

Like most of his contemporaries, Nietzsche equates manliness with strength, virility, self-control, depth, seriousness, activity and, above all, efflorescent health.[26] Femininity, on the other hand, connotes sickness and feebleness. Not only were the nineteenth-century woman's ideal social characteristics – nurturance, intuitive morality, domesticity, passivity and affection – all assumed to be rooted in her biological nature, but medical orthodoxy also insisted that female physiology was intrinsically pathological. Women were frailer, with smaller skulls and more delicate muscles. Moreover, the female nervous system was more refined, and thus more 'irritable' – its fragile constitution constantly threatened by menstrual, uteral and especially sexual irregularities. This increased nervous sensitivity was manifested in a weak will, in excessive emotionality and in overstimulation, resulting in exhaustion, neurasthenia and hysteria.[27] Hysteria in particular had for centuries been regarded as the quintessential 'female malady'; yet between 1870 and World War I – the so-called 'golden age' of hysteria – it occupied a peculiarly central role in degenerationist psychiatric discourse, and in definitions of femininity and female sexuality – a process Michel Foucault has called the 'hysterization of women's bodies'.[28] The renowned British sexologist

[25] *Ibid.* On this topic, see George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985).

[26] Möbius, *Geschlecht und Entartung*, p. 30.

[27] Carrol Smith Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg, 'The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Woman and her Role in Nineteenth-Century America', *Journal of American History* 60 (1973), 334–5. The past fifteen years have seen an enormous explosion in the literature on the cultural significance of hysteria in the nineteenth century. See e.g. Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady* (London: Virago, 1987); Oppenheim, *'Shattered Nerves'*; Mark Micale, *Approaching Hysteria* (Princeton University Press, 1995).

[28] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 3 vols. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), vol. I, *An Introduction*, p. 104.

Havelock Ellis, for example, asserts in his book *Man and Woman* (1894) that neurasthenia and hysteria 'are probably the typical nervous disorders of women'.[29] And the psychiatrist August Krauss, whose *Die Psychologie des Verbrechens* (*The Psychology of Crime*) Nietzsche owned, defined hysteria as a 'pathologically exaggerated, caricatured form of femininity',[30] for the hysteric's rapid passage from one emotional or physical symptom to the next suggested the mercurial and fickle nature traditionally associated with women. Nietzsche himself was by no means ignorant of this purported link between femininity and pathology; indeed, he seems to be consciously hinting at it when he describes women in the following way: '*the one half of humanity* is weak, typically sick, changeable, inconstant' (VIII 3, 14[182]).

Given these associations, men exhibiting symptoms of hysteria and nervous debilitation were inevitably perceived as effeminate, as 'unmanly'. Degeneration in men was a process of feminisation; it threatened the sexual differentiation on which the progress of culture and civilisation was thought to depend, by blurring the allegedly natural boundaries between the sexes: 'Under the influence of degeneration sexuality becomes muddled, and the most important facet of this is that the sharp delineation of sexual character is lost, that there appear in men female, in women male characteristics.'[31] Nietzsche, too, understands degeneration as the confusion of sexual identity. In *Human, All Too Human*, he had already held up the division of labour within the rigidly stratified society of ancient Greece as a model for coping with the diseases and derangement that inevitably accompany overcivilisation: 'The women had no other task than to bring forth handsome, powerful bodies in which the character of the father lived on as uninterruptedly as possible and therewith to counteract the nervous over-excitation that was gaining the upper hand in so highly developed a culture' (*HA* 259). In *The Gay Science*, he links the decadence of contemporary European society with the rise of effeminate bourgeois values and the concomitant decline of the aristocratic, manly values of the Renaissance (*GS* 362). And in *Beyond Good and Evil*, he describes compassion, and the morality based on it, as an expression of '*effeminacy*', as a 'softening' which manifests itself in a 'sickly, raw sensitivity about pain' – that is, in an essentially feminine 'affectability' (*BGE* 293). His concern for the preservation of the 'natural' distinctions between the sexes is an extension of his vision of a hierarchical society based on the rigid separation of the strong and the weak; the feminisation of men

[29] Havelock Ellis, *Man and Woman: A Study of Human Secondary Sexual Characters* (London: Walter Scott, 1894), p. 278.
[30] August Krauss, *Die Psychologie des Verbrechens* (Tübingen: H. Laupp, 1884), p. 34.
[31] Möbius, *Geschlecht und Entartung*, p. 9.

reflects the degeneration of the aristocratic 'races' and their interbreeding with inferior stock. He even goes so far as to suggest in one fragment that the eternal struggle between the 'strong' and the 'weak' – the motive force behind all history – is at root a battle of the sexes, or at the very least a struggle between the degenerate and effeminate races on the one side and the truly manly individuals on the other: 'Woman has always conspired with the decadent types, with the priests, against the "powerful", the "strong", the *men*' (VIII 3, 14[182]). Indeed, Nietzsche's aristocratic utopia is to be governed by the '*manliest men*', and not the 'half-women', amongst whom he includes priests and scholars (VII 2, 25[270]). This entails, of course, the defeat of decadence and democracy, for the future salvation of Europe lies in its 'masculinisation' (*Vermännlichung*), in the regeneration of the 'man' – as embodied in Napoleon – and his supremacy over 'the businessman and the philistine – and perhaps even over "woman"' (*GS* 362). Thus, Nietzsche's hopes for the rebirth of culture rest with the reintroduction of the 'manly virtues', and the opportunities that the war-plagued next century would bring; compulsory military service is, Nietzsche accordingly suggests, the antidote to the decadent 'softness' of democratic societies (VII 3, 34[203]). In all this emphasis on the healthy male body, there is, furthermore, an unmistakable undercurrent of eroticism: 'Personal *manly* fitness, physical fitness is again acquiring value; the valuations are becoming more physical, the nutrition more meaty. Handsome men are becoming possible once more' (VII 2, 26[417]).

There is a certain irony here. At the height of the bourgeois cult of manliness, Nietzsche sees the bourgeois spirit and age itself as effeminate. But in proclaiming new, more manly valuations he is merely radicalising the nineteenth-century discourse on sex, not revaluing it. The *Übermensch* is a more extreme expression of contemporary tropes of manliness, a response to those same anxieties which contributed to the sense of crisis overshadowing the *fin de siècle*. In seeking to overcome the decadent effeminacy of Zarathustra's 'last man', Nietzsche fails to redefine what constitutes masculinity (toughness, health, etc.), just as he perpetuates the prevailing construction of femininity. In short, he remains ensnared in the prejudices and ideals of his contemporaries, unable to transcend a biologism which sought to reinforce bourgeois models of marriage and sexuality.

Nietzsche does not only envisage degeneration as the feminisation of both masculine culture and physiology. While the most visible form of the medicalisation of the female body was the opposition of the fecund Mother (who in obeying her natural maternal instincts was also socially productive) and her negative image, the 'nervous woman' or

'hysteric', the growing women's movement gave rise to another stereotype of 'degenerate' female sexuality. For Nietzsche, as for his contemporaries, the politicisation of women, and the rise of the assertive, confident and intellectual New Woman in particular, implied a concomitant loss of femininity and the increasingly mannish character of female nature: '*Masculinisation of women* is the correct name for "emancipation of the woman"... I see therein a *degeneration* in the instincts of modern women' (VII 2, 26[361]). Women seeking influence in male-dominated spheres upset the rigid division of labour between man and woman in nineteenth-century society; since these gender roles were partly defined by appealing to 'nature' or 'instinct', any behaviour which undermined them was inevitably construed as pathological – that is, as degenerate. And as degenerates, all women who neglected their 'biological' duties of childbirth and childrearing were by implication antisocial, if not downright criminal: 'A woman wants to be a mother; and if she does not want to be one, even if she could be, then she practically belongs in prison [*Zuchthaus*] – so great is usually her internal degeneration' (VII 3, 34[153]). The women's movement, Nietzsche suggests in *Ecce Homo*, 'is the instinctive hatred of the woman who has *turned out ill*, that is to say is incapable of bearing, for her who has turned out well' (*EH* III, 5).

Modern women were stereotyped in several ways. There were the 'masculine' and abnormal women who, like the French novelist George Sand, mimicked the dress and comportment of men.[32] There was the androgyne, a recurrent motif in the literature of the period, and portrayed as a monster of sexual and moral ambiguity.[33] Finally, there was the lesbian. Long ignored by medical science, lesbianism was eventually subsumed under the medico-psychiatric categories of perversion and sexual degeneracy with Carl Westphal's study of the 'congenital invert' in 1869. Even more than the male (effeminate) homosexual, the lesbian constituted a threat to gender distinctions. Masculine and predatory, mentally and morally unstable, she represented the ultimate perversion of the idealised image of Motherhood, thus striking at the very roots of society.[34] It is this last contemporary stereotype of degenerate, mannish women that Nietzsche seizes on, in a crude, but by no means original remark, in order to allude to the sexual deviancy of female intellectuals: 'When a woman has scholarly tendencies, there is usually something wrong with her sexuality. Barrenness in and of itself predisposes to a certain masculinity

[32] See Nietzsche's critical remarks on Sand's 'men's roles' (VII 3, 38[6]).
[33] Cf. A. J. L. Busst, 'The Image of the Androgyne in the Nineteenth Century', in Ian Fletcher (ed.), *Romantic Mythologies* (London: Routledge, 1967), pp. 1–96.
[34] Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality*, p. 105.

of taste' (*BGE* 144).[35] For Nietzsche, the women's movement was yet another consequence of the decadent democratisation of the industrial age, and he expresses his fears in a lengthy passage in *Beyond Good and Evil*, the ironic anti-bourgeois thrust of which is undermined somewhat by his uncritical regurgitation of nineteenth-century (middle-class) prejudices:

> To be sure, there are enough idiotic woman-lovers and female-corrupters among scholarly asses of the male sex who are advising women to defeminize themselves in this way and to imitate all the stupidities that are infecting 'men' in Europe, European 'masculinity' – those who would like to bring woman down to the level of 'general education', or even to reading the newspaper and politicking. Some of them would even like to make women into freethinkers and literati . . . Women's nerves are being destroyed almost everywhere by the most pathological and dangerous kinds of music (our modern German music), making women every day more hysterical and less competent for their first and last profession, the bearing of healthy children. In general, these men want to 'cultivate' women still more and, as they say, make the 'weaker sex' *strong* through culture, as if history did not teach as forcefully as could be that the 'cultivation' of a person was always accompanied by a weakening, that is to say, the weakening, splintering, debilitating of his *strength of will* (*BGE* 239).

Nietzsche's restriction of 'natural', that is, healthy female and male sexuality to the creative and procreative function of reproduction expresses an ancient, yet also profoundly contemporary attitude, and it is ironic that he should happily endorse a view that, while supported by the authority of modern medicine, can actually be traced back to the doctrines of the Church Fathers and Stoicism. Indeed, the severe moralism of nineteenth-century psychiatry – expressed in its pathologisation of allegedly aberrant behaviour such as masturbation and homosexuality – in many ways merely represented the medicalisation of the repressive and censorious character of Christian teachings on sex; its fascination with the notion of original sin survived as the scientific preoccupation with heredity taints. Accordingly, there was, as Foucault has argued,

> scarcely a malady or physical disturbance to which the nineteenth century did nor impute at least some degree of sexual etiology. From the bad habits of children to the phthises of adults, the apoplexies of old people, nervous maladies, and the degeneration of the race, the medicine of that era wove an entire network of sexual causality to explain them.[36]

[35] The notorious insult which Nietzsche hurled at Lou Salomé after his break with her – he branded her a 'scrawny, filthy, foul-smelling ape with false breasts' (*KGB* III 1, p. 402) – also implies that her intellectual gifts were won at the cost of atavistic regression and a loss of femininity. See Carol Diethe, 'Nietzsche and the New Woman', *German Life and Letters* 48 (1995), 428–40.

[36] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, vol. I, p. 65.

Nietzsche's remarks in one late fragment on the subject of 'erotic precociousness' reflect these fears of sexual degeneration. This early awakening of the animal passions, he claims, afflicts above all the French, and especially Parisian, youth, who leave school and enter the adult world 'already ruined and tainted', unable ever to escape the 'chain of despicable inclinations'. As a form of 'hyper-irritability', with sufferers unable to prevent themselves from reacting to 'stimuli, even to such tiny little sexual stimuli' (VIII 3, 23[1]), it is in most cases already a 'symptom of *décadence* in the race and family' (VIII 3, 15[80]). Precisely this kind of precocious sexuality, Foucault writes, 'was presented from the eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth as an epidemic menace that risked compromising not only the future health of adults but the future of the entire society and species'.[37] Certainly, the notion of adolescent or even infantile sexuality was deeply repugnant to nineteenth-century morals and medicine, both of which were consumed by a deep suspicion of the intrinsic viciousness of the young, a mistrust reinforced by those theorists of degeneration who emphasised the congenital nature of delinquency. Inevitably, the sinfulness of childhood lust carried its own punishment: Charles Féré, for instance, regarded the 'premature development of the sexual instinct' as a sign that the child in question was 'predisposed to nervous disorders'.[38] As the potential site of numerous, highly communicable pathologies, sex, then, was placed in a position of responsibility with regard to future generations. The administration and regulation of sexuality were ordered and rationalised by a biologistic concern for descent and the species or 'race'. It is from this concern for sexual hygiene and heredity, for the healthy, productive channelling of the sex drive and for the safeguarding of sexual selection that the discourse of eugenics emerges as an innovation in the technology of sex. These same concerns preoccupy Nietzsche; the same fears give rise to his own eugenic pronouncements; he too upholds the same functionalist, economic conceptions of sexuality which associate the satisfaction of the sex drive with the health and future of the race:

> One should not make the satisfaction of the sex drive a practice whereby the race suffers, that is, where no selection at all takes place any more, and instead everyone mates and produces children. The *extinction* of many kinds of human beings is just as *desirable* as any reproduction. – And one is supposed to frustrate and interfere with one's entire development through this intimate association with a woman – for the sake of that drive!! (V 1, 5[38]).

This note was written in the year 1880, four years before Nietzsche was introduced to the ideas of Francis Galton, Darwin's cousin and founder

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 146. [38] Féré, quoted in Oppenheim, *'Shattered Nerves'*, p. 259.

of the 'science' of eugenics, and eight years before he became acquainted with Féré's crude social Darwinism. Indeed, Nietzsche entertained similar ideas as early as 1876, looking forward in one note to a future 'extinction of bad races' and the 'breeding of better ones' (IV 2, 19[79]), and a few months subsequently arguing that the extermination of 'deformities' and 'monsters' is justified in order to prevent their propagation (IV 2, 23[59]). Later eugenic statements written in the last year of his creative life, such as his proposal to sterilise the 'chronically ill and neurasthenics of the third degree' (VIII 3, 23[1]) and the passage entitled 'Morality for Physicians' in *Twilight of the Idols* (*TI* IX, 36) add nothing new except perhaps a more radical, urgent tone. Yet despite the use of modern, biologistic terms such as 'race' and 'selection' in the above passage and elsewhere in his writings, it would appear that his original model is much older. The oldest formulation of a eugenic utopia can be found, of course, in Plato's *Republic*, which was in turn partly inspired by the infamous Spartan practice of infanticide in cases of foetal deformation or congenital illness.[39] Plato already formulates a large number of the institutional measures to secure hygienic reproduction which are echoed in all subsequent utopian proposals for the controlled breeding of human beings, and ultimately in the concrete proposals of the eugenicists. With this in mind, Nietzsche argues that the greatness of ancient Greek culture was made possible by the practice of sexual hygiene and the employment of various eugenic procedures – among which he counts coitus interruptus, abortion and, rather oddly, even homosexuality:

> The emergence of **many** *free* individuals with the Greeks: marriage *not* for the sake of lust. Practice and development of the art of coi[tus]. Pederasty as diversion from the veneration and mollycoddling of women – and consequently prevention of women's over-excitation [*Übernervosität*] and weakness . . . The killing of the embryo; elimination of the fruits of unhappy coitus (V 2, 11[97]).

In Plato's society, marriage in any conventional sense was to be abolished. Instead, state authorities would bring together men and women who were deemed to be of pure Guardian stock and thus regulate not only the quality of the offspring but, by determining the frequency of unions, the quantity as well. The children of good stock would be raised in state-run nurseries, while those of inferior parentage, 'and any defective offspring of the others, will be quietly and secretly disposed of'.[40] Like Plato, Nietzsche understands his 'eugenic' revaluation of marriage as a means of securing and consolidating the political and biological (genetic)

[39] Peter Weingart, Jürgen Kroll, Kurt Bayertz, *Rasse, Blut und Gene. Geschichte der Eugenik und Rassenhygiene in Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), p. 28.
[40] Plato, *The Republic* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p. 241.

hegemony of a ruling class. The purpose behind the dynastic unions of ancient Athens and eighteenth-century Europe (and, one might add, of Plato's utopian 'republic') was the '*breeding* of a race', the 'maintenance of a fixed, definite type of ruling man' (VIII 1, 4[6]). Marital partners, he argues, were carefully chosen in order to maintain the purity of those 'races' whose later degeneracy, as we have seen, was caused by the influx of debased blood after the abandonment of these practices. Such customs betray an instinctive awareness of, and concern for, the health of the race. Similarly, Nietzsche frequently declares that marriage should not take place simply in order to satisfy sexual desire; it is not a contract between romantic lovers (*D* 151). There are, he suggests, only two reasons why marriage should be entered into: '1) for the purpose of higher evolution 2) in order to leave behind the fruits of such a humanity' (V 1, 5[38]). Such remarks, and others like it – one thinks, for example, of Zarathustra's exhortation: 'You should propagate yourself not only forward, but upward!' ('Nicht nur fort sollst du dich pflanzen, sondern hinauf!') (*Z* I, 20) – have often given rise to the impression that Nietzsche's goal was the advancement of human evolution by artificial selection. This is misleading; if he ever did seriously contemplate (or at least imply) the possibility of creating a new biological species by means of selective breeding, then this is not representative of his position as a whole. For a start, as we have seen, evolution is for Nietzsche primarily a process of progressive individuation that is as much moral as it is biological in character: the *Übermensch* is by definition a solitary figure who has left the herd behind him at an earlier stage of his development. A 'species' of such superior beings would be a contradiction in terms. What is more, the majority of serious, respected eugenicists – men like Wilhelm Schallmayer, Otto Ammon, Alfred Ploetz and Fritz Lenz, rather than the more fanciful of the idle dreamers writing in organs such as the *Politisch-anthropologische Revue* – were not, contrary to popular belief, interested in creating a superhuman species.[41] As we shall see in the next chapter, they were, like Nietzsche, more interested in 'negative', rather than 'positive', eugenics; or what, in Germany, became known as 'racial hygiene'. This becomes clear if we consider the rest of the passage quoted above. Here, Nietzsche pleads for the 'ennoblement' of prostitution; 'concubinage with prevention of conception' is a necessary measure to discharge the excess sexual energy of those who are excluded from marriage, i.e. the unfit. In short,

[41] Gunter Mann, 'Biologie und der "Neue Mensch"', in Gunter Mann and Rolf Winau (eds.), *Medizin, Naturwissenschaft, Technik und das zweite Kaiserreich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1977), pp. 174f. For a discussion of some of these thinkers, see Hedwig Conrad-Martius, *Utopien der Menschenzüchtung. Der Sozialdarwinismus und seine Folgen* (Munich: Kösel, 1955); Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics*.

legalised or state-regulated prostitution is a means of maintaining sexual, and thus racial, hygiene; it 'should *not* be the sacrifice which is made to ladies or to the Jewish purse – but, rather, the improvement of the race' (V 1, 5[38]). Elsewhere, Nietzsche proposes (like the *Gestalt*-psychologist and sexual reformer Christian von Ehrenfels [42] and the eugenicist Vacher de Lapouge after him), both polygamy and polyandry as a way of ensuring that the 'best' members of a society produce as many offspring as possible: 'Individual exceptional men ought to have the opportunity to reproduce with a number of women; and individual women, with particularly favourable conditions, also ought not to be bound to the fortune of a single man' (V 2, 11[179]). Nietzsche proposes a number of state-sanctioned measures to promote sexual and racial hygiene, which one writer later praised as 'a very timely programme' and which indeed differ little from the policies devised by future generations of eugenicists:[43]

On the future of marriage:

an *additional tax* on inheritances, etc. also additional military service for bachelors of a certain age upwards and increasing (within the community)

benefits of all kinds for fathers who bring large numbers of boys into the world: possibly a plural vote

a *medical certificate* preceding every marriage and signed by the leaders of the community: wherein several definite questions must be answered by the engaged couple ('family history' –

as remedy for *prostitution* (or as its ennoblement): short-term marriages, legalised (for a period of years, months, days), with guarantees for the children

every marriage accounted for and sanctioned by a certain number of community representatives: as a matter of concern for the community (VIII 3, 16[35]).

Thus far, then, we have seen how Nietzsche's use of the concept of degeneration reflects nineteenth-century anxieties, many of which he shared. His biologism, his concern for the epidemic spread of a variety of social pathologies, his employment of the motif of racial degeneration and weakness of will – all point to a profoundly *fin-de-siècle* attitude towards contemporary social, political and cultural upheavals. Nietzsche also construed degeneration respectively as either a process of feminisation or masculinisation, in response to a growing unease about the blurring of the 'natural' boundaries between the sexes. Finally, he views sex as the potential site of numerous degenerative processes if severed from its primary and 'biological' function of reproduction. It is in the context of this

[42] Christian von Ehrenfels, 'Die konstitutive Verderblichkeit der Monogamie', *Archiv für Rassen- und Gesellschaftsbiologie* 4 (1907), 615–51 and 803–30.

[43] Egon Kirchner, 'Nietzsche's Lehren im Lichte der Rassenhygiene', *Archiv für Rassen- und Gesellschaftsbiologie* 17 (1925–6), 388. On the eugenic debates about sexual health, marriage and the issuing of health certificates, see Weingart, Kroll and Bayertz, *Rasse, Blut und Gene*, pp. 227–30, 274–7.

concern for sexual and racial hygiene that many of his proto-eugenical statements occur. At the same time, however, he subverts and ironises the discourse of degeneration so that it becomes his chief rhetorical weapon in his struggle against modernity and the movement in which, according to his genealogy, modern values have their origin: Christianity. It is to this critique that we now turn our attention.

5 Christianity and degeneration

For Bénédict-Augustin Morel, the devout Catholic psychiatrist who, in 1857, established the nosological category of 'degeneration', the human being was not the product of a gradual evolution of the species. On the contrary, modern man was, rather, the 'morbid deviation from an original type', a degenerate descendant of the Adamic *Urmensch* of Creation, and the primary cause of this *dégénérescence* – his name for the progressive process of pathological change manifested in visible and gross physical deformity – was original sin itself. Morel was thus responsible for the lasting impression of immorality being both causal and symptomatic in this process of degeneration: physical decadence led to intellectual and moral decay, and vice versa. *Dégénérescence*, in other words, is at root a medicalised lapsarian myth, a potent mixture of Christian theology and Lamarckian theories of inheritance. For degeneracy was transmitted by hereditary means and intensified in successive generations, becoming, ultimately, self-perpetuating. In other words, children inherit the 'sins of the fathers', the biological and moral flaws of their parents, and transmit these defects to their own offspring in heightened form until the fourth generation, condemned to congenital idiocy and sterility, marks the end of the degenerate line.

Given the fact that the concept of *dégénérescence* was freighted with such moral-religious implications, it is significant that it should inflect and infect so much of Nietzsche's writing. His late works from *Beyond Good and Evil* onwards are preoccupied with his diagnosis of the pathologies of nineteenth-century civilisation, with the attempt to trace the advent of modern nihilism back to the roots of Western culture – to Socratic rationality, but most spectacularly, of course, to the Judaeo-Christian tradition. This critique of modernity receives its most potent expression in his manipulation of the language of degenerationism – for the very rhetorical weapon with which Nietzsche chooses to attack Judaeo-Christianity is itself a product of the same values and *fin-de-siècle* pessimism. He does not uncritically appropriate the concept of degeneration: he subverts it, ironises it; he turns the implicit Christianism back on itself, extending the

application of this discourse to interrogate the genesis of those Judaeo-Christian values themselves. Unlike his contemporaries, Nietzsche does not regard only the *fin de siècle* itself as a period of decline; rather it is the apotheosis, the culmination of a long process of decay which he sees as beginning with the rise and eventual hegemony of Christianity. By operating with anachronistic concepts and diagnostic categories, with those quintessentially modern diseases, degeneration and neurasthenia, he emphasises how the contemporary 'flowering' of decadence has its roots in the very values which have shaped Western civilisation. In those long notes which litter the notebooks of the last years of his intellectual life, Nietzsche lists the 'pathologies' he sees as afflicting the nineteenth century. Not only crime, prostitution and alcoholism, but also democracy, pessimism and Christianity are the social symptoms of physiological exhaustion, of weakness of will and hyper-irritability. 'I have asked myself', he writes in one fragment, so typical of his own biologism and that of his age, 'whether one can indeed compare all the highest values of previous philosophy, morality and religion with the values of the enfeebled, the *mentally ill* and the neurasthenics' (VIII 3, 14[65]). Nietzsche's anti-Christianism is thus inextricably linked with his degenerationism, with the way in which he deploys the prevailing biological discourse of his day. In this chapter, I want to explore several aspects of his biologistic critique of Christianity. I shall begin by discussing Nietzsche's portrayal of Christian morality as a symptom of physical degeneration and link this with contemporary accounts of criminal behaviour. I shall then move on to his pathologisation of religious experience proper, which I shall consider within the wider context of nineteenth-century scientific anti-clericalism. Finally, I shall address Nietzsche's mobilisation of the tropes of racial biology and anti-Semitism, a rhetorical strategy which serves, once again, to point up the inherent degeneracy of the Christian. I shall discuss this in conjunction with his subversion of Wagnerian Aryan Christianity, as well as the relationship between Nietzsche's new religion and the emergent discourse of eugenics.

Crime and Christianity

Time and time again Nietzsche asserts in his notebooks and in his published works that the following is the 'first principle' of his revaluation of morality: 'what one has hitherto regarded as the *causes of degeneration* are in fact its *consequences*' (VIII 3, 14[74]). By this he means that what has been traditionally called moral 'degeneration' by the Church – particularly the abuse of narcotics, alcohol, tobacco – is *not* the cause of physiological dissolution. Rather, he argues in *Twilight of the Idols*, the

opposite is the case: 'if a people is destroyed, if it physiologically degenerates, then this is *followed* by vice and extravagance (i.e. the need for ever stronger and more frequent stimuli, familiar to every exhausted type)' (*TI* VI, 2). This demand for more potent stimulants is, he makes clear, the consequence of an already weakened will, of a 'hereditary exhaustion', of nervous derangement brought about by the process of domestication and civilisation:

> We know today that we ought not to think of moral degeneration as separate from physiological degenerescence: the former is merely a symptom-complex of the latter . . . Bad: the term expresses here a certain *incapacity* which is linked with the type of degenerescence: e.g. weakness of will, unstable and even multiple 'personality', the inability to prevent a reaction to a given stimulus and to 'master' oneself, the enslavement to every form of suggestion by a foreign will. Vice is no cause; vice is an *effect* (VIII 3, 14[113]).

The Christian belief that man is congenitally corrupt, bad and sinful would only be justified, Nietzsche continues, if the 'degenerate type' were the normal type of human being. That, he caustically observes, is something of an exaggeration, a claim valid only where Christianity flourishes and prevails, where 'a morbid ground is proved, a sphere for degenerescence'. That is to say, Nietzsche not only – in line with the degenerationism of his day – describes what was generally agreed to be vicious behaviour as the consequence of individual pathology; Christian 'virtue' is equally symptomatic of degeneracy: 'everything that one could call *l'impressionisme morale* . . . is one more expression of the physiological oversensitivity proper to everything *décadent*' (*TI* IX, 37). Good and evil, virtue and vice are related forms of decadence – there is no essential difference between the physiology of Christian morality and the physiology of crime (VIII 3, 14[86]). They differ only outwardly: in the Christian, the weakness of will and loss of immunity to pathogenic external influences that is constitutive of degeneracy manifests itself as 'resignation and humility before one's enemy', rather than in, say, alcoholism or gambling. In so far as it represents a 'revolt against life', a suppression of, and struggle against, vital instincts, Nietzsche condemns Christian morality as a '*degenerate's idiosyncrasy*' (*TI* V, 6). For only those who are 'too weak-willed, too degenerate' to achieve the self-regulative equilibrium of mutually antagonistic drives, which Nietzsche had earlier described as the hallmark of any healthy, 'natural' morality, resort to radical means such as 'castration and eradication' to fight against their desires (*TI* V, 2).

Criminality had been pathologised ever since Morel first described the process of moral and biological degeneration, but it was the Italian psychiatrist Cesare Lombroso's fatalistic concept of the *uomo deliquento* or 'born

criminal' which set the terms for nineteenth-century debates about crime and punishment. Although Charles Féré, Nietzsche's source for much of his degenerationist vocabulary, rejected Lombroso's notion of congenital deviancy, this idea remains very much part of Nietzsche's thinking. As early as 1881, in *Daybreak*, and thus long before his enthusiastic reading and assimilation of Féré's work, Nietzsche remarked (possibly with reference to Henry Maudsley, the leading apostle of degeneration in England, the German translation of whose *Responsibility in Mental Disease* he owned and read around this time) that scientists have only recently begun to study the physiology of the criminal. Yet despite the relative youth of criminal psychiatry, he continues, it is already incontestable that there is no essential difference between delinquency and insanity, provided that 'one *believes* that the *usual* mode of moral thinking is the mode of thinking of *spiritual health*' (*D* 202). Nietzsche, of course, does not. As he later puts it in *Twilight of the Idols*, the so-called criminal is 'the type of strongest person under unfavourable conditions, a strong person made sick' whose natural instincts are outlawed by a moral society and 'immediately get caught up with the depressive emotions, with suspicion, fear, dishonour. But this is practically the *recipe* for physiological degeneration' (*TI* IX, 45). The process of 'civilisation', of domestication, causes a strong, free spirit to degenerate into criminality. But such an individual nevertheless remains 'a more healthy soul' – like the unrepentant specimens in the Siberian prison camps described by Dostoyevsky, who are, Nietzsche believes, 'worth a hundred times more than a "broken" Christian' (VIII 3, 14[155]). Nietzsche, then, is always at pains to separate the pathological or hereditary criminal of contemporary degenerationist literature from the healthy, or at least originally healthy, criminal; to differentiate between the amorality of robust natures such as Cesare Borgia or Napoleon and the depravity that is a consequence of 'physical degeneration . . . and the moral *vacancy* of moral insanity' (VII 1, 7[42]). Because modern, 'civilised' society is familiar only with the '*failed type of criminal*' (VIII 2, 9[120]) – with the cretinous and epileptic members of the '*criminal race*' for whom Nietzsche recommends immediate castration as a means of preventing their future propagation (VIII 2, 10[50]) – we quite naturally resist the idea that all great men have been in some sense law-breakers. It is an easy mistake to make: the Swedish playwright, August Strindberg, with whom Nietzsche began to correspond in 1888, utterly failed to grasp this distinction between degenerate and healthy forms of criminality. Replying to a now lost letter from Nietzsche, Strindberg is certain that the former has deceived himself in glorifying the 'criminal type': 'Look at the hundreds of photographs accompanying Lombroso's criminal man, and admit that the rogue is an inferior animal, a degenerate, a weakling

lacking the faculties necessary to elude the law' (*KGB* III 6, p. 376). Nietzsche corrects Strindberg by appealing to the work of Francis Galton: 'The *hereditary* criminal *décadent*, even idiot – to be sure! But the history of the criminal families, on which the Englishman Galton ("the hereditary genius") has collected the greatest amount of material, always leads back to a man who is *too strong* for a certain social *niveau*.'[1] He concludes by citing an example drawn from real life and scandalising Europe at the time. The murderer Prado, on trial in Paris for killing a prostitute, is, Nietzsche claims, an example of the 'classic type', a man whose superiority over those who judge him is manifest in his self-mastery and *esprit* (*KGB* III 5, p. 508). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that in his last letter to Jakob Burkhardt in early January 1889 Nietzsche should identify with this villain (*KGB* III 5, p. 578).

In short, Nietzsche reconstructs the bourgeois nightmare of the wretched and unclean masses whose alarming fecundity and innate criminality were believed to be undermining the fabric of European civilisation, and describes Christianity itself as a 'degenerescence-movement' comprising the refuse and detritus of society (VIII 3, 14[91]). At the same time, he subverts the implicit lapsarianism in degenerationist psychiatry, the idea of a 'falling away' from Edenic moral perfection. Christianity itself now represents a morbid deviation from the healthy, egoistic instincts of an original 'criminal type', a process that has culminated in the nihilistic crisis afflicting modernity. What is more, by insinuating that both the Christian and the pathological criminal suffer from the same form of degenerative insanity (they are both 'moral cretins' (VIII 3, 14[57])), Nietzsche underlines his often repeated claim that the concept of free will is a chimera. By linking criminality either to the pathogenic effects of the social environment or to the ineluctable fate of heredity, nineteenth-century biological determinism, as embodied by Maudsley and Féré, ruled out the possibility of autonomy and moral responsibility. (In the same spirit, Nietzsche argues that sanctions are no longer sufficient to encourage or deter moral and immoral behaviour in an age of pathological heredity: 'In the midst of our late culture, fatality and degenerescence are something that completely *negates* the meaning of reward and punishment . . . in old races the impulses are so *irresistible* that a mere idea is utterly impotent' (VIII 3, 14[209]).) Free will is precisely what the Christian lacks; he does not – whatever he may persuade himself to the contrary – act according to an independent, conscious choice between good and evil, for

[1] Nietzsche is thinking of Francis Galton's description of the infamous Jukes family, an American dynasty of criminal degenerates. This appears in *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development* (London: Macmillan, 1883), pp. 63–4, not Galton's earlier work, *Hereditary Genius*.

morality is merely the rationalisation of a congenital inability to withstand the effects of certain external stimuli upon a diseased nervous system. Nietzsche even speaks in this regard of '*moral nervosity*' (VIII 3, 14[181]). Finally, compassion – the basis of Christian ethics – is not only 'pathological' (VIII 1, 7[4]). It is, like all forms of degeneracy, self-perpetuating – in so far as it actively obstructs the process of natural selection (in which Nietzsche normally has little faith, although he is not above appealing to it for rhetorical purposes), thereby facilitating the survival of those weak and feeble specimens who would in normal circumstances have succumbed in the struggle for existence:

> If the degenerate and the diseased person ('the Christian') is to be worth the same as the healthy person ('the pagan') . . . then the natural process of evolution is frustrated and *anti-nature* has become law . . . This universal love of humanity is in practice the *preferment* of everything that is suffering, ill-constituted and degenerate . . . True love of humanity demands sacrifice in the best interests of the species (VIII 3, 15[110]).

The religious neurosis

Let us move away from the general characteristics of altruistic morality, best exemplified by Christianity, to more specific religious phenomena, to the belief systems through which such systems of norms purport to derive their legitimacy. For Nietzsche also holds religious sentiment itself to be a symptom of physiological decadence. The nineteenth century was, of course, the great age of positivism, and prominent doctors and psychiatrists were already – long before Nietzsche – diagnosing religious ecstasy and morbid pessimism as symptoms of degeneration, hysteria and melancholia. These widespread attempts in late nineteenth-century France to naturalise, pathologise and thus to debunk purportedly supernatural phenomena were part of the general pattern of professional self-assertion by doctors and psychiatrists eager to usurp the traditional curative role occupied by the clergy. At the forefront of this development were Jean-Martin Charcot and the Salpêtrière school of psychiatry, who systematically reinterpreted both past and contemporary religious phenomena according to their definition of hysteria. Cases of 'demonic possession', for example, supposedly corresponded to the second stage of a hysterical attack – the so-called 'grands mouvements' – which was characterised by flailing limbs, gnashing teeth, wild stares and so on, and which followed an initial epileptoid phase. Mystical ecstasy was thought to coincide with the 'attitudes passionnelles' typical of the third period, which brought with it bodily rigidity and visual and aural hallucinations. At the same time, however, the medical representation of the symptomatology of

hysteria was – like that of degeneration – ironically invested with religious, specifically Catholic, imagery: the sensory stigmata, those anaesthetic or hyperaesthetic patches on the hysteric's body which Charcot believed to be the most dependable diagnostic indicators of nervous disease, derived directly from the Christian *stigmata diaboli* used by the Inquisition to identify witches. Similarly, Charcot's technique of ovarian compression to control seizures owed much to the demonological procedure of pressing on the stomach of a religious convulsionary. And descriptions of the *attitudes passionelles* showed women poised in positions of religious supplication, ecstasy, and even crucifixion.[2] This aspect of Charcot's teaching was widely known, and Nietzsche himself was certainly aware of it. His copy of the Parisian physiologist Charles Richet's *L'homme et l'intelligence* (1884), a collection of essays which contains a reprinted newspaper article very much in this vein, 'Les démoniaques d'aujourd'hui', shows the usual markings which Nietzsche left behind when reading and sifting through books for material. In one passage, Richet, an intern at the Salpêtrière, relates the standard Charcotian account of hysteria which I have been describing:

> It is the moment when there arise hallucinations of all kinds, now happy, now sad, now amorous, now religious or ecstatic. Each time that an image arises in the mind the movements of the limbs, the physiognomic features, the general posture of the body all immediately conform to the nature of this hallucination. These poses, these *attitudes passionnelles*, have a vivacity and vigour of expression which one does not find elsewhere . . . They fold their arms and raise their eyes to the heavens in an attitude of religious devotion, as if they had seen the clouds open in order to show them the saints or the gods.[3]

Other authors in Nietzsche's library are equally representative of the anti-clerical mood among nineteenth-century scientists. Henry Maudsley attempted to establish a link between religiosity and degenerative disorders such as epilepsy, arguing that it was the task of a future inductive psychology to examine 'how many supposed revelations of the supernatural, and how many theological beliefs founded on such revelations, have been the results of deranged nervous function'.[4] And Francis Galton argues in his 1883 work, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development*,

[2] Ruth Harris, *Murders and Madness: Medicine, Law and Society in the Fin de Siècle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 205.

[3] Charles Richet, *L'homme et l'intelligence. Fragments de physiologie et psychologie* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1884), p. 285. In another essay in the same volume, Richet links outbreaks of female hysteria to the witch-trials of previous centuries ('Les démoniaques d'autrefois', pp. 297–394). This perhaps inspired Nietzsche to cite the mistaking of 'hysterics as witches' as an example of seeking a supernatural cause for feelings of physiological discomfort (*TI* VI, 6).

[4] Henry Maudsley, *Responsibility in Mental Disease* (London: Henry S. King, 1874), p. 243.

that 'disorders of the sexual organisation' – by which he means chiefly celibacy and the overrestraint of the reproductive impulse – are the most common morbid organic conditions which accompany 'the show of excessive piety and religious rapture in the insane'.[5]

A similar tendency towards physiological reductionism informs Nietzsche's own critique of religion in general, and Christianity in particular, from *Human, All Too Human* onwards. There he writes that all 'visions, terrors, states of exhaustion and rapture' experienced by the saint are 'familiar pathological conditions which, on the basis of rooted religious and psychological errors, he only *interprets* quite differently, that is to say not as illnesses' (*HA* 126). Yet though that work supposedly marks the high point of Nietzsche's so-called 'positivistic' period, his account of the origin of religious beliefs changes little over the next ten years, becoming only more rhetorically sophisticated with his increasing deployment of a bewildering array of specialist medical and psychiatric terms. His reading of Galton and Maudsley, for instance, is reflected in section 47 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, where he discusses for the first time – at least in this sense – what he would later call 'ascetic ideals'.[6] What, he asks, is the cause of the oscillation between manifestations of excessive sensuality and the penitential denial of the will and world which religious fanatics exhibit? The answer which he gives here, and works out in more detail in subsequent works, is what he calls the 'religious neurosis' – neurosis in the original, pre-psychoanalytic sense, of course; that is, a lesion of the nervous system and thus primarily a physiological, rather than a purely mental disturbance. According to nineteenth-century medicine, neurasthenia, epilepsy and hysteria are all related forms of neurosis. In his attempt to refute Christianity on medical grounds by exposing the underlying neuropathy of religion, Nietzsche diagnoses all three disorders.

For example, in a note from 1888, he describes states of 'religious ecstasy' or inspiration in a way similar to that in which he portrays those of an aesthetic nature. Both experiences are accompanied by the experience of intoxication, of which there are two kinds. Although outwardly similar, intoxication springs, in the one case, from a feeling of plenitude; in the other, from an epileptic fit. The superficial semblance of these forms of ecstasy means that the 'excess of mental or nervous discharge' displayed by the typical 'religious epileptic', and which manifests itself as fanaticism, demonic possession or divine inspiration, is often and easily confused with the healthy discharge of creative energy that characterises truly transformative Dionysian intoxication. These states aroused fear and respect in ancient peoples, Nietzsche claims, so that 'one believed

[5] Galton, *Inquiries*, pp. 67–8.

[6] Cf. Marie-Luise Haase, 'Friedrich Nietzsche liest Francis Galton', *Nietzsche-Studien* 18 (1989), 633–58, and my 'Beiträge zur Quellenforschung', 547–8.

terrible powers to be at work in the nerve-sick and epileptics'. The mere appearance of power, which masked a real physiological debility, was interpreted as the expression of divine authority and wisdom. It was under these false pretences that the epileptic or neurasthenic was elevated to the status of 'priest', exploiting an emergent and ultimately disastrous '*will* to "deification"' in his people – an attempt to mimic his privileged access to the spirit world, to find a way to this purportedly more exalted realm of experience. Yet this will is in reality nothing more than a 'will . . . to typical degeneration of mind, body and nerves' – a will to make oneself sick, insane and to bring about one's physiological ruin (VIII 3, 14[68]).[7]

Nietzsche's paradigm of the decadent holy man is, of course, Jesus Christ. But Jesus is not just neurotic, epileptic and visionary, like other examples of the *homo religiosus*, such as Francis of Assisi (VIII 2, 11[363]). On several occasions, both in his notes and in his published work, Nietzsche describes Jesus as an idiot – a degenerate idiot in the strict clinical sense of the word[8] – likening the 'strange and sick world' of the Gospels to a Russian novel: both have the 'refuse of society, neurosis and "childlike" idiocy' for their subject matter (*A* 31). This allusion in *The Antichrist* to Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* is explicitly aimed at contradicting Ernest Renan's portrayal of Christ in *La vie de Jésus* (1863) as a 'hero' and 'genius' (see *A* 29) by depicting him in diametrically opposite terms. For Nietzsche, Jesus' feeble-mindedness is manifested above all in his 'glad tidings' – that everyone is the child of God – a case of intellectual infantilism which displays the classic hallmarks of degenerate cretinism:

> One can sense his incapacity to comprehend a reality: he moves in circles around five, six concepts which he heard earlier and has gradually understood, that is to say, has misunderstood – these comprise his experience, his world, his truth, – everything else is alien to him . . . That the truly manly instincts – not only the sexual ones, but also those instincts for struggle, for pride, for heroism – have never stirred in him, that he is retarded and has remained childlike at the age of puberty: this is typical of certain epileptoid neuroses (VIII 3, 14[38]).

And on the basis of Christ's putative degeneracy, Nietzsche attempts to account for the Christian doctrine of redemption by suggesting that what he sees as its two major components, the 'instinctive hatred of reality' and the gospel of love, are symptoms of the by now familiar nervous hypersensitivity characteristic of the decadent.

[7] In slightly later notes, Nietzsche portrays the belief in God as a symptom of 'altération de la personnalité' (or what we would today call multiple personality disorder), a term he came across in Alexander Herzen's *Le cerveau et l'activité cérébrale* (1887) (VIII 3, 14[124], 14[125]).

[8] According to degenerationist psychiatry, the idiot was the most wretched of all the various categories of the insane. Cf. Féré: 'At the bottom of the ladder of the degenerates, one finds the idiot' (*Dégénérescence et criminalité*, p. 85).

Nietzsche's mischievous portrait of Jesus as degenerate madman might strike many readers today as typical of his boldness and irreverence, his willingness always to go one step further than his superficially pious contemporaries. Yet he was by no means the first critic of Christianity to question the mental health of its founder. As the theologian Albert Schweitzer long ago demonstrated in his doctoral dissertation, *Die psychiatrische Beurtheilung Jesu* (*The Psychiatric Evaluation of Jesus*), David Friedrich Strauss and the historical school of biblical criticism had already expressed the 'suspicion that the mind of Jesus might somehow have pathological traits . . . long before psychiatry occupied itself with the person of the Nazarene'.[9] In 1878 the French doctor Jules Soury described Christ as 'aliené et hallucine', as 'hysterical and exalted, as nervous and mentally ill'.[10] By the early twentieth century case-studies of Christ's psychopathology were entirely commonplace, indeed almost fashionable, as an increasing number of medical writers sifted Scripture with a combination of exegetical casuistry and monomaniacal zeal for the telltale signs that underpinned their retrospective diagnoses of dementia and paranoia. Emil Rasmussen's *Jesus. Eine vergleichende psychopathologische Studie* (1905), Charles Binet-Sanglé's *La folie de Jésus* (1908), and William Hirsch's *Religion and Civilisation: The Conclusions of a Psychiatrist* (1912), to name but a few, are entirely typical of this glut of 'pathographies' or clinical histories of the Messiah. But it is George de Loosten's *Jesus Christus vom Standpunkt des Psychiaters* (*Jesus Christ from the Standpoint of the Psychiatrist*) which perhaps bears the most resemblance to Nietzsche's account. De Loosten suggests that Christ was 'probably of mixed race [*Mischling*]', that he was accordingly 'tainted from birth by heredity' and a 'congenital degenerate'. An exaggerated self-consciousness combined with high intelligence and an only slightly developed sense of family and sex [*Familien- und Geschlechtssinn*], de Loosten continues, eventually evolved into a fixed delusional system, the peculiarities of which were influenced by the intensive religious tendencies of his time and by his one-sided preoccupation with the prophecies of the Old Testament.[11]

It would seem, then, that Nietzsche's pathologisation of religious experience has much in common with the strident anti-clericalism of the increasingly powerful, usurpatory medical establishment. Like Maudsley, Galton and the other positivists, he apparently subscribes to precisely that kind of 'medical materialism' which William James would later reject as a

[9] Albert Schweitzer, *Die psychiatrische Beurtheilung Jesu* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1913), p. 2.
[10] Soury, quoted in Johannes Ninck, *Jesus als Charakter. Eine Untersuchung* (Leipzig: Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1906), p. 230.
[11] George de Loosten, *Jesus Christus vom Standpunkt des Psychiaters* (Bamberg: Handelsdruckerei, 1905), p. 90.

means of explaining the varieties and significance of religious experience, and which

> finishes up Saint Paul by calling his vision on the road to Damascus a discharging lesion of the occipital cortex, he being an epileptic. It sniffs out Saint Theresa as an hysteric, Saint Francis of Assisi as an hereditary degenerate. George Fox's discontent with the shams of his age, and his pining for spiritual veracity, it treats as a symptom of a disordered colon. Carlyle's organ-tones of misery it accounts for by a gastro-duodenal catarrh.[12]

Yet for all the similarities between Nietzsche's appraisal of the phenomena of religious belief and that of the medical materialists – he even asserts that Thomas Carlyle's pessimism can be attributed to 'lunch revisited' (*TI* IX, 1) – there is at least one significant difference. Despite their attempts to explain away experiences of revelation and inspiration as psychological aberrations and their enmity towards what they perceived as archaic superstition, many, if not all, of these positivists embraced the idea of a secularised Christianity, a moral core divested of its supernatural trappings. Nietzsche, in contrast, had nothing but scorn for those 'fat-heads' amongst his contemporaries who remained naïvely convinced that the values and norms of Christian civilisation might still be retained despite the divine source of their authority having been abolished. If God – and the believer's communion with Him – is nothing but a phantasm, a delusion, then His commandments, too, are no less fictional. Nietzsche takes the nineteenth-century critique of religion to its logical and inescapable conclusion; nothing is more fundamental to his thought than the assertion that if 'you abandon the Christian faith, at the same you are pulling the *right* to Christian morality out from under your feet . . . Christian morality stands and falls with the belief in God' (*TI* IX, 5).

Now, Nietzsche not only reduces the religious experience of individual holy men to organic dysfunction, he also figures the system of rituals that constitute religious practice and which originate in these individuals' experiences – the doctrine of redemption in Christianity, for example – as an obsolete, pre-medical means of 'treating' nervous illness. That is to say, although Christian teaching emanates from degenerate, sickly states, it actually established itself by appealing to the 'physiologically inhibited' as a means of overcoming this exhaustion: 'the prime concern of all great religions is the struggle against a certain fatigue and inertia which has grown to epidemic proportions' (*GM* III, 17). Because religion invariably involves an attempt to account for, and treat, the suffering of the human organism, it professes to perform the same function – or at least address

[12] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p. 13.

the same problems – as modern medicine, but ends up confusing sin with illness, 'redemption' (*Heil*) with 'cure' (*Kur*). (Nietzsche's critique of the curative claims of religion is timely: around the time that the *Genealogy* was written, the miracle cures of Lourdes and elsewhere were enjoying a burgeoning reputation as a site of the anti-medical counter-culture of hysteria. The Church was once again claiming that the restorative powers of faith were more effective than medicine, and the shrines which grew up around these miracle sites were a magnet for the sick and almost literally became the 'madhouses' Nietzsche describes them as.[13])

The imagery of the religious 'treatment' (*Behandlung*), which runs through much of the *Genealogy* and recurs in *The Antichrist*, is inspired by Leopold Löwenfeld's *Die moderne Behandlung der Nervenschwäche* (*The Modern Treatment of Nervous Illness*, 1887), a textbook which discusses the relative merits of various treatments for nervous disease and which Nietzsche read around the time of writing the *Genealogy*. Indeed, throughout that work Nietzsche argues that religion has been superseded by those therapies described by Löwenfeld, and that those ailments to which it is a response can be relieved more effectively by modern methods stressing the physiological basis of mental illness – with the rest-cure developed by the American doctor Silas Weir Mitchell, for instance, which emphasises seclusion, massage, electricity, immobility and excessive feeding, and which Nietzsche prescribes as the most effective remedy against 'all the hysteria of the ascetic ideal' (*GM* I, 6). The ascetic ideal, which originates, he writes, in the '*protective and healing instincts of a degenerating life*' (*GM* III, 13), and which finds its apotheosis in the Christian doctrine of redemption, is one such misguided form of 'hygiene', aiming at spiritual purity by denying the flesh. Yet religious ritual – the practice of asceticism – does not offer a 'cure', only temporary anaesthesia; its 'narcotic' effects are indeed the opium of the masses, a *paradis artificiel*. Although Nietzsche discusses a number of methods which can be – and are – employed to alleviate the pain and temporarily lift the depression suffered by the typical decadent, the sudden, violent discharge of emotions involved in the purging of the 'feeling of guilt' is by far the most effective, as well as the most dangerous technique. For this ecclesiastical quackery achieves precisely the opposite of what it professes to do: '*making* sick is the real ulterior motive of the Church's whole system of salvation procedures' (*A* 51). Since sinfulness is merely an 'idée fixe', a figment of the priest's morbid imagination, an interpretation of actual physiological discomfort, this dis-ease must first be brought about – if it does not already exist: 'in order to arouse feelings of guilt, in order to

[13] Micale, *Approaching Hysteria*, pp. 262–71.

prepare remorse, one must bring about a sickly and nervous state in the body' (VIII 3, 14[179]). That is to say, the religious or '*purely psychological* treatment' of 'sin' and 'guilt' actually induces neurasthenia and hysteria in morbidly predisposed individuals (VIII 3, 14[155]); it inculcates the 'religious neurosis', and thus has had an even more debilitating influence on the health and strength of the European races than the degenerative effects of syphilis and alcohol (*GM* III, 21). In the act of penance, an excess of emotion is produced through the repetition of certain prayers, gestures and oaths. These contortions, this 'tearing open of old wounds, the wallowing in self-contempt and remorse', which are forms of 'hysteria and . . . epilepsy' (VIII 3, 14[155]), are eventually followed by exhaustion and somnolence, and ultimately by the state which Christians call 'redemption' (VIII 3, 14[179]).

Nietzsche's account of religious experience is wholly consistent with contemporary medical concepts of hysteria. The patient, it was thought, was able in some sense to manipulate his or her own pathology and bring about paroxysms and loss of consciousness simply by voluntarily evoking a particular emotion or sentiment which he or she knows from past experience to trigger an attack.[14] What is more, Nietzsche's depiction of the delirium and convulsions involved in penitential ritual echoes Richet's Charcotian description of the third stage of the hystero-epileptic seizure, the *attitude passionnelle* (see above). Indeed, all this is once again reminiscent of the anti-clerical diatribes of the Salpêtrière school: like Nietzsche, and in the same year, 1887, the physician Paul Regnard argued in *Les maladies épidémiques de l'esprit* that religion is diametrically opposed to modern therapeutic techniques; he, too, ascribes the cures offered by the Church to the nature of the disease entity – to hysteria, the mass hysteria of religion. Christianity is the root cause of hysteria, not its cure.[15]

Like the concept of 'degeneration' itself, hysteria carried a number of tacit connotations which Nietzsche intends to be read into what we might call, to paraphrase Foucault, his 'hysterisation' of Christianity. Although only implicit in the Charcotian model, the sexual aetiology of nervousness – which, of course, became central to the Freudian account developed in the 1890s – was a traditional aspect of the disease. August Krauss, whose *Die Psychologie des Verbrechens* Nietzsche owned, declared: 'the source of hysterism lies in the sexual system';[16] erotomania, as well as religious insanity, was one possible symptom, a claim which supports

[14] Krauss, *Psychologie des Verbrechens*, p. 36.
[15] Sander Gilman, 'The Image of the Hysteric', in Sander Gilman, Helen King, Roy Porter, G. S. Rousseau and Elaine Showalter, *Hysteria Beyond Freud* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), p. 377.
[16] Krauss, *Psychologie des Verbrechens*, p. 35.

Galton's assumption, for instance, that there exists some hidden link between religiosity and sexuality. As one aspect of the wider discourse of degeneration, hysteria played a key role in the new psychiatry's attempt to medicalise, and thus regulate and normalise, certain forms of sexuality – seen most clearly in the work of the Austrian psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing, author of *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886). Those sexualities which were procreative, socially productive, hygienic – that is, those which conformed to accepted Christian and bourgeois conceptions of sexuality – were sanctioned, whilst at the same time 'abnormal' sexualities or 'perversities' were stigmatised. Nietzsche reverses these valuations: the Christian concept of sexuality – its abstemiousness, its prudery – is itself the product of sexual dysfunction, 'a misdirected eroticism and hysteria of "love"' (VIII 1, 8[3]): a claim which finds a startling image when he labels the self-professed 'beautiful souls' a 'species of moral onanists' (*GM* III, 14). The hystero-epileptic paroxysms of the penitent, too, are a grimly ironic parody of the orgasm, the very possibility of which is being suppressed. And when Nietzsche suggests in *Twilight of the Idols* that the Christian finds radical measures such as 'castration and eradication' indispensable in his struggle to repress his own sensual nature, he is alluding to the fact that these techniques – castration and the extirpation of the ovaries – were a relatively common method in the nineteenth century for 'curing' the sexual basis of hysteria.[17] Secondly, as we have seen, hysteria was predominantly, though not exclusively, regarded as the 'female malady' – a fact that is unsurprising if we bear in mind the etymology of the term, which derives from the Galenic belief that hysterical symptoms were caused by a mobile womb (*hustera*) migrating throughout the woman's body. Indeed, in its mildest forms especially, it was held to express somehow the essence of the 'feminine'; the rapid passage from one emotional or physical symptom to another suggested the mercurial and capricious nature traditionally associated with women. As Richet said, 'hysterics are more womanly than other women'.[18] Thus, the image of the Christian as hysteric underpins Nietzsche's more general strategy of feminising Christianity, which he elsewhere describes as emasculating (VII 3, 34[141]), as a 'women's religion' (VIII 3, 14[180]) – as opposed in contrast to the swaggering virility he sometimes associated with Islam. What is more, like the hysterical female, the Christian is firmly linked in his mind with dissimulation – with the mendacity of the 'actor' which he also associated with Wagner and his art. Hysterics, wrote Charles Richet in a passage marked in Nietzsche's own copy of his book, 'tell improbable

[17] Leopold Löwenfeld, *Die moderne Behandlung der Nervenschwäche* (*Neurasthenie*), *der Hysterie und verwandter Leiden* (Wiesbaden: Bergmann, 1887), pp. 95–6.
[18] Richet, *L'homme et l'intelligence*, p. 269.

tales, lie brazenly'; these shameless 'female *Diogenes*' are devoid of 'all moral sense'. Similarly, Francis Galton pointed to 'a morbid condition of apparent inspiration' which afflicts 'imaginative women', especially those who suffer from hysteria, a condition that is 'accompanied in a very curious way, familiar to medical men, by almost incredible acts of deceit . . . Ecstatics, seers of visions, and devout fasting girls who eat on the sly, often belong to this category.'[19] It is this hysterical duplicity which Nietzsche is playing on when he remarks in *The Antichrist*:

> The complete lack of psychological cleanliness in the priest – it betrays itself in his gaze – is a *consequence* of *décadence* – one can observe in hysterical women and rachitic children how regularly instinctive falsity, lying for the sake of lying, inability to look and act straight, are expressions of *décadence* (*A* 52).

Race, religion and eugenics

This linking of Christians with epilepsy, neurasthenia and hysteria is a typically Nietzschean inversion. For these illnesses were part of the late nineteenth-century racial contruction of the 'Jew', and particularly the *Ostjude*, who, as Sander L. Gilman has argued, was represented in the popular, anti-Semitic discourse of the time as 'the hysteric . . . [and] the feminized Other'.[20] German *fin-de-siècle* medicine and anthropology perpetuated the widely held belief that the Jews were a group apart; it sought to medicalise and thus sanction Jewish otherness, to return the Jews to 'a theoretical ghetto of biological difference'.[21] Not only were they supposed to be protected from certain contagious or hereditary diseases like alcoholism – Nietzsche himself writes that, of all European peoples, Jews 'are least liable to resort to drink or suicide in order to escape from some profound dilemma' (*D* 205) – they were also simultaneously predisposed to particular forms of degeneracy. One alleged source of Jewish racial decadence was the institutionalised sexual depravity contained within the strictly enforced custom of consanguinous marriages. Another was their 'cosmopolitanism'. The concentration of the Jewish population in urban areas and the large numbers employed as what George Beard called 'brain-workers' meant that, as a racial group, they were proportionately more exposed to the pathogenic influences of city life and

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 289; Galton, *Inquiries*, p. 207. In an earlier note, and with St Augustine and John Bunyan in mind, Nietzsche had described Christianity as 'a hysterical kind of honesty' (VII 2, 25[211]).

[20] Sander L. Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 76.

[21] John M. Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 28.

consequently more prone to hysteria and neurasthenia. As the French anti-Semite Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu put it:

> It is well known that the increase of cerebral diseases and the exacerbation of nervous disorders is one of the distinctive marks of our age and our civilisation. It is due to the feverish intensity of modern life, which, by multiplying our sensations and efforts, overstrains the nerves and rends the delicate network of the cerebral fibres. The Jew is the most nervous and, in so far, the most modern of men. He is, by the very nature of his diseases, the forerunner, as it were, of his contemporaries, preceding them on that perilous path upon which society is urged by the excesses of its intellectual and emotional life, and by the noisy spur of competition.[22]

I am not interested here in the thorny issue of Nietzsche's complex and often ambivalent attitude towards the Jews *per se*.[23] What is more important in the present context is his self-stylisation as an 'anti-anti-Semite' or as an 'anti-Christian' – as the title of *Der Antichrist* might also be translated. This 'anti-Christianism' involves the subversion of contemporary stereotypes of Jewish racial and sexual degeneration – according to Nietzsche, for example, the Jews are 'a nation of the toughest vital energy' and as such are the 'counterparts of *décadents*' (*A* 24). Certainly, he often invests the Jews with more recognisably 'masculine' qualities than was generally the case amongst his contemporaries – although he is by no means always consistent, as, for instance, when he speaks of the 'sensuality, which appears so ridiculous in little, pale Jews or Parisians, and almost *comme une neurose*' (VII 3, 34[189]). At the same time, he mobilises the rhetoric and tropes of the increasingly vocal racial anti-Semitism of the late nineteenth century and transfers typically Jewish negative characteristics onto Christians. Thus, it is the Christians – not the Jews – who are now hysterical, feminine, duplicitous, sexually corrupt and diseased – their essential impurity manifested by that indelible stamp of Jewishness: their smell, the *foetor judaicus*. As he puts it in *The Antichrist*: 'One would no more choose to associate with "first Christians" than one would with Polish Jews . . . Neither of them smell very pleasant' (*A* 46). Even the Christian God has 'remained a Jew', master of 'a ghetto-empire' and 'so pale, so weak, so *décadent*' (*A* 17).

[22] Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, *Israel Among the Nations. A Study of the Jew and Antisemitism*, trans. by Frances Hellman (London: Heinemann, 1895), p. 169. Even Jewish writers perpetuated this myth. See Arthur Ruppin, *Soziologie der Juden*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1930–1), vol. I, pp. 253 and 85ff.

[23] There have been numerous recent attempts to come to terms with Nietzsche's complex and ambivalent attitude to the Jews. Cf. Arnold M. Eisen, 'Nietzsche and the Jews Reconsidered', *Jewish Social Studies* 48 (1986), 1–14; Michael F. Duffy and Willard Mittelman, 'Nietzsche's Attitude Toward the Jews', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49 (1988), 301–18; Jacob Golomb, 'Nietzsche's Judaism of Power', *Revue des Etudes Juives* 147 (1988), 353–85; Jacob Golomb (ed.), *Nietzsche and Jewish Culture* (London: Routledge, 1997).

This conflation of racial markers is consistent with the general strategy of deliberately misapplying degenerationist categories and concepts which underpins Nietzsche's critique of modern values. It serves to emphasise his contention that Christianity is 'rooted in Judaism and only understandable as having grown from this soil' (*TI* VII, 4), and thereby points up the inconsistencies and self-deceptions of anti-Semitism – in effect, to 're-judaise' Christianity with all the negative associations that implied for the contemporary reader and refute those anti-Semites who roll 'their eyes in a Christian – Aryan – Philistine way' (*GM* III, 26). Nietzsche's implicit target here is undoubtedly his old mentor Richard Wagner, the leading apostle of Aryan Christianity, whose attempt to fuse vulgar anti-Semitism with the 'noble' – and therefore 'Aryan' – Christian 'morality of pity' certainly vindicates Nietzsche's claim that Christianity is a barely disguised expression of *ressentiment*. This insidious form of anti-Semitism, first articulated by Fichte in 1804 and developed further by Schopenhauer and Paul Lagarde before being seized upon by Wagner, sought to purge the Christian religion of 'foreign' Jewish elements, holding that the essence of Christianity, so close in spirit to Eastern religions, must be of Aryan provenance. Moreover, Wagner suggested – as his son-in-law, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, would also later do, though without Wagner's equivocation – that 'it is more than doubtful if Jesus himself was of Jewish extraction'; the Saviour was, rather, an Aryan whose teachings were corrupted after his death by the rabbinical Paul.[24] These basic themes are reprised in a series of essays written by Wagner in the late 1870s, but are now lent greater coherence and 'scientific' rigour by the emergent discourse of racial biology. The biologistic character of Wagner's so-called 'regenerative' racial anti-Semitism and Aryan Christianity, the artistic embodiment of which was *Parsifal*, was inspired by two main sources: Darwinism, which Wagner understood as the scientific corroboration of Schopenhauer's will to life, and Gobineau, with whom the composer had become acquainted personally and whose cultural–racial ideas took on an implicitly biological tinge after the publication of *The Origin of Species*.[25]

Aryan Christianity and anti-Semitism, especially Wagner's version of them, are themselves conceived and articulated with the quasi-theological vocabulary of degenerationism. The 'degeneration of the human race' – which Wagner also refers to in more conventional terms as 'man's historic

[24] Richard Wagner, 'Religion and Art', in *Prose Works*, trans. by William Ashton Ellis, 8 vols. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1892–9), vol. VI, p. 233.

[25] For a more detailed discussion of Wagner's reception of Gobineau and his ideas on Aryan Christianity, see Paul Lawrence Rose, *Wagner: Race and Revolution* (London: Faber, 1992), pp. 135–69.

fall' – was initially triggered, he believes, by the 'departure from its natural food'.[26] An antediluvial, irenic and above all vegetarian people were driven by the famine which followed catastrophic climatic and geological upheavals to renounce their natural diet and consume flesh, a move which led to 'a change in the fundamental substance of our body, and to . . . the depravation of temperaments and of moral qualities proceeding from them'.[27] Even more noxious was the second source of corruption which Wagner cites: the interbreeding of the Aryan with the Jew, a centuries-long 'tainting [*degenerierende Vermischung*] of the hero-blood of noblest races with that of former cannibals now trained to be the business-agents of Society'.[28] As the quintessence of Jewishness, this carnivorous, bloodthirsty 'predator' – and here Wagner is resurrecting the ancient anti-Semitic legend of the blood libel – is the ultimate source of the 'vitiation of our blood', the pollution of the once proud German–Aryan race.

Although degeneration is a natural phenomenon – and is explicable in purely biological terms – its progress can be reversed by the regenerative power issuing from the 'deep soil of a true Religion'.[29] According to Wagner, spiritual renewal, which can be attained through vegetarianism, through the resuscitation of the redemptive Aryan ethic of renunciation and compassion, and the 'real rebirth of racial feeling'[30] – in short, through the implementation of a system of hygiene – inevitably brings with it the regeneration of the race. This purgation is symbolised in the self-sacrifice and blood of the Aryan Christ, the 'divine sublimate of the species itself', which simultaneously reverses the degeneration of the White Race and magically redeems polluted and inferior stock, raising 'the very lowest races to the purity of gods'.[31] For the Jews to accept Christ as their Saviour and to take Holy Communion would thus mean not only the extinction of Judaism as a religion, but also the destruction of Jewish 'racial congruence' – that biological integrity which anti-Semites like Wagner both admired and feared: 'let Jew or Jewess intermarry with the most distinct of races, a Jew will always come to birth'.[32]

Wagner's bizarre contention that Christianity is both the highest expression of human compassion and profoundly, necessarily anti-Semitic; that Christ's supposedly Aryan gospel of love is motivated by a 'racial

[26] Wagner, 'Religion and Art', p. 242. Nietzsche owned these late 'regenerative' texts in the following volume: Richard Wagner, *"Parsifal": Ein Bühnenweihfestspiel und andere Schriften und Dichtungen* (Leipzig, n.d.).
[27] Richard Wagner, 'Hero-Dom and Christendom', in *Prose Works*, vol. VI, p. 275.
[28] Wagner, 'Hero-Dom and Christendom', p. 284.
[29] Wagner, 'Religion and Art', p. 243.
[30] Richard Wagner, '"Know Thyself"', in *Prose Works*, vol. VI, p. 271.
[31] Wagner, 'Hero-Dom and Christendom', pp. 282–3.
[32] Wagner, '"Know Thyself"', p. 271.

feeling' which promises redemption for the bastardised White Race and deliverance from the 'Semite-Latin Church', is predictably ridiculed by Nietzsche. Indeed, *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *The Antichrist* can be read as ironic meditations on nineteenth-century debates about the relationship between race and religion. And in *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche flatly denies Christianity's noble racial heritage when he sneers that it represents, rather, the '*anti-Aryan* religion *par excellence*', the 'revaluation of all Aryan values' (*TI* VII, 4). Nietzsche's first tactic in denying the racial basis of Christianity is to subvert the contemporary discourse of race, and of Aryanism in particular. As he understands it, the Aryan people is equivalent to the noble, strong 'master race' described in the *Genealogy*. Yet this 'race' is curiously heterogeneous, far removed from the Aryan fantasies proliferating in imperial Germany. While he carefully distinguishes the pre-Aryan, dark-haired inhabitants of Europe from the blond Aryan invaders, his mythical 'blond beast' serves as an emblem for the 'predatory type' in *all* cultures. The epithet 'Aryan' signifies nothing more than 'the noble'. Indeed, according to Nietzsche's etymology (which is no less fanciful than the many others so beloved of contemporary ethnologists), *arya* means simply '"the wealthy", "the owners"' (*GM* I, 5), and is consequently extended by him to cover all healthy, barbarian peoples throughout history: the Roman, Arabic and Japanese nobility, the Homeric heroes and the Vikings – and not just the ancient Germanic tribes. And note that for Nietzsche, contra Wagner, it is the *Aryan* who is the rapacious predator, not the Jew. Though he believes, like Wagner and Gobineau, in the natural inequality of human races, he does not employ the term 'race' in the usual sense, the sense in which most nineteenth-century anthropologists and biologists understood it. Placing himself beyond that 'mendacious racial self-admiration' shamelessly paraded in Germany (*GS* 377), he is less concerned with distinctive biological characteristics like skin colour as a means of racial classification than with the simple criterion of strength. Even his openly racist interpreters often complained that he had no clearly defined concept of 'race'. Heinrich Härtle's appraisal in *Nietzsche und der Nationalsozialismus* is perfectly correct: 'But Nietzsche does not want a *völkisch*-organic politics of race. The concept "master race" is actually meant more in terms of class.'[33] Härtle's claim is borne out by Nietzsche's remark that the 'Law of Manu', the ancient Indian codex from which he approvingly quotes in *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Antichrist*, sought to breed 'no fewer than four races at once: a priestly one, a warrior one, a commercial and agricultural one, and finally a servant race, the Sudras' (*TI* VII, 3).

[33] Heinrich Härtle, *Nietzsche und der Nationalsozialismus* (Munich: F. Eher, 1937), p. 64.

Whether Nietzsche seriously believed in the characteristics he assigns to his putative 'Aryan' and lesser races is of less interest to us here than the rhetorical use to which he puts these conventional tropes of 'dolichocephalous' (or long-skulled) master and 'brachycephalous' (short-skulled) slave races. Certainly, he would have been aware of the vigorous contemporary debates surrounding the precise racial attributes of the Aryan people, and the thoroughly unscientific way in which these often conformed to the particular anthropologist's prejudices and his national 'type'.[34] Once again, Nietzsche exploits the opportunity to associate the modern European, and particularly the German Christian whose Aryan ancestry he explicitly denies, with contemporary biological–anthropological conceptions of the *Untermensch* (*BGE* 244). Not only, he writes, is the lower racial type predominant in the resentful, impotent masses of Christian Europe, descendants of the pre-Aryan insurrectionists of the 'slave revolt in morals'; their inferiority is inscribed in their skin colour and skull size. Even modern political and social forms like anarchism, socialism and democracy – precisely those political ideals to which the revolutionary Wagner was still committed – are also a symptom of atavism, a sign that 'the race of conquerors and *masters*, the Aryan race, now finds itself physiologically in an inferior position' (*GM* I, 5). Christianity was never the religion of a noble Aryan people. It is, rather, a '*nay-saying* Semitic religion'. Expressed in 'Indian–Aryan terms' – those very terms of which Wagner was so fond – it is a 'C*handala religion*', the 'monstrous creation of the *oppressed* classes' (VIII 3, 14[195]). As the product of interbreeding among the different 'races' of the rigidly stratified Aryan community, the Chandalas represent the 'degenerates of all castes', the perpetual detritus of society (VIII 3, 14[224]).[35] Christianity is not, therefore, the legacy of one race or nation (the Aryan Germans): it is 'not "national", not racially conditioned' (*A* 51). While Nietzsche concurs with Wagner that the once great Aryan nation owes its biological and moral

[34] Theodor Poesche, in *Die Arier: Ein Beitrag zur historischen Anthropologie* (Jena: Costenoble, 1878), a book which Nietzsche owned, argued that 'a noble race of fair-haired, blue-eyed people vanquished and subjugated an earlier race of short stature and dark hair. In opposition to this is the new French theory, without scientific foundation . . . which asserts that the primitive Aryans were a short and dark people, who Aryanized the tall fair race' (quoted in Leon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth* (London: Heinemann, 1974), p. 267).

[35] By portraying Christianity in this way he is also contradicting the source for his information on 'Aryan' religion, Louis Jacolliot's *Les législateurs religieux: Manou, Moïse, Mahomet* (Paris, 1876). Jacolliot himself held that the Jews were a stupid, degraded race, descended from the Chandala caste of India. Nietzsche characteristically extends this dubious anthropological insight to cover the Christians (see VIII 3, 14[190]). Nietzsche's reading of Jacolliot's book has been discussed by Annemarie Etter in 'Nietzsche und das Gesetzbuch des Manu', *Nietzsche-Studien* 16 (1987), 340–52.

decline to miscegenation, he maintains that this process of bastardisation ('synthesis of races' (*GM* II, 20)) is the very precondition for the rise and spread of Judaeo-Christian values. The teachings of Christianity do not reflect a pristine state of moral health; they are themselves, rather, a symptom of this 'blood-poisoning'. In other words, it is not just a question of what Wagner called the 'jewification' (*Verjüdung*) of Aryan blood and religion; there is no essential difference, Nietzsche playfully suggests, between the terms 'jewified' (*verjüdelt)*, 'christianised' (*verchristlicht*) or vulgarised (*verpöbelt*) (*GM* I, 9).

We saw earlier that Nietzsche rejects the ethics of altruism by appealing to the logic of social Darwinism, by arguing that Christianity as a whole works towards the '*degeneration of the European race*' (*BGE* 62). This claim, together with his assertion that the teachings of the Church betray a profound ignorance of physiology, is now given a further twist in his response to Wagner's aryanisation of Christianity. Given its origins, Judaeo-Christianity represents, whatever Wagner might hold to the contrary, the 'total revolt of everything downtrodden, miserable, ill-begotten, botched, against "pedigree" [*Rasse*]' (*TI* VII, 4) – in other words a revolt against purity, breeding and excellence. It is, in fact, the exact antithesis of Aryanism. Since Aryan religion is the faith of the 'master race', it cannot be, as Wagner would have us believe, the religion of compassion. Compassion, as we have seen, is the birthright of the pathologically weak: 'the deepest instinct of the health of a race speaks against it' (VIII 3, 14[224]). A truly Aryan and affirmative religion, like that proclaimed in the 'Law of Manu' is not 'humane'. Aryan sages, he maintains, recognised long ago what modern degenerationist biology and medicine have only recently rediscovered: that vice, disease, insanity and the 'hyper-nervosity' of certain mental faculties are symptoms of 'physiological *décadence*' (VIII 3, 14[224]). All affirmative religions have, in contrast to the Christian calumny against the sex drive, the highest respect for the family and for procreation because they recognise that 'one must pay the debts [of one's] forefathers'. That is, they have a greater appreciation of the dangers of heredity and sexual pathology; they possess an innate 'instinct against *degenerescence*' (VIII 3, 14[220]). Like Wagner before him, Nietzsche thus situates religion and morality within the emerging discourse of eugenics. Buddhism, for example, although strictly speaking decadent and pessimistic, is still an Aryan religion. Accordingly, its moral code functions as a '*system of hygiene*' (*EH* I, 6), prescribing moderation in diet, in the consumption of alcohol and in strong emotion, but demanding neither prayer nor asceticism (*A* 20). The Manu codex, too, is a form of 'sanitary policing', an attempt to regulate, but not to extirpate the instincts – by which Nietzsche means primarily the sex drive (*TI* VII, 4). As such, it has

much in common with the sentiments expressed in several notes scattered throughout the late notes which urge a kind of biologistic, authoritarian attitude to sex and marriage. Indeed, this is precisely what its affirmativeness consists in: a willingness to separate the degenerate and decaying elements from the rest of society; to distinguish castes based on criteria of physiological strength. As a pre-scientific form of racial hygiene, Aryan religion has no room for compassion: 'To be hard here is synonymous with being "healthy"' (VIII 3, 14[224]). Diseased organs and limbs must be amputated in order to preserve the social organism as a whole.[36]

But we should remember that no matter how positive, how 'healthy' the Aryan belief system, it is still a religion. It is still rooted in a moral interpretation of the world. Even worse, the Aryan race was according to Nietzsche the *original author* of the moral-religious conception of the universe; it was they who first coined the pernicious concepts of good and evil. One of the great ironies of history is that the 'best-equipped and most prudent kind of man' was responsible for the 'the most fundamental lie which has ever been told': the 'holy lie'. In notes from the year 1888, Nietzsche goes so far as to make the astonishing assertion that Aryanism is the *fons et origo* of 'Semitic' (i.e. Judaeo-Christian) religion and values. Like Gobineau and Wagner before him, then, he holds the Aryan race to have been the only truly creative force in human cultural evolution; only its legacy is for Nietzsche rather more dubious: 'the *Aryan influence* has corrupted the whole world' (VIII 3, 15[45]).

What is interesting about Nietzsche's figuring of religion as eugenics is that it presents a striking parallel to the manner in which Francis Galton himself viewed the science he founded. Unlike the German racial hygienists who began to emerge in the 1890s, Galton understood eugenics not so much as a specific medical discipline, but in more general terms, as an all-embracing world-view. A religious man, though not in any conventional sense, he believed that the biologistic values of eugenics could function as a surrogate for Christianity, 'that the furtherance of human evolution in desirable directions should be a main concern of religion'.[37] Galton says as much in his *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development*: 'Man has already furthered evolution very considerably, half unconsciously, and for his own personal advantages, but he has not

[36] The Aryan fantasist Wilibald Hentschel also viewed Brahmanism as a proto-eugenic system of laws. See the chapter entitled 'Die Indo-Eranier und die Rassenhygiene' in his *Varuna. Eine Welt- und Geschichts-Betrachtung vom Standpunkt des Ariers* (Leipzig: Fritsch, 1901), pp. 144–68. Conversely, Max Grunwald argued in 1911 that the rituals of Judaism anticipated many of the discoveries of modern medicine. See his *Die Hygiene der Juden* (Dresden: Verlag der historischen Abteilung der internationalen Hygiene-Ausstellung, 1911).

[37] C. P. Blacker, *Eugenics: Galton and After* (London: Duckworth, 1952), p. 82.

yet risen to the conviction that it is his *religious duty* to do so deliberately and systematically.'[38]

Now, whether Nietzsche's fragmentary English enabled him to appreciate Galton's paean to the 'religious significance of the doctrine of evolution' and eugenics is a moot point.[39] But it appears that his reading of the *Inquiries* at the very least confirmed him in his suspicion that religion and morality, at least in their traditional forms, could not contribute towards the realisation of his *Zukunftsmensch*. Thus, the Viennese doctor Josef Paneth, from whom he acquired his copy of Galton's work, reports in a letter dated December 1883: 'He has actually given up the idea of forming and modelling men through the influence of morality and only hopes for something from the physical, from food and things of that nature . . . Thus we came to speak of *Galton*' (VII 4/2, p. 11). Yet only eighteen months later, this apparent scepticism has vanished and he is again able to envisage moral codes and religion – in the guise of laws and customs – as the chief means by which 'one can fashion from man what one wishes':

> I observe religions and systems of education in order to discover to what extent they accumulate and transmit energy, and nothing seems to me to be more essential than the study of the *laws of breeding*, in order then not to lose again the greater amount of energy through inappropriate unions and life-styles (VII 3, 34[176]).

If Nietzsche did seriously entertain hopes of shaping man solely by biological means, how do we explain this apparent turnaround in his thinking? The answer lies in his increasingly biologistic understanding of morality from 1881 onwards. Morality, he believes, is merely an abstract and misleading interpretation of organic processes, a semiotics of unconscious bodily impulses. As we saw with his characterisation of Aryan religion, Nietzsche insists that there is no essential difference between moral and physiological hygiene, and his study of Galton may well have reinforced this conclusion. Certainly, the passage quoted above, with its emphasis on the relationship between heredity and religion, has a distinctly Galtonian ring to it. Yet while Nietzsche might, like Galton and others, criticise Christianity from a pseudo-eugenic perspective, invoking the laws of selection, he by no means wholeheartedly subscribes to Galton's biologistic religion. There may well be echoes of Galton's

[38] Galton, *Inquiries*, p. 304, my emphasis.

[39] Certainly an ardent eugenicist like Maximilian Mügge failed to recognise the religiosity at the heart of the 'science'. In an extraordinary article published in the *Eugenics Review*, Mügge argued that Nietzsche's achievement in proclaiming the noble ideal of the Superman was to have established a 'Eugenic Religion', an ally and necessary correlate of the 'Eugenic Science' founded by Galton, and which would supply the necessary popular feeling of responsibility towards the race so that eugenic reform could be implemented. See Mügge, 'Eugenics and the Superman: A Racial Science and a Racial Religion', *Eugenics Review* 1 (1909–10), 184–93.

demands for the state regulation of marriage and reproduction in the biological authoritarianism of many of Nietzsche's own late notes; he may well claim, in the opening paragraphs of *The Antichrist*, that that work is primarily concerned with the problem of 'what type of human being one ought to *breed*, ought to *will*, as more valuable, more worthy of life, more certain of the future' to supplant the degenerate Christian herd animal. But this is immediately preceded by the express declaration that he is not interested in the question of 'what ought to succeed mankind in the sequence of species' (*A* 3). In evolutionary terms, the human being is a dead-end. Nietzsche is even more explicit in his preparatory notes for this passage: to ponder what may one day supersede humanity is merely the 'ideology of Darwinists' (VIII 3, 15[120]). Unlike Galton, who believes biology has delivered into his hands the 'power of shaping the course of future humanity',[40] Nietzsche is not interested in the fate of the entire human race. That is an ideal he associates with Christianity, democracy and socialism. The utopianism, egalitarianism, inclusiveness and progressivism of Galton's new religion means that it, too, like all other subsequent eugenical fantasies, is motivated by the same desire to 'improve' man which Nietzsche decries in traditional moralities. No matter how often his name might subsequently be invoked by eugenicists eager to appeal to his authority, Nietzsche's own goal is not the breeding of a new or higher biological species: 'What concerns me is the problem of the order of rank within the species man, in whose progress I by and large do not believe, the problem of the order of rank between human types which have always existed and always will exist' (VIII 3, 15[120]).

Rather, he demands the return of the strongest natures to their original position of dominance, insisting that the original inequality between 'races' be re-established, that a future caste-based society should reflect and sanction the hierarchies of strength inherent in nature. This is Nietzsche's famous 'pathos of distance'. Only such a rigidly pyramidal, Platonic–Aryan society can enable and sustain the breeding of a ruling caste of *Übermenschen* from amongst 'a particular, strong kind of men of the highest intellectuality and strength of will' (VII 3, 37[8]), who have thus far remained merely individual 'strokes of luck' throughout the history of human civilisation. The term 'breeding' (*Züchtung*) which Nietzsche repeatedly employs to describe this process is notoriously ambiguous. It can imply 'breeding' in both the biological and moral sense, and Nietzsche characteristically plays on both – for, according to his biologism, moral and physiological 'breeding' (*Zucht*) amount essentially to the same thing. Nowhere, as his eugenicist interpreters often complained,

[40] Galton, *Inquiries*, p. 334.

does he even hint at the biological measures necessary to realise his goal. Instead, it is the imposition of a new morality, of which the new social order is itself an expression, that achieves this end, a morality 'with the aim of breeding a ruling caste – the future *masters of the earth*' (VII 3, 37[8]). Yet even those eugenicists who recognised the moral aspect of Nietzsche's project conspicuously failed to appreciate either his biologistic understanding of morality or his lack of interest in 'evolution' in the specifically Darwinian sense. Thus, Canon Edmund McLure, in his 1914 pamphlet *Germany's War-Inspirers: Nietzsche and Treitschke*, objected that 'Changes of views on morals, or on anything, do not touch the factors of *physical* evolution . . . The Superman cannot be generated by any moral hygiene.'[41] But the transvaluation of values, as the overcoming of the Christian vision of the body as a repository of unclean impulses and lascivious desires, releases 'a mass of instincts that have been held in check and slandered' (VII 3, 37[8]), and in this sense it also involves a '*physiological* purification and strengthening' (VIII 1, 5[61]). For Nietzsche, as for Wagner, then, the reversal of nineteenth-century degeneration involves both a biological and a spiritual *re*-generation. And, again like Wagner, Nietzsche's pseudo-eugenical religion of the future, his 'grand politics' (VIII 3, 25[1]), has as its goal the redemption of Aryanism. But unlike the Law of Manu, the gospel of Zarathustra (Nietzsche's own Aryan Christ) is not predicated on the 'holy lie', on concepts of absolute 'good' and 'evil', 'guilt' and 'punishment'. It is an attempt to purge humankind of original sin, not by 'improving' or 'bettering' it as a whole in the way that Galton's eugenics purports to do, but by stripping humanity's animal inheritance of its 'sinful' character. It is a programme to breed, to cultivate successfully a ruling caste, an elite, healthy 'race' free of the hysteria, epilepsy and degenerate 'Jewishness' of a Christian majority, who are to be nothing more than the means to the self-expression of the *Übermensch*.

In this chapter we have seen how Nietzsche's ironic manipulation of the concept of degeneration underpins his critique of Christianity. Firstly, he likens the degenerate physiology of the Christian to that of Lombroso's 'born criminal'; the former's preference for altruism over egoism, good over evil, is evidence of his incurable 'moral insanity'. Furthermore, like the nineteenth-century positivists, Nietzsche reduces religious experience to hystero-epileptic fits, pathological states which priests attempt to bring about in their followers through various practices aiming at the achievement of 'salvation'. This pathologisation (and feminisation) of the

[41] Edmund McLure, *Germany's War-Inspirers: Nietzsche and Treitschke* (London: SPCK, 1914), pp. 20–2.

Christian is an inversion of contemporary tropes associated with Jews, and forms part of his attack on the 'Aryan' Christianity and anti-Semitism preached by Wagner and others. True Aryan religions, Nietzsche claims, anticipate modern-day eugenic reforms and evince an instinctive concern for moral and racial hygiene, paving the way for the breeding of the *Übermensch*.

6 Degenerate art

In the introduction to his notorious 1892 book *Degeneration*, the Jewish journalist and physician Max Nordau declares: 'Degenerates are not always criminals, prostitutes, anarchists, and pronounced lunatics; they are often authors and artists.'[1] With these fateful words, he launches his vituperative critique of the most celebrated representatives of the cultural avant-garde, including Wagner, Zola, Wilde, Ibsen, Verlaine and Nietzsche, branding their art atavistic and regressive, a symptom of the epidemic of degeneracy and hysteria he saw plaguing *fin-de- siècle* society. His lurid revelations of the illnesses, sexual deviancy and moral insanity supposedly afflicting the leading figures of modernism ensured that *Degeneration* was a spectacular international success, and made it one of Europe's ten best-selling books in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Although Nordau's name soon sank into the oblivion from which it has only recently been rescued, the shockwaves unleashed by his work could still be felt decades later. It is a singular irony of history that it was an *Ostjude* and future Zionist who, by popularising an anti-modernist rhetoric of degeneration, unwittingly anticipated the slogans of Nazi cultural policy, which culminated in the infamous 'Degenerate Art' (*Entartete Kunst*) exhibition of Expressionist and Modernist paintings in 1937.[2]

Nordau has been credited with being the first to transfer the concept of degeneration from its place in nineteenth-century medical and sociological discourse to a quasi-scientific discussion of literary modernism.[3] But what is truly novel about Nordau's enterprise is the sheer scale and comprehensiveness of his attempt to explain, denigrate and devalue the

[1] Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (London: Heinemann, 1913), p. vii.

[2] See Jens Malte Fischer, '"Entartete Kunst": Zur Geschichte eines Begriffs', *Merkur* 3 (April 1984), 356–62.

[3] Jens Malte Fischer, 'Dekadenz und Entartung: Max Nordau als Kritiker des Fin de Siècle', in Roger Bauer et al. (eds.), *Fin de Siècle: Zur Literatur und Kunst der Jahrhundertwende* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), pp. 93–111; Hans-Peter Söder, 'Disease and Health as Contexts of Modernity: Max Nordau as Critic of Fin-de-Siècle Modernism', *German Studies Review* 14 (1991), 473–87.

aesthetic movements of the *fin de siècle* by wrapping his prejudices in the most fashionable scientific theory of the age. For his belief that certain expressions of creativity are pathological in origin and his conviction that the achievements of modernism must, on this basis, be condemned out of hand are not without precedent. The idea that genius and madness share a natural affinity – indeed, that one is a species of the other – is at least as old as Plato's notion in the *Symposium*, and elsewhere, of the heaven-sent *furor* or 'divine madness' that is the well-spring of philosophical inspiration. Yet although the linkage between mental derangement and prodigious talent has been made in almost every age ever since – from Seneca to Schopenhauer, from Pope to Lamartine – it was not until the Romantic reaction against the Enlightenment ideal of the artist as embodying reason, judgement and taste that widespread medical interest in the pathology of genius was awakened in earnest. Romanticism's celebration of irrationality and intuition as the cardinal virtues of the true artist was the point of departure for a number of the most influential psychiatrists and earliest theorists of degeneration of the mid-nineteenth century, who sought to illumine the mysterious processes fuelling the creative imagination. In 1836, in the first 'pathography' or clinical history of genius, the French physician Louis-François Lélut caused outrage by suggesting that the *daimon* of Socrates was not to be understood in a figurative sense, but rather as symptomatic of actual sensory hallucinations and madness. Ten years later, Lélut passed a similar judgement on Pascal, who had himself written that 'l'extrême esprit est voisin de l'extrême folie'.[4] Following this line of inquiry, J. J. Moreau de Tours, in his 1859 work *La psychologie morbide*, advanced what was to become one of the most influential theories of the period. He argued that, like insanity or cretinism, genius was a species of *névrose*, a lesion of the nervous system, with the afflicted organism suffering an irregularity, an exaltation, of his intellectual faculties. This idea was taken up in 1860 by Bénédict-Augustin Morel, who used the concept of degeneration, which he himself had introduced into psychiatry some three years earlier, to explain the neurotic hereditary taint that Moreau had isolated as the common root of both madness and genius. Following Morel, Valentin Magnan described the genius as a 'dégénéré supérieur', a term which rapidly gained currency in clinical psychiatry and designated a class of unbalanced individuals in whom intellectual and artistic faculties were abnormally developed. Moreau's ideas were also absorbed by the Italian Cesare Lombroso, who, in his much-translated *Genio e follia* (1863), clearly linked his description of the epileptoid psychosis of genius to his previous studies

[4] L. F. Lélut, *Du démon de Socrate* (Paris: Trinquart, 1836); *L'amulette de Pascal* (Paris: J. B. Baillière, 1846).

of degenerate criminality.[5] His eminence ensured that the theory of the *genie-névrose* found a wide audience: Nordau's book, which is dedicated to Lombroso, is merely the most spectacular example of his huge contemporary influence.

But before Nordau's *Degeneration*, a vastly shorter and more succinct polemic had already acquired considerable notoriety for applying the concept of the neuropathic genius to debates about modern art: Nietzsche's *The Case of Wagner*.[6] It was a reference to Moreau in the *Journal des Goncourt*, a text regarded by Nietzsche as an invaluable document of nineteenth-century decadence, which brought the theory of the *genie-névrose* to his attention in the late 1880s. In the preparatory notes for *Beyond Good and Evil*, he speaks of that 'famous and even proverbial expression in France which says so much about the "health" of the French spirit: "le génie est une neurose [*sic*]"' (VIII 1, 2[23]). At this point in time, the concept proved useful for his investigation of the relation between the 'genius' of the *homo religiosus* and the 'religious neurosis'. But, several years later, it would provide the rhetorical climax of his devastating critique of Wagner: '*Wagner est une névrose*.'

My aim in this chapter is to uncover the web of associations underlying the increasingly medicalised vocabulary of nineteenth-century culture-critical discourse, and to show how Nietzsche deploys them in his own critique of modern art. I shall begin by exploring the connection between health and beauty both in his thought and the popular imagination, and I shall locate his appeal to the norms of Classical aesthetics within the context of the anti-Romantic polemics of the nineteenth century. Next, I shall discuss the argument of *The Case of Wagner*, which rests on two constantly repeated assertions: that Wagner is a hysteric and that modern music has, in his hands, deteriorated into mere theatricality. By way of conclusion, I shall briefly consider how, despite his often ironic and playful manipulation of the discourse of degeneration, Nietzsche himself came to represent the archetypal pathological genius.

[5] George Becker, *The Mad Genius Controversy. A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1978); Rafael Huertas, 'Madness and Degeneration, IV: The Man of Genius', *History of Psychiatry* 4 (1993), 304–8.

[6] Nietzsche had already spoken of 'degenerate art' in *The Birth of Tragedy* (*BT* 16). See also IV 1, 12[9]. On Nietzsche's relationship to *fin-de-siècle* debates about art and decadence, see: Erwin Koppen, *Dekadenter Wagnerismus: Studien zur europäischen Literatur des Fin de Siècle* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973), pp. 319–28; Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, 'Artistische décadence als physiologische décadence: Zu Friedrich Nietzsches später Kritik am späten Richard Wagner', in H. Bürkle and G. Becker (eds.), *Communicatio Fidei: Festschrift für Eugen Biser zum 65. Geburtstag* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1983), pp. 285–94; Dieter Borchmeyer, 'Nietzsches Begriff der Decadence', in Manfred Pfister (ed.), *Die Modernisierung des Ichs* (Passau: Wissenschaftsverlag Richard Rothe, 1989), pp. 84–95.

The aesthetics of degeneration

In the epilogue of *The Case of Wagner*, Nietzsche formulates what he calls his 'conception of what is *modern*':

> Either [an age] has the virtues of *ascending* life: then it will resist from the profoundest depths the virtues of the declining life. Or the age itself represents declining life: then it also requires the virtues of decline, then it hates everything that justifies itself solely out of abundance, out of the overflowing riches of strength. Aesthetics is tied indissolubly to these biological presuppositions: there is an aesthetics of *decadence*, and there is a *classical* aesthetics (*CW*, Epilogue).

Though it is couched in the language of evolution and degeneration, it would have been impossible for Nietzsche's contemporary readers not to hear in this distinction the echo of Goethe's famous remark to Eckermann in 1829: 'I call the classic *healthy*, the romantic *sickly*.'[7] It was Goethe who was the first to pathologise the excesses of modern art, who set the terms for the subsequent controversies. Or at least he was recognised as such throughout the nineteenth century by critics who, like Max Nordau and Nietzsche himself, appealed to his authority in order to denounce Romanticism and the modernist avant-garde. The rhetoric of health and sickness had become so widespread by the middle of the century that the writer Karl Gutzkow complained: 'One reads so much praise and acclaim for writers whom one calls "healthy natures". He who is healthy can count himself lucky. But it is not exactly a virtue.'[8] But Julian Schmidt and Gustav Freytag, the editors of *Die Grenzboten*, the journal of the German liberal bourgeoisie, *did* see health as a virtue. In seeking to establish a new realist aesthetic, Schmidt adopted Goethe's slogan as his own in his crusade against Romanticism and railed against those critics who did not see in the genius the 'highest concentration of energy and health'.[9]

But in what does this 'health' supposedly consist? And how does Nietzsche's advocacy of the norms of Classical aesthetics differ from, say, programmatic realism's proclamation of a self-righteous ideal of 'healthiness'? Let us address these questions in reverse order. Nietzsche urges us to overcome not only the 'sickness' of Romanticism, but also the 'health' of the modern *Bildungsbürger*. As a young Romantic in 1868, he explicitly rejects that 'certain "healthiness"' which has become the 'nickname for particular sorts of *Grenzboten*-heroes and historians', and dismisses it as the 'eternal enemy of more profound philosophy' (*KGB* I 2,

[7] J. W. Goethe, *Conversations with Eckermann and Soret*, trans. by John Oxenwood (London: Bell, 1874), p. 380 (2 April 1829).

[8] Goethe, quoted in Gertrud Hager, *Gesund bei Goethe: Eine Wortmonographie* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1955), p. 25.

[9] Julian Schmidt, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur seit Lessings Tod*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Herbig, 1853), vol. I, p. 243.

p. 327). Several years later, he counts Schmidt and Freytag amongst those *Bildungsphilister* or cultural philistines against whom he rails in *David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer* (III 4, 27[52]). The cultural philistine, he argues there, invents 'for his habits, modes of thinking, likes and dislikes, the general formula "healthiness", and dismisses every uncomfortable disturber of the peace as being sick and neurotic' (*UM* I, 2, p. 12). Even at this early date, then, he recognises that the 'health' celebrated in realist rhetoric (and later by Nordau and Hitler, that cultural philistine *par excellence*) does not invoke a value-free frame of reference, but is rather a construction concealing a system of bourgeois norm and value orientations. For with the rise of the bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century, health came to play an increasingly important role in defending and asserting the ethical, intellectual and aesthetic values of the third estate against the perceived moral and physical degeneration of the aristocracy. Indeed, for Ernst Freiherr von Feuchtersleben, who defined health as 'nothing other than beauty, morality and truth',[10] it represented the literal embodiment of the highest and most positive valuations, a sanitary version, as it were, of the Greek *Kalokagathia*. Health was both the prerequisite of individual happiness and the consequence of a rational, ordered and principled life. Only a healthy person, whose mind and body co-existed in harmonious equilibrium, could perform his or her role in society. At the same time, this process of what Ute Frevert has called the 'hygienisation' of life served to exclude a whole range of behaviours, attitudes and emotions which seemed incompatible with the mores of bourgeois society.[11] Health and virtue, in other words, were conflated.

But health was not only equated with moral integrity; it was also an index of beauty. There was nothing new in the suggestion of Paul Möbius that 'beauty, health or fitness are the same thing' or, conversely, that illness was identical with ugliness:

> Disease always spoils beauty, and a truly beautiful person is certainly *originally healthy*. To be sure, a consumptive person can have a beautiful face, but only a degenerate taste can prefer a body with a phthisic habitus to a beautiful body . . . For ugliness always points to something pathological and, depending on the kind of ugliness, now only to the organism's pathological constitution, now to a mental disharmony.[12]

This chain of associations was systematically worked out by the Hegelian philosopher Karl Rosenkranz in his 1853 treatise, *Ästhetik des Häßlichen*.

[10] Feuchtersleben, *Zur Diätetik der Seele* (1838), quoted in Thomas Anz, *Gesund oder Krank? Medizin, Moral und Ästhetik in der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1989), p. 27.

[11] Ute Frevert, *Krankheit als politisches Problem, 1770–1880* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1984), p. 35.

[12] Möbius, *Ueber Kunst und Künstler*, pp. 131–2 and pp. 132–3.

Rosenkranz saw his study of ugliness as analogous to the study of disease in medicine; indeed, he referred to his undertaking as an 'aesthetic pathology'. But it is not just any illness which he cites in his discussion of the 'ugly in nature': 'Disease is always the cause of ugliness when it has as a consequence a deformation of the skeleton, of the bones and muscles, e.g. with syphilitic inflammation of the bones, with gangrenous destruction of the body'.[13] Syphilis, like alcoholism and madness, belongs to those 'social pathologies' which, as the second half of the nineteenth century wore on, were increasingly identified as symptoms of a profound cultural and biological malaise. Such diseases have a moral, as well as a physiological aetiology; the gross deformation of the once beautiful bourgeois body is the physical sign of the victim's moral turpitude. But while the healthy European can only *become* ugly, the 'bush man' and the cretin are inherently ugly:

> The cretin is even uglier than the negro because he combines a misshapen physique with moronic stupidity and feeble-mindedness. His lifeless eyes, his low brow, his drooping lower lip, his gluttonous indifference to the quality of food and his sexual brutality – all place him beneath the negro and bring him closer to the ape, who has the advantage over the cretin, aesthetically speaking, of not being human.[14]

Here, too, the abnormality of the 'negro' and the cretin is inscribed in their physiognomies. The cretin's dull eyes, simian forehead and protruding lip are the reflex of his vacuity, lasciviousness and latent criminality. It is this correlation between his physical and mental corruption, between his unhealthy body and congenital immorality, that makes him even more 'ugly' than the negro, who exhibits a purely physiological and racial inferiority. What is significant about Rosenkranz's discussion of cretinism is that it was, at the time of his writing, a condition that was very much of topical concern for the emerging discipline of psychiatry; four years later, it would become the centrepiece of Morel's theory of degeneration. In other words, Rosenkranz already regards the cretin as the degenerate *par excellence* and, like the physicians of the *fin de siècle*, as a figure simultaneously embodying physiological, moral and aesthetic decay.[15]

As Möbius noted with approval in his clinical study of Nietzsche in 1902, the latter establishes this same connection between health and beauty: 'With a sure eye, [Nietzsche] recognised that health is the basis of beauty and of every kind of fitness.'[16] What is more, Nietzsche also

[13] Karl Rosenkranz, *Ästhetik des Häßlichen* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1990), p. 33. [14] *Ibid.*
[15] Sander L. Gilman, 'The Ugly and the Beautiful: Cross-Cultural Norms and Definitions in the Medical Culture of Sexuality', in *Health and Sickness: Images of Difference* (London: Reaktion, 1995), pp. 51–66.
[16] Paul Möbius, *Nietzsche* (Leipzig: J. A. Barth, 1909), p. 132.

equates ugliness with degeneration. (He even goes so far as to describe the decadence of modern civilisation not just in terms of progressive feminisation or christianisation, but as a process of 'uglification': modernity is characterised by an 'increase in ugliness' (VIII 3, 15[32]).) As we have seen, Nietzsche reduces aesthetic value judgements to biological states, to instinctive reactions of attraction and repulsion linked to the evolutionary mechanism of sexual selection. In *Twilight of the Idols*, he argues that we designate as 'beautiful' that which triggers erotic intoxication, thereby increasing the potential for creative individual evolution. The value judgement 'ugly', on the other hand, has its origin in visceral feelings of revulsion and hatred which spring from the '*most deep-seated* instinct' of the species (*TI* IX, 19). In contrast to the empowering experience of beauty, the apprehension of ugliness leads to depression and impotence, to the diminution of one's 'feeling of power':

> Nothing is beautiful, only man is beautiful: all aesthetics rests on this naïvety; it is its *first* truth. Let us immediately add its second: nothing is ugly except for the *degenerating* man – thus the realm of aesthetic judgement is delimited . . . Ugly things are understood as signs and symptoms of degenerescence: anything which serves as the slightest reminder of degenerescence produces in us the judgement 'ugly' (*TI* IX, 20).

Alive as always to the implications and tacit presuppositions of the claim that ugliness is the reflex of degeneracy, Nietzsche is also aware of the moral dimension that his contemporaries ascribed to it. For example, in his work on the physiognomy of the criminal, Lombroso argued that a set of identifiable physical abnormalities – especially cranial or facial deformities – were symptomatic of an individual's moral pathology. The degenerate criminal's true, 'ugly' nature was stamped on his (or her) body and reflected in his physical ugliness. An ironic allusion to Lombroso's theory underpins Nietzsche's argument in the section entitled 'The Problem of Socrates' in *Twilight of the Idols*:

> Ugliness is often enough the expression of a cross-bred development *stunted* by cross-breeding. If not, then it appears as a development in *decline*. The anthropologists among criminologists tell us that the typical criminal is ugly: *monstrum in fronte, monstrum in animo*. But the criminal is a *décadent*. Was Socrates a typical criminal? (*TI* II, 3).

Following a by now familiar strategy, Nietzsche includes under the category of 'degeneration' not only those social pathologies diagnosed by physicians and cultural critics alike, but even those values which form the basis of Western civilisation. The Socratic invention of dialectics; the elevation of reason above instinct and the body; the equation of virtue and happiness (the healthy common sense (*gesunder Menschenverstand*)

still celebrated by the cultural philistine of the nineteenth century) – all are symptoms of decadence, a falling away from the great tragic age of the Greeks, a sign 'that the instincts were turning *against* each other' (*TI* II, 9). Socrates' 'moral insanity' is revealed for Nietzsche in his legendary ugliness; if Lombroso's theory is correct, then this pathophysiognomy is a sign of Socrates' innate criminality.

Lombrosian criminal typology also posited a link between the neuropathy of criminals and artists. For Lombroso, there was only a difference of degree, not of kind, between, say, Dostoyevsky, a supposedly pathological and criminal nature who wrote *about* crime, and a murderer who scribbles on his cell walls and inscribes his 'criminality' on his body by covering it with tattoos: both are throwbacks to a more primitive kind of human being. The Viennese writer Otto Weininger echoes this idea when he proposes that Flaubert and Dostoyevsky 'both had a great deal of the criminal nature in them without of course being criminals'.[17] Nietzsche himself suggests that a link exists between criminality and art in a fragment written in 1888. In an age of overcivilisation, which brings with it an increase in morbidity, in nervous illness and criminality, there arises a '*hybrid species*', half-criminal, half-madman. This is the modern artist, the naturalist:

> the *artiste*, held back from the criminal act by his weakness of will and social timidity, at the same time not yet ready for the madhouse, but inquisitively probing with his feelers in both spheres . . . The insane, the criminals and the 'naturalists' are increasing in number: sign of a culture that is developing and rushing *forwards* at breakneck speed – that means that the rejects, the trash, the detritus gain in importance (VIII 3, 14[182]).

The degeneracy of the modern artist does not manifest itself in criminal acts or in crazed delirium, but rather in his work. The naturalist's depiction of the squalor and misery of urban life – that same pernicious milieu of which he is himself a product – reveals his pathological delight in the filth and suffering of the city; his art is first and foremost a 'stimulant' for degenerate natures: 'the ugly and the monstrous arouse emotions' (VIII 1, 7[7]). Because naturalism wallows in the ugliness of existence, but does not affirm it; because it merely describes but does not seek actively to idealise, to triumph over life, Nietzsche makes what at first sight seems the rather odd claim: that naturalism is the consequence of Romanticism (VIII 3, 17[9]). The 'delight in the actual' is, just as much as the Romantic flight into a *paradis artificiel*, the symptom of a 'neurotic condition among the artists' (VII 2, 25[121]). Moreover, the art-work itself is analogous to the criminal's physiognomy, is a surface

[17] Otto Weininger, *Geschlecht und Charakter* (Munich: Matthes und Seitz, 1980), p. 438.

upon which the pathological stigmata of its author are inscribed. Physical ugliness indicates a 'contradiction and lack of co-ordination of the inner desires' within the degenerate individual, a 'decline in the *organising* power, in "will", to speak in physiological terms' (VIII 3, 14[117]). Nietzsche describes the ugliness of the art-work in almost identical terms. For instance, he claims to be able to detect in Wagner's music the same 'decline of the power to organize', which results in an 'excessive liveliness in the smallest parts', in a lack of cohesion, of unity of style (*CW*, Second Postscript). It is precisely these symptoms of will-pathology that mark out both Wagner the artist and his music as 'sick', and which make him responsible for the '*uglification of music*' (VIII 3, 14[49]).

Beauty, Nietzsche claims in *Twilight of the Idols*, is no accident. In a passage reminiscent of Galton's study on hereditary genius, he writes: 'the beauty of a race or a family . . . is worked for: like genius, it is the end result of the accumulated labour of generations' (*TI* IX, 47). The beauty of the art-work, too, is 'worked for', the result of an imperious 'will to unity' (VIII 2, 11[312]) that imposes form, harmony, logic and proportion – in other words, the 'grand style' – upon its subject matter. This is the 'Classical aesthetic' to which Nietzsche refers in the epilogue of *The Case of Wagner*. Just as the amorphousness of the decadent work of art mirrors the internal disintegration of the decadent artist, so the dominance of balanced and harmonious form over feeling that characterises Classicism reflects the artist's self-mastery, his harnessing of the creative energy released during the experience of Dionysian intoxication (VIII 3, 14[46]). It is precisely this quality of 'self-discipline' which Nietzsche saw in Goethe himself ('he disciplined himself into a whole, he *created* himself' (*TI* IX, 49)), and which makes both him and his art the epitome of the healthy, Classical aesthetic. It is this that makes Goethe, even more than Bizet, the antithesis of Wagner, whose work is characterised by an 'incapacity for giving organic form' (*CW* 7). In one note, Nietzsche even describes Wagner's music as '*anti-Goethean*' (VIII 3, 15[12]).

Nietzsche's appeal to Goethe is perhaps more justified than he realises, for the association of beauty and health is also at the heart of the latter's definition of Classicism and Romanticism. For a start, Goethe, like Nietzsche, held the 'highest and only operation of nature and art' to be a process of 'shaping' (*Gestaltung*) – precisely that capacity supposedly wholly lacking in Wagner.[18] Both the artist and the *Bildungstrieb* operative in nature structure the chaos of the world, creating individual forms which correspond to ideal archetypes. Natural beauty consists in

[18] Goethe, quoted in Erich Jenisch, '"Das Klassische nenne ich das Gesunde, und das Romantische das Kranke": Goethes Kritik der Romantik', *Jahrbuch der Goethe-Gesellschaft* 19 (1957), 69.

the 'manifestation of secret laws of nature' or, in other words, the perfect co-ordination of an organism's parts.[19] But morphological harmony is not only the expression of beauty; it is also Goethe's definition of 'health': 'Nature develops normally when it makes countless individual elements conform to a rule, determines and conditions them; when, however, the individual elements prevail and stand out in an arbitrary, indeed seemingly accidental fashion, then those phenomena are abnormal.'[20] Classical art imitates the beautiful, healthy harmony of nature. Romantic art, on the other hand, is analogous to the malformed, ugly organism. As an example, Goethe cites a play he had recently seen by a young poet: ' "It is a pathological work", said he; "a superfluity of sap is bestowed on some parts which do not require it, and drawn out of those which stand in need of it . . . This is what I call pathological, or even 'romantic', if you would rather speak after our new theory." '[21] In other words, the modern, Romantic work of art is 'sick' because it manifests the same lack of proportion, moderation and form as pathological structures in nature; its parts develop individually at the expense of the whole. But this is precisely what Nietzsche calls 'décadence'.

Not only does Goethe's definition of Romanticism and pathology resemble Nietzsche's own concept of (artistic and organic) decadence, there is also a great deal of similarity in the way in which they evaluate these phenomena. Both deny that health and sickness are rigid and distinct states, regarding them, rather, as different aspects of the same essentially dynamic process within life itself. Nietzsche, of course, calls this process the will to power, and measures health by the amount of disease an organism can not only tolerate, but also assimilate and overcome: 'Sickness itself can be a stimulant to life: only one has to be healthy enough for this stimulant!' (*CW* 5). This is what he also describes as the 'great health', a higher form of health 'that one does not merely have but also acquires continually, and must acquire' (*GS* 382). In like fashion, Goethe declares: 'Sickness is the true proof of health',[22] and intimates that, in the strongest and most vital organisms, sickness can lead to a higher form of health. This applies as much to the world of art as it does to nature: 'I compare the present literary epoch to a state of violent fever, which is not in itself good and desirable, but of which improved health is the happy consequence.' Unlike Schmidt, Nordau et al., Goethe refuses to reject

[19] J. W. Goethe, *The Maxims and Reflections of Goethe*, trans. by Bailey Saunders (London: Macmillan, 1893), Nr. 481, p. 171.

[20] J. W. Goethe, *Nacharbeiten und Sammlungen*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, Ernst Beutler (ed.), 24 vols. (Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1948–60), vol. XVII, p. 106.

[21] Goethe, *Conversations with Eckermann*, p. 386 (5 April 1829).

[22] J. W. Goethe, *The Diary*, in *Roman Elegies and The Diary*, trans. by David Luke (London: Libris, 1988), p. 115 (line 174).

'pathological' art out of hand and instead accords it special importance. For all Romanticism's flaws and immoderation, it nevertheless marks one of the periodically necessary episodes of experimentation during which the creative and expressive possibilities of art are expanded. By 'infecting' itself with the Romantic virus, literature prevents its own stagnation and achieves 'besides a freer form, richer and more diversified subjects'.[23] A similar ambivalence characterises Nietzsche's attitude to 'décadence'. We are reminded of his notion of 'ennoblement through degeneration' in *Human, All Too Human*, but it is a different kind of 'ennoblement through degeneration' which he describes in the preface to *The Case of Wagner*: his own. The 'case' of Wagner is presented as part of his own case history; that work announces his 'recovery' from his own youthful Romanticism, his triumph over his own (physiological and philosophical) decadence. Wagner, he declares, 'is merely one of my sicknesses' (*CW*, Preface). Yet this illness was necessary in order to acquaint him with the pathologies afflicting modern civilisation and thus enable him to overcome them: 'the philosopher is not free to do without Wagner . . . I'd . . . understand a philosopher who would declare "Wagner sums up modernity. There is no way out, one must first become a Wagnerian"' (*CW*, Preface).

Hysteria and histrionics

Despite the red-faced indignation with which many Wagnerians greeted the publication of Nietzsche's broadside, his appraisal of their idol's putative *nevrosité* was not entirely without precedent – or even a grain of truth. Wagner himself had confided to his friend August Röckel as long ago as 1854 that he suffered from a nervous condition which saw him oscillating between the extremes of lassitude and creative elation:

> when I experience the wretched state in which I now normally find myself, I cannot help but believe my nerves to be ruined; miraculously, however, these same nerves – when the time is right and beautiful, appropriate stimuli come to me – perform the most wondrous services; I then achieve a degree of perceptiveness, a sense of well-being through what I experience and create such as I have never known before. Should I now say that my nerves are ruined? I cannot. I see only that my nature's normal state is exaltation and its abnormal state common repose.[24]

In line with his own self-portrait, and ever since the uproar surrounding the 1861 performance of *Tannhäuser* in Paris, when the *Journal amusant* had punningly referred to its composer as 'vagues-nerfs', the *Meister* had been regarded as the century's leading exponent of what was to become known as 'neuromanticism', a 'nerve-artist' (*Nervenkünstler*), as

[23] Goethe, *Conversations with Eckermann*, p. 452 (14 March 1830).
[24] Richard Wagner, *Briefe an August Röckel* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1894), pp. 44–5.

the historian Karl Lamprecht later termed that modern breed of artists whose work, he thought, was conditioned by a greater neurological sensitivity.[25] Around the same time, Judith Gautier described the composer as 'excessively nervous and impressionable', and the critic Eduard Hanslick dismissed Wagner's famous 'unending melody' as 'formlessness raised to a principle, systematised non-music, melodic *nerve-fever* scribbled down on a stave'.[26] Whether Nietzsche was aware of Wagner's self-confessed weak nerves or that the man and his art were increasingly being identified in the public consciousness with nervous illness is unclear. But he certainly knew that he was not the first to label his former mentor a 'sick' genius. Ever since the 1870s, the *Meister*'s music had, beyond the walls of the devoted *Wagner-Vereine*, attracted an increasing amount of public opposition. Whilst his earlier, more traditional compositions could reckon with a measure of appreciation, even enthusiasm, the innovations of his later works were met with uncomprehending hostility. Accordingly, as often happens when what someone is saying cannot be understood by his audience, Wagner's *Zukunftsmusik* was denounced at the ravings of a lunatic. Of course, the notion that Wagner was insane had to begin with no more than polemical significance, but it was not long before a practising physician, with all the literal-mindedness of the nineteenth-century scientist, decided to throw his professional weight behind this popular diagnosis. In 1873, the Munich psychiatrist Theodor Puschmann sparked a minor scandal with the publication of a short case-study entitled *Richard Wagner: Eine psychiatrische Studie*. Claiming to have no particular axe to grind, and seeking to explain what he saw as Wagner's artistic and mental decline (the latter manifest in his increasingly pronounced anti-Semitism and vanity), Puschmann concluded:

> When we survey the many facts and take into account the moral alienation, the perversity of his drives and inclinations, the lack of social and moral feelings, together with the disturbances which the sphere of the intelligence has suffered and the delusions which rule his thoughts, then we cannot escape the scientific conviction that Richard Wagner is no longer psychologically normal, that today he suffers from certain symptoms of mental illnesses.[27]

Nietzsche was certainly aware of Puschmann and his work, and counted him among those cultural philistines who employ their own conception of 'health' as a criterion of aesthetic judgement. As a young Wagnerian he

[25] Koppen, *Dekadenter Wagnerismus*, p. 315; Lamprecht, *Zur jüngsten deutschen Vergangenheit*, vol. I, p. 60.

[26] Gautier quoted in Adolphe Jullien, *Richard Wagner. Sa vie et ses oeuvres* (Paris: Jules Rouam, 1886), p. 310; Hanslick quoted in Wilhelm Tappert, *Ein Wagner-Lexicon* (Leipzig: E. W. Fritzsch, 1877), p. 26.

[27] Theodor Puschmann, *Richard Wagner: Eine psychiatrische Studie* (Berlin: B. Behr's Buchhandlung, 1873), p. 61.

inquired indignantly of Erwin Rohde: 'That a mad-doctor has proved in "lofty language" that Wagner is *insane*, that another mad-doctor has done the same for Schopenhauer – have you heard that already?' (*KGB* II 3, p. 86).[28] Some fifteen years later, Puschmann's pamphlet was very much on his mind in a note written during the period leading up to the composition of *The Case of Wagner*. Perhaps seeking to distance his planned polemic from what he had once disdainfully referred to as 'Puschmannism' (*KGB* II 3, p. 176), he describes the attempt to include Wagner and Schopenhauer amongst the insane as 'tasteless'. Moreover, this diagnosis is not only tasteless, it is also mistaken. Puschmann and his ilk have failed to appreciate that their subjects conform to a more fundamental pathological type; they have overlooked the obvious symptoms of 'physiological *décadence*' (VIII 3, 14[222]).[29] In other words, Wagner, 'the modern artist *par excellence*', is not so much mad as degenerate. What is more, as Nietzsche later reveals in *The Case of Wagner*, publicly correcting Puschmann's misdiagnosis, his degeneracy manifests itself in a particular form: hysteria.

> Wagner's art is sick. The problems he presents on the stage – all of them problems of hysterics – the convulsive nature of his emotions, his overexcited sensibility, his taste that required ever stronger spices, his instability which he dressed up as principles, not least of all the choice of his heroes and heroines – consider them as physiological types (a pathological gallery)! – all of this taken together represents a profile of sickness that permits no further doubt. *Wagner est une névrose*. Perhaps nothing is better known today, at least nothing has been better studied, than the Protean character of degenerescence that here conceals itself in the chrysalis of art and artist (*CW* 5).

Nietzsche's careful distinction between 'mere' madness and hysteria is not only consistent with the categories of nineteenth-century psychiatry, which viewed the former as primarily characterised by a disturbance of the intellect and the latter by impotence of the will.[30] Hysteria's typical symptoms and status as the most modern of disorders mean that it – far more than the more diffuse iconography of insanity – provides him, as we shall see, with the perfect rhetorical weapon with which to denounce the excesses and modernity of Wagner's personality and music.

[28] The work on Schopenhauer mentioned by Nietzsche is Karl von Seidlitz's *Dr. A. Schopenhauer vom medizinischen Standpunkt aus* (Dorpat: Glaesers, 1872).

[29] In fact, Puschmann does understand mental illness in terms of degeneration. For instance, he claims that Wagnerians show the same 'symptoms of mental turmoil and psychic degeneration which we find in their *Meister*' (*Richard Wagner*, p. 67). He also speaks of Wagner's 'moral degeneracy' (p. 59). William Hirsch comprehensively refutes Puschmann (and Nordau) in his chapter entitled 'Richard Wagner and Psychopathology' in his *Genius and Degeneration* (London: Heinemann, 1897).

[30] Richet, *L'homme et l'intelligence*, p. 267.

The problem of the actor in general, and his relation to the modern artist in particular, is a recurring theme in Nietzsche's late philosophy – although his suspicion of the inauthenticity of the theatre, that 'mass art par excellence' (*NCW*, Where I Offer Objections), had been festering ever since the 1870s. Its roots lay in the crisis in his friendship with Wagner, which was sparked by the decision to begin construction of the *Festspielhaus* in Bayreuth. This move signalled for Nietzsche the beginning of Wagner's 'demolatry' (*CW*, Postscript), his willingness to condescend to public taste, and thus marked a betrayal of the more elitist conception of art that Nietzsche held dear. Over the years, these suspicions hardened; one of the most frequently repeated assertions in *The Case of Wagner* is that Wagner is an 'incomparable histrio', in whose hands music has become a mere 'theatrical rhetoric, a means of expression, of underscoring gestures, of suggestion, of the psychologically picturesque' (*CW* 8). But there is more to this claim than the accusation that he has subordinated musical expression to the demands of drama and character, or that he was debasing his art before the vulgar masses. Wagner's theatricality – as expressed both in his art and personality – is closely linked to his alleged hysteria. Indeed, Nietzsche promises that the chapter on the 'physiology of art' in his forthcoming major work, *The Will to Power*, a book he still intended to write at this point in time, will be devoted to the problem of how this 'over-all change of art into histrionics is no less an expression of physiological degenerescence (more precisely, a form of hysterism)' (*CW* 7). Needless to say, he never completed his *magnum opus*; nor did he discuss the relationship between hysteria, histrionics and modern art in any of his subsequent published works. But he did address the issue in a note written around the time that *The Case of Wagner* was published:

> The *modern* artist's physiology is most closely related to hysterism and his personality is also characterised by this pathology. The hysteric is false: he lies because he takes pleasure in lying, he is worthy of admiration in every art of play-acting – unless his pathological vanity is playing a trick on him. This vanity is like an incessant fever which requires narcotics and shrinks from no self-deceit, from no farce which promises momentary relief. *Inability* to feel pride and continually to require revenge for a deeply rooted self-contempt – that is almost the definition of this kind of vanity. The absurd excitability of his system, which makes crises out of all experiences and introduces 'the dramatic' into the most insignificant coincidences of life, deprives him of all predictability: he is no longer a person, at most a rendezvous of persons, of which now this one, now that one shoots out with barefaced self-assurance. For this very reason he makes a great actor: all these poor will-less creatures whom the physicians study at close quarters astound us with their virtuosity in mimicry, in transfiguration, in assuming almost every *required* character (VIII 3, 16[89]).

Nietzsche's comparison of the histrionic artist and the hysteric shows once again that he is alive to the contemporary significances of hysteria. Clinical discussion of the disease and its symptoms, for example, had long been influenced by metaphors drawn from the world of the theatre. Indeed, the picture Nietzsche paints of the mendacity and melodramatic posturings of the self-absorbed modern artist evokes Charles Richet's description of the emotional displays and 'tendency to deception' exhibited by the vain, hysterical 'liars' incarcerated in the wards of the Salpêtrière:

> Self-esteem is always highly developed . . . Everything becomes the subject of a drama. Life seems like the scene from a play. The steady, simple, easy life, which makes up the comings and goings of each day, is transformed by the hysterics into a series of momentous events characteristic of all the developments of a drama.[31]

If hysteria was construed as a self-dramatising 'performance', there was at the same time an unmistakable element of theatricality in the medical representation of the disease itself. The imperious Charcot put his patients on display before a huge audience composed largely of members of the general public, and used hypnotic suggestion to induce or halt seizures, like the director of some macabre ballet. His famous *leçons du mardi* were attended by actors and writers fascinated by the peculiar grace, mercurial expressiveness and wretched life-stories of these women.[32] In a passage marked by Nietzsche in his copy of *L'homme et l'intelligence*, Richet describes how a famous actor told him that he regarded the observation of the 'diverse sentiments of the soul: anger, ecstasy, love, admiration, menace, contempt, disgust, fright' displayed by hysterics as 'the best lesson in expression that he had ever had, and that it would be probably impossible for him to attain such a degree of perfection'.[33] By a strange circularity, the poses of *grande hystérie* enacted at these public events closely resembled the stylised movements and gestures of French Classical acting: both the diagnosed hysterics at the clinic and the fallen woman of melodrama displayed 'eye rolling, facial grimaces, gnashing teeth, heavy sighs, fainting, shrieking, choking; "hysterical laughter" was a frequent stage direction as well as a common occurrence in medical asylums'.[34] What is more, as Charcot's fame grew, hysterical performance was no longer confined to his clinic, but became just as widespread in the real theatre: Wilde's

[31] *Ibid.*, pp. 267 and 265. Nietzsche's reference to the 'psychologically picturesque' (*CW* 8) in Wagner's music also recalls Richet's description of the character of hysterics: 'Borrowing an expression from painting, one can say that it is very *picturesque*, and presents varied and always unexpected points of view' (p. 264).

[32] Elaine Showalter, *Hystories* (London: Picador, 1997), pp. 100–1.

[33] Richet, *L'homme et l'intelligence*, p. 546.

[34] Elin Diamond, 'Realism and Hysteria: Towards a Feminist Mimesis', *Discourse* 13 (1990–1), 63.

Salomé, Hofmannsthal's Elektra and Ibsen's Hedda Gabler are all hysterical figures. And if actresses were to play these roles with conviction, they needed to be of a nervous disposition themselves. The writer Helen Zimmern, an acquaintance of Nietzsche's who would later translate his works into English, described the famous Italian actress Eleanor Duse as 'the *fin de siècle* woman *par excellence*, with her hysterical maladies, her neurotism, her anæmia and all its consequences'.[35]

Hysteria and histrionics, then, were intimately linked in the nineteenth-century imagination – and not only in Nietzsche's. What links them in all the above examples is the figure of the woman. The hysteric's 'mobile and changing character'[36] was a pathological exaggeration of the capriciousness and superficiality that supposedly constituted the 'essence' of femininity. This inherent mutability of women, which could all too easily develop into full-blown hysteria, also meant that they possessed a natural propensity for acting. Havelock Ellis found no difficulty in locating the 'organic basis of woman's success in acting'. It lies, he claims, in their more rapid mental processes; their 'emotional explosiveness' is also greater than that which men possess and 'more easily within call'. Furthermore, the circumstances of women's social life have 'usually favoured a high degree of flexibility and adaptibility [*sic*] as regards behaviour'. In other words, all women are actresses, just as all women are, to a greater or lesser degree, hysterics; and the hysteric, the most volatile and unstable kind of woman, is the greatest actress of them all. Ellis even gives his suppositions an evolutionary twist when he suggests that there is a parallelism, and 'probably a real deep-lying nervous connection', between what he calls the 'suggestibility' of women – that is, their congenital predisposition to nervous disorders and hypnosis – and 'the special liability of female birds and many mammals to be mimetic in coloration, etc. Mimicry, or suggestibility, is an adaptation to the environment, ensuring the protection of the sex that is less able to flee or to fight.'[37] Predictably perhaps for one of the century's most notorious anti-feminists, Nietzsche, in a discussion of the actor in *The Gay Science*, also picks up the theme of women's innate theatricality; significantly, he simultaneously alludes to their susceptibility to hypnotic suggestion (and thus to hysteria):

> Reflect on the whole history of women: do they not *have* to be first of all and above all else actresses? Listen to physicians who have hypnotized women; finally, love them – let yourself be 'hypnotized by them'! What is always the end result? That they 'give themselves' even when they – give themselves. Woman is so artistic (*GS* 361).

[35] Helen Zimmern, 'Eleanora Duse', *Fortnightly Review* 67 (1900), 993.
[36] Richet, *L'homme et l'intelligence*, p. 276. [37] Ellis, *Man and Woman*, pp. 324 and 285.

Even more significant for our purposes was the chain of associations linking hysteria, histrionics and the Jew. I discussed in the previous chapter how the assumption of a more pronounced predisposition to nervous exhaustion formed an integral part of the racial construction of the feminised 'Jew' in the nineteenth century. Another old anti-Semitic canard served to underline the putative 'femininity' of the Jewish race. Like women, Jews lacked an 'essence'. The long centuries spent in the Diaspora, and thus removed from their natural environment, meant that they had been forced to adapt to a wide variety of different circumstances and cultures. Consequently, they possessed, as the sociologist Werner Sombart put it in his book *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* (*The Jews and Economic Life*, 1911), a 'definite talent' for acting:

> It is indeed astounding *how* nimble the Jew can be when he has his eyes fixed on a particular end. He even succeeds to a large extent in giving to his definite physical form the external appearance which he would like to give to it. Just as he once knew how to protect himself by 'playing dead', so now he does by 'adapting to colours' or through other kinds of mimicry . . . Understandably enough, it is much easier for him, by virtue of his nimble-mindedness and moral flexibility, to lend himself the spiritual air of his environment . . . We see even more clearly how the strength of the actor . . . lies in the ability quickly to transplant oneself to an unfamiliar world of ideas, to survey, assess and utilise people and circumstances without effort. Here the Jew's strong subjectivity is useful to him, by virtue of which he buries himself in another's intellectual world, puts himself in his place, thinks and defends himself in his name.[38]

We find this same trope in Nietzsche's discussion of the actor:

> As for the *Jews*, the people who possess the art of adaptibility par excellence, this train of thought suggests immediately that one might see them virtually as a world-historical arrangement for the production of actors, a veritable breeding ground for actors. And it really is time to ask: What good actor today is *not* – a Jew? (*GS* 361).[39]

The histrionic temperament, no less than hysteria, marks the confluence of overlapping discourses about sex and race in the late nineteenth century. It is therefore extremely significant that Nietzsche portrays Wagner as both hysteric and actor, given the meaning which he and his contemporaries invest in both terms. This move, too, is part of his wider strategy of debunking Wagner's racially tinged anti-Semitism, which

[38] Werner Sombart, *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* (Leipzig: Duncker und Humblot, 1911), pp. 327–8.

[39] Notice how both Sombart and Ellis employ the motif of mimicry. In the same passage in which he discusses the histrionism of both women and Jews, Nietzsche also refers to 'the incorporated and inveterate art of eternally playing hide-and-seek, which in the case of animals is called mimicry' (*GS* 316).

I outlined in the last chapter. Nietzsche, I argued, sought to 're-judaise' Christianity, to transfer the tropes associated with the degenerate, feminised Jew onto the Christian. In the same way, by 'hystericising' Wagner's body, by denouncing him as an actor, Nietzsche is now ascribing to the arch-anti-Semite himself and his art quintessentially 'Jewish' characteristics. This not only mirrors Wagner's own practice of evoking elaborate iconographies of race, sexuality and degeneracy in the portrayal of his dramatic characters, so that a contemporary audience would have recognised Mime, Hagen and Alberich, for example, as Jewish, with all the negative connotations that implied.[40] I also want to suggest that *The Case of Wagner* can be read as an ironic riposte to the composer's own views on the 'degeneracy' of modern art as expressed in his notorious essay *Judaism in Music*.

The thrust of that scandalous pamphlet is that Jews cannot aspire to musical genius. As ethnic outsiders, they have no organic relation to the *Volk*, and thus no access to the culture and language of the German nation. This estrangement from the *Volksseele* is manifest in the degenerate 'blabber' or 'jargon' which Jews speak in lisping, croaking tones, and in the empty formalism of their art and especially of their music. Consequently, the Jewish artist is merely a clever mimic, playing an 'artist-role',[41] but lacking the inspiration of true genius. Yet despite the obvious superficiality of his art, there has taken place a 'jewification [*Verjüdung*] of modern art';[42] Jewish control of capital has reduced the art-work to a mere commodity, polluting the cultural life of the *Volk*. This is why contemporary taste is so corrupt and the public favours the trivial music of Felix Mendelssohn and Giacomo Meyerbeer. Wagner is especially scornful of the latter, whom he accuses of resorting to theatrical and sensational effects, and having no higher goal than relieving the boredom of the bourgeoisie. True art has a more exalted purpose; Meyerbeer seeks merely to fool his audience: 'In fact, this composer pushes his deception so far, that he ends by deceiving himself, and perchance as purposely as he deceives his bored admirers.'[43] This jargon of inauthenticity and intrinsic dishonesty is for Wagner a hallmark of all Jewish art: Heinrich Heine, too, 'duped himself into a poet', and thought himself a true artist; in reality, he was nothing but the composer of 'versified lies'.[44]

[40] Marc A. Weiner, *Richard Wagner and the Anti-Semitic Imagination* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), esp. pp. 307–47. In countless notes, Nietzsche refers to the 'hysterical-hypnotic type of the Wagnerian heroine' (VIII 3, 15[99]); in the text of *The Case of Wagner* itself, he compares these characters with Flaubert's Madame Bovary (*CW* 9), who, according to Richet, is 'the most vivid, the most true, the most passionate' of all fictional hysterics (*L'homme et l'intelligence*, p. 272).

[41] Richard Wagner, *Judaism in Music*, in *Prose Works*, vol. III, p. 89.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 82. [43] *Ibid.*, p. 97. [44] *Ibid.*, p. 100.

It is typical of Nietzsche that, contra Wagner, it is the Jewish and Francophile Heine whom he reveres above all other German artists. And that his esteem for him is at least partly intended as a provocation is demonstrated by his remarks in a note from the year 1887. Citing Heine and the composer Jacques Offenbach as examples, he directly contradicts Wagner's assertion that Jews are by their very nature incapable of producing works of true greatness: 'in the realm of art the Jews have touched on genius'. Indeed, Offenbach, far from being excluded from the great European musical tradition, is actually its heir. Moreover, he represents, Nietzsche claims, playing on that most Wagnerian of words, the 'redemption' (*Erlösung*) from the '*degenerate* musicians of German Romanticism' (VIII 2, 9[53]). Nietzsche has here characteristically reversed the argument of *Judaism in Music*: it is Wagner, the apotheosis of German Romanticism, whose music is decadent; and a Jew's music promises regeneration – the very role Wagner had envisaged for his own. This strategy is continued in *The Case of Wagner*. For the *Meister*, the art of Jewish composers was a kind of musical jargon: notes and phrases were simply thrown together, and different forms and styles commingled 'in motleyest chaos' without any feeling for the organic unity of the whole.[45] Nietzsche later found the same failings in the 'anarchy of atoms' endemic in the dominant music of his day: Wagner's *Zukunftsmusik*. Where the latter had attacked Jewish music for debasing public taste, as well as the public for allowing itself to be so debased, Nietzsche claims that Wagner 'won the crowd, he corrupted taste, he spoiled even our taste for opera!' (*CW*, Postcript) and deplores those who pour adulation on him. The loud and theatrical effects which Wagner abominated in Jewish music are just as discernible in his own. Just as he accused Meyerbeer (and Heine) of inauthenticity, so Nietzsche denounces his music for being 'never true' (*CW* 8), an '*art of lying*' (*CW* 12). Finally, of course, Nietzsche portrays Wagner as an actor, just as the latter had reviled Jewish musicians for being nothing more than mimics. We have already seen that Nietzsche, taking up a widespread contemporary trope, associated histrionism and Jewishness, asking 'What good actor today is *not* – a Jew?' According to this logic, if Wagner is an actor, a good actor (and he is a 'first-rate actor' (*CW* 8)), then the nineteenth century's greatest anti-Semite is himself a Jew. Not only is he playing at being a great artist, he is even playing at being a German. With gleeful malice, Nietzsche drives the point home:

> Was Wagner a German at all? . . . It is difficult to find any German trait in him. Being a great learner, he learned to imitate much that was German – that's all. His own nature *contradicts* that which has hitherto been felt to be German – not

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 92.

to speak of a German musician. – His father was an actor by the name of Geyer. A Geyer [vulture] is practically an Adler [eagle] (*CW*, Postscript, note).

Nietzsche is here alluding to Wagner's secret and ultimately groundless fear that he himself was of part-Jewish descent – through his step-father and probable biological father, Ludwig Geyer.[46] The untranslatable pun on his name reinforces this allusion: Adler is of course a common Jewish surname.

Wagner is not merely a Jew, he is the feminised, hysterical Jew of the anti-Semitic imagination. The deceitfulness and manipulation associated with the Jewish actor–artist is also a hallmark of the narratives of hysterical women. Wagner's 'instability of character' and 'shifting personality' (VIII 3, 16[77]) are as much a sign of dissembling Jewishness as a symptom of hysteria. By the same token, his 'incapacity for giving organic form', the innate decadence and the confusion of styles displayed by his work, is not only a Jewish characteristic: it is ' "hysterism" as music' (VIII 3, 16[75]). Wagner's art is feminine, it lacks what are, according to the nineteenth-century categories from which Nietzsche never really emancipated himself, the 'manly' virtues of form and style. This emphasis on 'manliness in art' was later echoed by Walter Pater; for him, too, it represented the antithesis of all decadence, consisting in 'tenacity of intuition and of consequent purpose, the spirit of construction as opposed to what is literally incoherent or ready to fall to pieces, and in opposition to what is hysteric or works at random'.[47] For Nietzsche – and here his criticism echoes that of Eduard Hanslick – this randomness, this lack of unifying structure, finds its most refined expression in Wagner's famous 'unending melody', which marks a departure from the 'physiological presupposition of previous music' and represents the 'complete degeneration of rhythmic feeling' (*NCW*, Wagner as a Danger 1). Rhythm is for Nietzsche both the primary organising principle of music, as well as the means by which it acts directly on the human organism (through the vascular system) (*TI* IX, 10). The 'easy, bold, exuberant, self-assured rhythms' which he professes to admire in the music of Bizet and Offenbach stimulate and reinvigorate the 'animal functions' (*NCW*, Where I Offer Objections). Without rhythm, music is mere chaos and its influence upon human physiology more sinister: 'irregular breathing, disturbance of the blood circulation, extreme irritability with sudden coma' (VIII 3, 16[75]). These are the symptoms of the hysterical seizure. In other words, Wagner is not only an hysteric, he is also a *magnétiseur*, able to induce hysteria in others using the

[46] See Ernest Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner*, 4 vols. (London: Cassell, 1976), vol. II, p. 612.

[47] Walter Pater, 'Plato's Æsthetics', in *Plato and Platonism* (London: Macmillan, 1910), p. 281.

'swimming' and 'floating' of his unending melody to aggravate the nerves (*NCW*, Wagner as a Danger 1). The *Lohengrin* prelude, for instance, is a good example of 'hypnotism by means of music' (*CW* 7). According to Charcotian neurology, not only are hysterics particularly susceptible to hypnosis; hypnosis is itself a kind of pathological condition found only in hysterics. It was therefore rare for men to be hypnotised.[48] It is for this reason that Nietzsche writes of Wagner's 'success with nerves and consequently women' (*CW* 5). He has beguiled – or, Nietzsche intimates, 'seduced' – those with the weakest nerves: women and the effeminate, idealistic youths of the Reich.

Nietzsche only hints at the issue of Wagner's sexuality in the published version of his polemic. To brand Wagner a hysteric was enough to insinuate his unmanliness, even his homosexuality. Such innuendo sufficed for Nietzsche's meaning to be understood.[49] For Wagner was as famous for his music as he was infamous for his vigorous libido, his scandalous relationship with Cosima von Bülow and the sensuous eroticism of his music dramas. This presented an easy target for his enemies. In 1873, Theodor Puschmann had suggested that the fact that Wagner 'has always permitted the sexual impulses to exert a great influence on his inner life' was proof of his insanity: 'It is well known that in the beginning of mental illnesses there often arises an unnatural intensification of the sex drive.'[50] In his letters and notebooks, Nietzsche also rails against the 'disgusting sexuality of Wagnerian music' (*KGB* III 5, p. 459) and Wagner's own 'unbelievably pathological sexuality which was the bane of his life' (VIII 3, 23[2]). Such views – implied, as I have said, in the published work – are consistent with a further aspect of the allusive and elusive character of hysteria. I have, in previous chapters, already drawn attention to the putative sexual aetiology and symptomology of the disease. For example, August Krauss, the author of *Die Psychologie des Verbrechens*, not only identifies the source of hysteria as lying in the 'sexual system'; he regards the 'extreme intensification of sexual desire to the point of nymphomaniacal ecstasy' as one of its chief symptoms.[51] Wagner's sexual degeneration is another manifestation of his hysterical, feminine nature. It might at first sight seem contradictory for Nietzsche to criticise Wagner's overt

[48] Richet, *L'homme et l'intelligence*, p. 204; Ellis, *Man and Woman*, p. 313.

[49] Wagner was often associated with homosexuality at the *fin de siècle*. In his book *Richard Wagner und die Homosexualität* (Berlin: H. Barsdorf, 1903), Hanns Fuchs argues not only that Wagner was homosexual, but that this trait is also shared by many Wagnerians. To support his claim he quotes a remark made by one of Krafft-Ebing's patients: '[I] am an enthusiastic follower of Richard Wagner, and I have noticed that most homosexuals share this predilection; I find *that precisely this music accords so very much with our* nature' (p. 175). See also Oskar Panizza, 'Bayreuth und die Homosexualität', *Die Gesellschaft* 11 (1896), 88–92.

[50] Puschmann, *Richard Wagner*, p. 59.

[51] Krauss, *Psychologie des Verbrechens*, p. 36.

eroticism, as it manifested itself both in his art and in his person, for does he himself not consider artistic creativity and sexuality to be intimately connected; does he not claim that the 'energy which one expends in the conception of art and in the sexual act is one and the same' (VIII 3, 23[2])? But, in typical fashion, he differentiates between a healthy and a pathological expression of sexual desire. The Classical artist maintains 'a prudent caution on principle regarding erotic matters'. He is strong enough not to yield to each and every erotic stimulus; he restrains, harnesses and rechannels his sensual nature. The degenerate is unable to inhibit his impulses; he lacks precisely that 'will to mastery' necessary for great art and the self-creation of great individuals. For Wagner and his ilk, art becomes both a means of giving vent to sublimated sexual urges and a refuge from them: an individual thus enslaved requires 'a hashish world, a strange and heavy smoke that enshrouds everything, every kind of exoticism and symbolism of the ideal, merely in order to be rid for once of *his* reality – he requires Wagnerian music' (VIII 3, 23[2]). Redemption or *Erlösung*, the grand theme of Wagner's music dramas, is – as it is for the hysterical Christian – nothing but a decadent longing for deliverance from one's pathological sexuality.

If, in *The Case of Wagner*, Nietzsche seeks to portray the modern artist as both hysteric and actor, it might seem strange, then, that he should describe the Dionysian artist in superficially similar terms in his next work, *Twilight of the Idols*:

> In the Dionysian state . . . the whole system of the emotions is aroused and intensified: so that it discharges its every means of expression at one stroke, at the same time forcing out the power to represent, reproduce, transfigure, transform, every kind of mime and play-acting. The essential thing remains the ease of the metamorphosis, the inability *not* to react (– as with certain hysterics who also enter into *any* role at the slightest sign). It is impossible for Dionysian man not to understand every suggestion; he overlooks no emotional sign, he has the instinct for understanding and sensing in the highest degree, just as he possesses the art of communication in the highest degree. He adopts every skin, every emotion: he is constantly transforming himself (*TI* IX, 10).

What is the relation between hysteria and histrionics here? A recurrent theme in Nietzsche's late writings is that there is a thin line separating health and sickness; that one state is frequently mistaken for the other. As we saw in the previous chapter, the hystero-epileptic seizures of the *homo religiosus* have throughout history been confused with the frenzied states of pure potency experienced by strong, creative natures. Similarly, the Dionysian artist only *appears* to exhibit the same symptoms as the hysteric: 'Just as one might today judge "genius" as a form of neurosis, so perhaps also the artistic power of suggestion – and our *artistes* are

indeed all too closely related to hysterical little women!!! But that speaks against "today", and not against the "artists"' (VIII 3, 14[119]). Modern humanity can recognise such signs of full and flourishing life only as morbid, because our concept of 'health' is too limited. What we consider to be sick need not be so for those who belong to a 'still stronger race' (VIII 3, 14[119]). The Dionysian state is not only a 'higher health'; it is also, as it were, a higher form of hysteria. (In the preface to the second edition of *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche speaks of 'neuroses of *health*' (*BT*, Attempt at Self-Criticism, 4).) Hysterical and Dionysian frenzy represent different points on a continuum of human aesthetic experience. The experience of intoxication, a heightened sensory awareness and extreme irritability are just as much the necessary preconditions for the production of art as they are symptoms of organic dysfunction. The difference lies in the relative health of the organism undergoing the particular experience: whether the inability to withstand a stimulus, say, is the result of fatigue or an explosive superabundance of erotic energy; whether the discharge of this energy is followed by the 'extreme enfeeblement' experienced by morbid natures or a renewed accumulation of power (VIII 3, 14[119]). Thus, what Nietzsche calls 'Dionysian histrionism' is worlds away from the mimicry and self-regarding melodramatic posturing of the hysterical modern artist. It is the original aesthetic experience, and involves tapping into a 'much fuller world of emotional expression' and ecstatically communicating and idealising this affectual world through physical signs and gestures (*TI* IX, 10). These histrios impart their experiences directly through the creative transformation of their bodies, the primordial medium of artistic expression. Given the sheer potency of the experience, these movements are spastic and unpredictable, and therefore resemble the convulsions of the hystero-epileptic.

The case of Nietzsche

Nietzsche's accusations of degeneracy (and sexual degeneracy in particular) in *The Case of Wagner* are above all an act of revenge. Wagner had suggested in a now notorious 1877 communication with Nietzsche's physician, Otto Eiser, that his apostasy might be linked to his sexual deviancy, his mind having become unhinged through onanism. Years later, Nietzsche was still wounded by his erstwhile friend's lack of discretion in publicising his amateur diagnosis of his state of mind: 'Wagner is full of malicious ideas; but what do you say to the fact that he exchanged letters (even with my doctors) in order to express his *conviction* that my changed way of thinking was the consequence of unnatural excesses, with suggestions of pederasty' (*KGB* III 1, p. 365). Wagner was thus the first, but

by no means the last, person to speculate on the pathological nature of Nietzsche's thought. Perhaps inevitably, given the dramatic character of his mental collapse and his sudden notoriety, Nietzsche soon supplanted Wagner as the archetypal degenerate genius in the popular imagination, ironically becoming, as the doctor Kurt Hildebrandt argued, the symbol of that very decadence against which he so obsessively fought.[52] The same medical idiom which he subtly invoked to question the validity of modern values was turned against him, and once more reasserted itself as a means of legitimising and sustaining that same value system.

Even before his mental collapse, reviews dismissed Nietzsche's works as 'psychiatric' or 'pathological' and quoted passages to prove it (*KGB* III 5, p. 221) – so much so that he complained: 'My new writings are being interpreted in the universities as proof of my general "decline"; people have heard a little too much of my illness' (*KGB* III 1, p. 365). Yet this was only the beginning of critics' preoccupation with his illness. In 1891, Hermann Türck suggested that Nietzsche's critique of morality was the expression of the 'inborn instincts of murder' or 'anomalies or perversions of the moral feelings' which he was unable or unwilling to keep in check.[53] Two years later, Max Nordau praised Türck's 'excellent little work' and diagnosis of Nietzsche's 'innate moral aberration and the inversion in him of healthy instincts', but added:

> It is not necessary that Nietzsche should have the wish to commit murder and other crimes. Not every aberrant person (*pervers*) is subject to impulsions. The perversion may be limited exclusively to the sphere of ideation, and get its satisfaction wholly in ideas. A subject thus affected never gets the notion of transforming his ideas into deeds. His derangement does not encroach upon the centres of will and movement, but carries on its fell work within the centres of ideation.[54]

Just as Nietzsche had used the notion of the *uomo deliquento* to attack Socrates, so Nordau diagnoses him as a criminal whose moral insanity and sadistic sexual pathology are manifested in his work rather than in acts of lawlessness. And in 1902, Paul Julius Möbius proposed that though Nietzsche's body betrayed no 'coarser signs of degeneration', the illnesses which he suffered prior to his breakdown were symptomatic of a general nervous exhaustion, placing him among the class of 'dégénérés supérieurs'.[55]

But Nietzsche, it seems, expected such attacks and took pre-emptive measures against them. He himself situated his chronic illness firmly

[52] Kurt Hildebrandt, *Gesundheit und Krankheit in Nietzsches Leben und Werk* (Berlin: S. Karger, 1926) p. 86.
[53] Hermann Türck, *Friedrich Nietzsche und seine philosophischen Irrwege* (Dresden: Glöss, 1891), p. 7.
[54] Nordau, *Degeneration*, pp. 448–9. [55] Möbius, *Nietzsche*, p. 56.

within the contemporary discourse of degeneration. He regarded his periodic bouts of illness as symptomatic of a '*thorough* nervosity' (*KGB* III 1, p. 336). In June 1887, he complained that he was suffering from 'a real *décadence*' (*KGB* III 5, p. 95). And a year later, he wrote to Franz Overbeck, delivering an extremely detailed description of the state of his health:

> Eternal headaches, eternal vomiting; a recrudescence of my old pains; masking deep nervous exhaustion when the whole machine is no good for anything . . . It is not just health that is lacking, but also the prerequisite for recovering my health – the vital energy is no longer intact. The losses incurred during at least 10 years can no longer be made good: during this time I have always lived off 'capital' and acquired nothing, absolutely nothing to replace it. But that makes one *poor* . . . One does not catch up *in physiologicis*, every bad day *counts*: that is something I have learnt from the Englishman Galton . . . I have ended up in an irksome and unsettled winter weather, which takes it out of me like a February in Basle. – This extreme irritability in response to meteorological impressions is *not* a good sign: it characterises a certain general exhaustion, which is actually my real illness. Everything else, like headaches and so on, is only a *consequence* of this and relatively symptomatic . . . I am certainly *not* suffering from a head complaint, *not* from a stomach complaint: but under pressure of nervous exhaustion (which is partly *hereditary*, – from my father, who also only died of the effects of a total lack of vitality – and partly acquired) the consequences appear in all forms (*KGB* III 5, pp. 347–8).

The combination of acquired and hereditary nervous exhaustion, an irritability exacerbated by bad weather,[56] the decline in vitality and the conviction that his health is irrecoverable – all these factors, as Nietzsche well knew, point to his degeneracy. Significantly, however, the two self-glorifying accounts of his life which he wrote during this year, the short self-portrait he sent to Georg Brandes in Copenhagen and *Ecce Homo*, paint an entirely different picture.

> All morbid disturbances of the intellect, even that semi-stupefaction consequent on fever, have remained to this day totally unfamiliar things to me, on their nature and frequency I had first to instruct myself by scholarly methods. My blood flows slowly. No one has ever been able to diagnose fever in me. A doctor who treated me for some time as a nervous case said at last: 'No! there is nothing wrong with your nerves, it is only I who am nervous.' Any kind of local degeneration absolutely undemonstrable; no organically originating stomach ailment, though there does exist, as a consequence of general exhaustion, a profound weakness of the gastric system (*EH* I, 1).

While he concedes that his illness is the product of a mysterious 'general exhaustion', Nietzsche goes out of his way to deny any suggestion of the

[56] Lombroso viewed susceptibility to meteorological influences as one of the symptoms of degenerate genius. Cf. *The Man of Genius* (London: Walter Scott, 1891), pp. 100–16.

nervous debility (and its concomitant symptoms) which he diagnosed in his letter to Overbeck. While he admits that he has been a '*décadent*', he qualifies this by distinguishing between the '*décadent* as such' and his own temporary bouts of exhaustion which have provided him with firsthand experience of the pathologies afflicting modernity; in fact, he claims, famously, that he represents the antithesis of decadence:

> My proof of this is, among other things, that in combating my sick conditions I always instinctively chose the *right* means: while the *décadent* as such always chooses the means harmful to him . . . I took myself in hand, I made myself healthy again: the precondition for this – every physiologist will admit it – is that *one is fundamentally healthy* (*EH* I, 2).

This is a far cry from the resigned tone of his earlier admission that he lacks the 'prerequisite for recovering my health', that his health struggles to attain even a 'delicate equilibrium'. What is more, the claim that he nursed himself back to health by instinctively prescribing himself the correct treatment is a direct contradiction of his admission to Overbeck that, when he first fell ill in Basle in 1876, his medical knowledge was rather lacking: 'The only regime which would have been appropriate then would have been the American Weir Mitchell cure: an extreme supply of the most nutritious food (together with absolute change of surroundings, company, interests). Actually, out of ignorance, I chose the opposite regime' (*KGB* III 5, p. 348). *Ecce Homo* is designed to correct that past negligence: his answer to his question 'why am I so clever?' is the fact that he has been careful in the 'selection of nutriment, of place and climate, of recreation' (*EH* II, 8) – that he has, in other words, deliberately and systematically applied the principles of the Weir Mitchell cure throughout his life. That this particular cure was designed to alleviate the symptoms of neurasthenia and hysteria means that this is a tacit reference to his own nervous exhaustion.

Nietzsche's deliberate misrepresentation of his health is ironic: not only because he would suffer his mental collapse a few short months later, but also because *Ecce Homo* itself was withheld from publication by his sister until 1908 – by which time he had repeatedly been denounced as a degenerate. Nevertheless, this ploy is obviously intended to differentiate him from those nervous and hysterical modern artists against whom he himself inveighs. But there is more at stake than this. In that vain, hubristic voice that many have interpreted as a sign of his imminent breakdown, Nietzsche not only announces himself in *Ecce Homo* as the prophet of a cataclysmic struggle between opposing value systems, which he expresses in the formula '*Dionysos against the Crucified*', but also identifies himself ever more closely with that god: as the incarnation of Dionysos in human form whose illness and recovered health represent his own Passion

and Resurrection. Accordingly, the consciously heroic self-portrait of the philosopher that emerges in the text echoes his description of Dionysian man in *Twilight of the Idols*, in whom the *appearance* of illness conceals a higher form of health. If, as Nietzsche suggests, the difference between the hysterical and the Dionysian artist lies predominantly in their respective states of health, and not in the superficially similar forms of aesthetic intoxication which they experience, then we see how crucial it is for him to present himself as the embodiment of the Dionysian constitution. There are other correspondences between his self-description and portrayal of the Dionysian artist. His famous account of the moment of inspiration when the idea of Eternal Recurrence took hold of him evokes his own descriptions of the involuntary release of creative energy experienced in moments of Dionysian intoxication:

> An ecstasy whose tremendous tension sometimes discharges itself in a flood of tears . . . a complete being outside of oneself . . . an instinct for rhythmical relationships which spans forms of wide extent . . . Everything is in the highest degree involuntary but takes place as in a tempest of a feeling of freedom, of absoluteness, of power, of divinity (*EH* IX, 3).

Finally, Nietzsche invites a comparison between his writing and the art of the Dionysian 'histrio', that protean nature who transforms himself constantly and is able to communicate a rich affectual world: 'To *communicate* a state, an inner tension of pathos through signs, including the tempo of these signs – that is the meaning of every style; and considering that the multiplicity of inner states is in my case extraordinary, there exists in my case the possibility of many styles' (*EH* III, 4). By his own admission, then, Nietzsche's Dionysian philosophy is itself a kind of acting, a playing with masks; his narrative voice is centreless, expressing a multiplicity of shifting perspectives and affects. But this style is Dionysian only so long as its basis is healthy, and health is precisely what the 'real' Nietzsche lacks: he crosses the fine line separating the Dionysian 'neuroses of health' and the degenerate hysteria of modernity. If we adopt a Nietzschean standpoint – that is, one that seeks to reveal the pathophysiology underlying cultural forms – then the extraordinary rhetorical performance in *Ecce Homo* deteriorates into the posturing of the hysteric; the narcissistic and self-mythologising persona collapses into a pathological vanity and mendacity that seeks to compensate for his chronic lability; and the diversity of his narrative voices is merely the symptom of hysterical capriciousness. Perhaps Möbius is right when he concludes:

> With an acuity which is admirable in an old philologist, he grasps the matter (even if *décadence* is a somewhat ill-advised word) and identifies himself as a degenerate . . . Now, he describes degeneration superbly, and he was able to do

so because he found it in himself. But what he acquired through his inner degeneration he only sees in the appearance of others, not in himself. There is no better way of describing Nietzsche's nature than by copying what he said about Wagner and then swapping the names . . . I place this perspective at the outset: Wagner's art [Nietzsche's writing] is sick. The problems he presents on the stage [in his books] – all of them problems of hysterics – the convulsive nature of his emotions, his overexcited sensibility, his taste that required ever stronger spices, his instability which he dressed up as principles . . . all of this taken together represents a profile of sickness that permits no further doubt. *Wagner [Nietzsche] est une névrose*.[57]

[57] Möbius, *Nietzsche*, pp. 149–50.

Conclusion

'No man', wrote one of Nietzsche's favourite writers, the American Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson,

> can quite emancipate himself from his age and country, or produce a model in which the education, the religion, the politics, usages, and arts of his times shall have no share. Though he were never so original, never so wilful and fantastic, he cannot wipe out of his work every trace of the thoughts amidst which it grew. The very avoidance betrays the usage he avoids.[1]

Throughout this study, I have been arguing that Nietzsche, whatever he may have claimed to the contrary, is no exception to this rule. Perhaps this sounds like a truism – after all, no thinker writes in a cultural or an ideological vacuum, and this must be as true of Nietzsche as of anybody else. But it is the extent to which this philosopher, who liked to portray himself as living in self-imposed alpine exile '6,000 feet above man and time', who saw himself as waging war against all that was ignoble and decadent in his culture; it is the extent to which Nietzsche failed to 'emancipate himself from his age and country' and remained a nineteenth-century thinker, sharing the hopes and fears of the *fin de siècle* and participating in a wide range of contemporary debates – it is this aspect of his philosophy that modern critics, especially in the English-speaking world, have tended to ignore. In this book, I have tried to redress the balance and situate his thought – or at least one strand of his thought – within its historical context.

Nowhere is Nietzsche's 'timeliness' more apparent than in his biologism. I have argued that the rhetoric of health and sickness which is so central to his writing, his enduring preoccupation with processes of evolution and degeneration, must be viewed not as arbitrary metaphors peculiar to Nietzsche or expressions of the personal symbolism of a valetudinarian, but rather as reflecting the wider biologisation and medicalisation of nineteenth-century cultural discourse that began with the publication and popularisation of Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. To console himself

[1] R. W. Emerson, 'Art', in *Essays* (London: Everyman, 1980), pp. 193–4.

for having failed to achieve during his intellectual lifetime the notoriety to which he aspired, Nietzsche often claimed that he was writing not for his own age, but for a readership that was as yet unborn – boasting, for instance, that it would be best if *Beyond Good and Evil* were not read until the year 2000. Now that year has passed, however, there are ways in which we have *forgotten* how to read him. Though we may (at least to some extent) have rejected the philosophical and theological orthodoxies which he sought to overturn, and though we may have become more conscious of the elaborate rhetorical strategies enacted by his texts, our remoteness from his age means that we are no longer familiar with the allusive iconography of race, degeneration and disease which energises his works. One of the objectives of the foregoing study was, therefore, to revitalise this imagery for the modern reader by exploring the contemporary associations evoked by his habitual recourse to biological language.

But Nietzsche's biologism involves more than the deployment of metaphors and images that were common currency during the last decades of the nineteenth century. It also functions as a unifying framework connecting and supporting the major themes of his thought. Thus we have seen, for example, how his critique of traditional morality and his conception of the inherent creativity of the world emerge as coherent – if not entirely consistent – strands of his commitment to non-Darwinian forms of evolutionism, and must be seen as a response to widespread attempts by Herbert Spencer, Ernst Haeckel and others to sustain value systems threatened by the theory of evolution. Contextualising his thought in this way not only serves to highlight its many continuities, which are often overlooked, it also exposes some of the inadequacies and time-bound limitations of his thinking. It is ironic, for instance, that, in seeking to refute Darwin's most radical proposals for explaining species change, he unwittingly lapses into an obsolete Romanticism; his largely uncritical acceptance of contemporary biological theories leads him to perpetuate precisely those metaphysical, pre-Darwinian ideas about nature which he sought to overcome. At the same time, he appeals to the value-laden authority of degenerationist psychiatry to confirm his deeply conservative and wholly conventional views on women and sexuality. Nietzsche's biologism is thus a double-edged sword. On the one hand, biology is a subversive weapon in his unholy war against the values of Judaeo-Christianity; on the other, it actually undermines his project of the transvaluation of all values, legitimating those nineteenth-century prejudices and attitudes from which he was unable (or unwilling) to liberate himself.

I am not trying to suggest that Nietzsche's thought is irrelevant today simply because he still has one foot firmly planted in the nineteenth century. But I believe that it is only by considering the inconsistencies as

well as the merits of his philosophy that we can arrive at a more balanced picture of Nietzsche and his place in the history of ideas than the one which has prevailed hitherto. In *Ecce Homo*, he prophesied: 'One day there will be associated with my name the recollection of something frightful – of a crisis like no other before on earth, of the profoundest collision of conscience, of a decision evoked *against* everything that until then had been believed in, demanded, sanctified' (*EH* XIV, 1). But his thought no more represents a clear break with the past – a paradigm shift – than does Darwin's. Like that of the English naturalist whom he so despised, Nietzsche's work is a strange melange of the old and the new, the radical and the conventional. Now that the centenary of his death and our own *fin de siècle* are behind us, it is perhaps an opportune moment to re-evaluate Nietzsche's complex relationship to his time. This study has, I hope, contributed in some small measure towards this end.

I have not attempted to offer up a single, exclusive or exclusionary reading of Nietzsche here. I am not suggesting that his thought is entirely reducible to biologism: metaphors drawn from medicine and the biological sciences are of course not the only recurring tropes in his profoundly varied and multifaceted writing. Furthermore, though I have throughout this book argued the necessity of 'contextualising' or 'historicising' Nietzsche's biologism, I have at all times endeavoured to avoid suggesting that his work is somehow reducible to, or generated by, some general historical 'context'. The same goes for my treatment of Nietzsche's sources: Nietzsche may have read widely and incorporated other thinkers' ideas into his own work, but it is not enough merely to establish the fact of such borrowings or the existence of a shared paradigm by enumerating common presuppositions, questions, themes or arguments. We must seek also to understand what Nietzsche actually *did* with those adopted ideas, how or to what extent he transformed them to suit his own ends. I have tried, therefore, to elucidate how the borrowed or the common actually functions in Nietzsche's works. Though Nietzsche may not be a bolt out of the blue, it would nevertheless be a serious mistake to conclude from the simple fact of his indebtedness to various scientific works, or his receptiveness to the prevailing climate of biologism, that there is no difference between his writing and that of, say, Charles Féré or William Rolph. Any study – such as this one – which aims to document shared assumptions or lines of influence within a given time or culture must address the issue of how common ideas function differently in different texts and bodies of work.

Another possible approach to Nietzsche's biologism – and one not pursued here – would be to explore how the same motifs of evolution and degeneration were variously exploited by *subsequent* thinkers, particularly

those who explicitly claimed to be Nietzsche's intellectual heirs. For late nineteenth-century anxieties about the imminent collapse of Western European civilisation were not assuaged as the new century dawned; cultural criticism continued to be expressed in terms of the medical bipolarity of normality and morbidity. A history of the concepts of 'health' and 'sickness' in post-Nietzschean German thought from the *fin de siècle* to the Third Reich has yet to be written. Such an account would explore not only the reception of Darwinism and non-Darwinian theories of organic change by later German philosophers, but also the ways in which they gave expression to their sense of decadence – in short, how both evolutionism and degenerationism continued to form part of the profoundly anti-modernist tenor of much German thought at the beginning of the twentieth century. Though the preoccupation with the decline and fall of modern civilisation was not of course confined to German culture,[2] it was arguably here, more than anywhere else in Western Europe, that degeneration became part of the philosophical discourse of modernity. To be sure, the colossal influence of Nietzsche's 'symptomatology of decline' partly explains this, but the philosophical preoccupation with decadence and regeneration could not continue to thrive throughout late Wilhelminian Germany and the agonies of the Weimar Republic without the persistence of an overwhelming sense of crisis – fuelled by real economic, political and cultural turmoil – and the perpetuation of a vocabulary of race and degeneration with which to express it.

Such a study would presumably focus primarily – but not exclusively – on *Lebensphilosophie*, that trend in early twentieth-century European philosophy which has its roots partly in the reception of Nietzsche and partly in the neo-vitalistic reaction against mechanism in biology represented by figures such as Hans Driesch and Henri Bergson. Herbert Schnädelbach has suggested that *Lebensphilosophie* – which rejects the theoretical abstractions of traditional philosophy in favour of irrationalism and the immediate, undistorted experience of 'Life' in all its fullness – 'can be defined simply by the fact that the contrast between "health" and "sickness" is the dominant normative antithesis in it'.[3] The study would need to place philosophy within the context of broader cultural and social developments, exploring the links between the post-Nietzschean revaluation of the body – reflected in, for example, the glorification of health and strength in *Lebensphilosophie* and Max Nordau's calls for a revived 'muscular Jewry' (*Muskeljudentum*) – and the contemporaneous flourishing of

[2] See Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*; William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel, 1880–1940* (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[3] Herbert Schnädelbach, *Philosophy in Germany, 1831–1933* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 145.

a variety of practices and lifestyles aimed at overcoming the decadence associated with modern existence: burgeoning reformist movements advocating vegetarianism, temperance, gymnastics, sexual hygiene and the emergent discourses of eugenics and scientific racism. But the rhetoric of health and sickness was not the exclusive preserve of *Lebensphilosophie*. For example, Franz Brentano argued that philosophy, like fine art, goes through periods of 'ascending evolution' and 'times of decadence', the latter stage exemplified by the woolly mysticism of Idealism; Hegel, he believed, was the 'most extreme degeneration of human thinking'.[4] Just how widespread such language was can perhaps be gauged by the following remark made by the young Martin Heidegger, who, in 1910, cited the 'ground-destroying rage for the new', a lack of spiritual profundity and the modern need for 'continually self-extinguishing momentary excitements' as factors pointing to a 'decadence, to a sad falling away from health and the transcendent value of life'.[5]

Perhaps the clearest example of the influence of Nietzsche's anti-Darwinist arguments can be seen in the work of the phenomenologist Max Scheler, probably the most renowned German philosopher of the 1920s but today best known for his anti-Kantian ethics. For Scheler, the prevailing, mechanistic understanding of evolution is itself a symptom of cultural malaise, and time and time again in his writings he seeks to refute the Darwinian–Spencerian understanding of life in general and of the evolutionary process in particular. Though Nietzsche 'understood next to nothing about biology', Scheler contends, it was nevertheless he who intuitively recognised the 'falsity of the original and basic conception underlying a large part of modern biological science': that is, the misplaced faith in adaptation as the principal mechanism by which life advances. But adaptation – an essentially reactive and passive process – is not sufficient to explain the development of organic structures. Life for Nietzsche – and Scheler wholeheartedly agrees with him in this respect – is 'not something that "adapts" or is "adapted" to'.[6] The essence of life lies rather in its activity. The organism is not an inert object modified by environmental pressure; rather, the organism itself, guided by a dynamic vital impulse, modifies the environment to suit its own needs: 'the tendency towards

[4] Franz Brentano, *Die vier Phasen der Philosophie* (Leipzig: Meiner, 1926), pp. 7 and 23.

[5] Martin Heidegger, 'Abraham a Sankta Clara. Zur Enthüllung seines Denkmals in Kreenheinstetten am 15 August 1910', in *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt: Klosterman, 1976 –), vol. XIII, p. 3. Norberto Bobbio would later describe the philosophy of Heidegger and Jaspers itself as decadent in *The Philosophy of Decadentism. A Study in Existentialism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1948).

[6] Max Scheler, 'Versuche einer Philosophie des Lebens', in *Gesammelte Werke*, Maria Scheler and Manfred S. Frings (eds.), 15 vols. (Berne: Francke, 1954–97), vol. III, p. 315.

expansion and active shaping of the environment – Nietzsche one-sidedly and inappropriately called it the "will to power" – precedes all those processes which determine the increasing (or decreasing) adaptation of individuals to their environment'. The struggle for existence as postulated by Darwin is a secondary, indeed purely negative, phenomenon, taking place only when 'life in a species stagnates and declines'. The competitive struggle for resources between organisms is the consequence, then, of an 'inadequate unfolding of life's power'.[7]

How do we account for such an erroneous conception of life as that dominant in the biological sciences? To answer this question, Scheler borrows another Nietzschean motif: *ressentiment*. But unlike Nietzsche, Scheler holds not Christian ethics but rather that specifically modern form of asceticism, bourgeois morality, to be the product of the poisonous '*ressentiment* of the vitally unfit against the fit'. The steady rise of the biologically inferior, 'relatively stagnant' bourgeoisie, the victory of industrialism and commercialism over the military and theological-metaphysical spirit, has brought with it the '*most profound* perversion of the hierarchy of values': 'the *subordination of vital values to utility values*', the elevation of instrumental reason and utilitarianism over everything that is noble, powerful and healthy. Modern Darwinian biology 'finds "facts and reasons" to justify this primary variation of the hierarchy of values'. It no longer views life as an original phenomenon (*Urphänomen*), but merely as a complex of mechanical and mental processes. The organism is reduced to a mere machine, its organs to tools whose function is primarily to promote the survival of the structure as a whole. Life is thereby stripped of any independent value apart from its utility value: 'for modern biology it is almost self-evident that the expressions, movements, and actions of the living being, and the organs and nervous system serving them, are only developed and propagated to the degree they are useful for the preservation of the bodily machine'. This impoverished understanding of life's irreducible grandeur represents nothing more than the projection of the values and concerns of the rabble onto nature; the entire mechanistic world-view 'is only the immense intellectual symbol of the slave revolt in morality'.[8]

Nietzsche may have seen through the delusions of Darwinian–Spencerian biology and rejected the idea that the primary impulse of all life is towards self-preservation, but Scheler believes that Nietzsche was

[7] Max Scheler, 'Der Genius des Krieges und der Deutsche Krieg', in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. IV, pp. 32–3.

[8] Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*, trans. by William W. Holdheim (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), pp. 162, 171, 154, 160, 161, 172.

equally mistaken in assuming – as we saw in chapters 1 and 2 – that life can be defined exclusively as self-growth, that evolution results in increasing individuation, and that sympathy is therefore an expression of declining vitality. Nietzsche's thought is in this respect no less false and one-sided than the formulation of the principle of the struggle for existence. Rejecting the notion that egoism is primordial, even healthy, Scheler seeks to reconcile Nietzschean evolutionism with the morality of compassion: the conception of life as 'will to power' does not preclude the possibility that sympathy is also a fundamental vital impulse. Scheler suggests that organisms exhibit a '*unified power-striving*'; mutual support in the acquisition of power actually results in the 'highest possible efficacy of this tendency to power'.[9]

But for all his anxiety over the inverted evaluation of vitality and utility, Scheler does not regard biological values as higher than spiritual values. This, he maintains, is the error to which both Nietzsche and Spencer, in their different ways, fell prey. For the proposition which underlies all religions and ethics – that 'Man is the most valuable being' – is only justified on the basis of values independent of vital values. Measured solely against biological values, modern humanity appears as the 'sick animal' in Nietzsche's sense, representing 'a kind of *faux pas* which life has taken in its evolution on earth'. This aberrance lies in what Scheler calls 'man's *impotence* in the *vital* sense, his unique neediness, the stagnation of the processes of differentiation in peripheral organs, and, above all, the *fixation* of his vital *ability* to develop'. Lacking the resources to evolve new structures, the human being instead relies on tools and technology. Thus the refinement of the intellect – which Scheler defines as the capacity to design and produce such artificial surrogates – is always the consequence of biological enfeeblement. Unable to modify and extend its milieu, to unfurl the rich potentialities of life, the human being simply adapts. This process of adaptation is called civilisation. But although civilisation arises as a means of compensating for a vital deficit, it – and modern, industrial society in particular – also has a retroactive effect, exacerbating human debility. It gives rise to more diseases than it can treat and heal through progress in medicine and hygiene; it leads to declining birth rates by causing infertility; it enables the 'impotent' to multiply and flourish, and allows their base values to prevail.[10] Like Nietzsche before him, Scheler is haunted by the spectre of the degenerate urban masses, a spectre that can only be exorcised by returning vital values to their rightful place in

[9] Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, trans. by Manfred S. Frings and Roger L. Funk (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 278.
[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 285, 287, 288.

the hierarchy of human evaluations:

> we must conclude that the spirit of modern civilisation does not constitute 'progress' (as Spencer thought), but a *decline* in the evolution of mankind. It represents the rule of the weak over the strong, of the intelligent over the noble, the rule of mere quantity over quality. It is a phenomenon of decadence, as is proved by the fact that everywhere it implies a *weakening of man's central, guiding forces* as against the anarchy of his automatic impulses. The mere means are developed and the goals are forgotten. And that precisely is decadence![11]

We find a similar preoccupation with evolution and degeneration in Oswald Spengler's monumental and enormously influential book *Decline of the West* (1918), in which he seeks to account for the rise and fall of cultures by appealing to the universal laws of progress and dissolution operating in nature. But Spengler is always careful to distinguish his own evolutionism – which he prefers to call a 'metaphysics of life' – from 'the materialistic biology of the age of Darwin'.[12] For, like Scheler and many other German thinkers of his age, Spengler finds Darwin's 'cult of the useful' abhorrent and believes his 'mechanics in physiological garb' to be a calumny against the organic unity of life celebrated by Goethe, who, Spengler claims, 'anticipated just about as much of Darwinism as there will be left of it in fifty years from Darwin'.[13] Evolution according to Spengler is not a gradual process, but rather takes place through saltations, through 'profound and very sudden changes . . . in the being of plants and animals, changes which are of a cosmic kind and nowise restricted to the earth's surface'. There is, he believes, no more conclusive refutation of Darwinism than that furnished by palaeontology. The fossil record supplies no proof for the transitional structures required by Darwin's theory, but instead reveals stable and unaltered forms across long periods of geological time, forms which '*appear suddenly and at once in their definitive shape*; that do not thereafter evolve towards better adaptation, but become rarer and finally disappear, while quite different groups crop up again'. Such phenomena cannot be explained by the concept of utility. Instead, Spengler appeals to some mysterious 'Destiny' which 'evoked into the world life as life, the ever-sharper opposition between plant and animal, each single type, each genus, and each species'. Life everywhere follows 'an inward organic logic', ascending and branching off to higher forms when the vital energy which each class of organisms possesses expands, or descending when that same

[11] Scheler, *Ressentiment*, p. 174.
[12] Oswald Spengler, *Briefe, 1913–1936* (Munich: Beck, 1963), p. 773.
[13] Oswald Spengler, *Decline of the West*, trans. by Charles Francis Atkinson, 2 vols. (New York: Knopf, 1936), vol. I, pp. 155, 111n.

energy contracts, leading to 'senility of the species and finally to its disappearance'.[14]

This same organic logic governs cultural evolution; it, too, lurches unpredictably forwards, propelled by some mysterious cosmic process. Spengler's 'morphological' approach to history is based on the essentially Romantic intuition that cultural artefacts – political and cultural institutions, architectural forms, economic organisations – are the outer expressions of something internal and hidden: of Life itself, or of the 'soul' of races or cultures. History consists of successive externalisations of this elemental life-force. But just as species and individual organisms must grow old and eventually become extinct when the creative energies of life dissipate, so entire cultures necessarily disintegrate when the 'being-streams' which flow through them are exhausted. This period of irreversible cultural decline Spengler calls 'civilisation'. Civilisation concentrates life in the cities, draining the countryside of its resources and causing the racial stock to degenerate: the modern 'megalopolis' harbours 'lamentable poverty and degraded habits, and the attics and mansards, the cellars and back courts are breeding a new type of raw man [*Urmenschen*]'. The rise of the 'parasitical city dweller', 'cohering unstably in fluid masses', at the expense of the earth-bound peasant means the death of the organic principle, the triumph of sterility over fecundity, desiccated intellectualism over blood and instinct. Cut off from the energising influence of his native soil, stricken by *taedium vitae* and falling birth rates, the civilised urbanite is Nietzsche's 'last man'; his arrival represents – at the level of the race if not of the individual – an 'essentially *metaphysical* turn towards death'. This biological and spiritual exhaustion gives rise to a specifically 'megalopolitan art' that is nihilistic, imitative, artificial, inauthentic – a 'faked music, filled with artificial noisiness of massed instruments; a faked painting, full of idiotic, exotic and showcard effects'. Spengler explicitly endorses Nietzsche's charges against Wagner's music – its 'decadence, theatricalness', its 'ruthless bombardment of the nerves' – but generalises them and extends their scope to cover all contemporary art-forms. The 'impressionistic' art of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Spengler concludes, is 'meticulous, cold, diseased – an art for over-developed nerves'. Together with the demand for luxury, the craze for the vicarious viscerality of sport, and the rapidly changing fashions that characterise the tastes of modern

[14] *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 32–3, 104. Despite his emphasis on universal processes of evolution and degeneration, the eminent eugenicist Fritz Lenz attacked Spengler for his ignorance of racial biology in an article entitled 'Oswald Spenglers "Untergang des Abendlandes" im Lichte der Rassenhygiene', *Archiv für Rassen-und Gesellschaftsbiologie* 17 (1925–6), 289–309.

civilisation, art has become little more than titillation for the jaded, desensitised masses.[15]

Spengler's reflections on the 'world-city' as the necropolis of culture and the debasement of art to mere 'nerve-excitement' echo to some extent those of Georg Simmel. For the concept of neurasthenia is also fundamental to Simmel's understanding of the experience of modernity, which he develops in his famous essay 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1903). As the title suggests, this work is an attempt to describe the peculiar mentality of the urbanite, which is typified by a lack of inner security, resulting in a 'faint feeling of tension and vague longing', an 'uncanny restlessness', a 'helpless urgency' which originates in the 'outward bustle and excitement of modern life'. Simmel's account draws on standard motifs in turn-of-the-century psychiatry and cultural criticism; the psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality is, he claims, the *'intensification of nervous life* which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli'.[16] The accelerating pace of modern urban existence, the more varied forms of economic, occupational and social life, the ever changing impressions flooding the senses – all this means that the metropolis makes entirely different demands on the nervous system than does the countryside or small town. The mentality of the quiet rural community is for Simmel based upon largely emotional relationships, which are rooted in the more unconscious layers of the psyche. However, this soft and tender seat of the personality cannot withstand the enervating conditions prevailing in the urban environment. In order to adapt to his milieu, therefore, the city dweller evolves a protective organ, a means of preserving 'subjective life against the overwhelming power of metropolitan life',[17] a superficial form of consciousness which is least sensitive and most remote from the self: the intellect. Metropolitan mental life is for Simmel distinguished by its rationalistic and calculating character, by its logicality, objectivity and tendency to perceive the world in terms of means and ends – and for this reason there is an intrinsic connection between the intellect and the rise of the money economy, both of which develop only in the big city.

This intellectuality is an expression of that more general 'tendency to increase the distance between man and his objects'[18] which Simmel sees as characteristic of modern culture. The relentless bombardment

[15] Spengler, *Decline*, vol. II, p. 102; vol. I, p. 32; vol. II, p. 104; vol. I, pp. 294, 291, 289.
[16] Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in *Simmel on Culture* (London: Sage, 1997), p 175. Translation modified.
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 176.
[18] Georg Simmel, 'Sociological Aesthetics', in *The Conflict in Modern Culture and Other Essays*, trans. by K. Peter Etzkorn (New York: Teachers College Press, 1968), p. 80.

of the senses with new and ever changing impressions leads the individual to establish a psychological barrier between himself and his social and physical environment, something which makes life amidst the huge bustling crowds tolerable for the nervous person. In its most extreme and pathological form, this need for distance is manifested as *Berührungsangst*, 'the fear of getting into too close contact with objects', which results from 'a kind of hyperaesthetics, for which every live and immediate contact produces pain'. But in milder forms this emotional trait is endemic to the modern period. At a social and cultural level Simmel sees this trend instanced in phenomena as varied as the dissolution of the family and in modern aesthetics; in the rise of neo-Kantianism; in the love of the art of distant cultures; and in the pre-eminence of the fragment and the aphorism. Such artistic forms impose only a mild degree of excitement on weakened nerves. In the same way, symbolism has supplanted naturalism. In its cruder forms, naturalism was an attempt to grasp the closeness and immediacy of things, an attempt that was necessarily short-lived because our 'sensitive nerves were unable to tolerate the contact, and they shied away as if they had touched hot coals'.[19]

At the level of the individual, however, this neurasthenia often takes the form of complete indifference, a sentiment which Simmel sees expressed in the blasé attitude, the typical mentality of the city dweller. If *Berührungsangst* was characterised by a prickly hypersensitivity, then the blasé attitude represents, physiologically speaking, the desensitising of the nerves. Just as a 'life in boundless pursuit of pleasure makes one blasé because it agitates the nerves to their strongest reactivity for such a long time that they finally cease to react at all', so the rapidly changing and closely compressed sense-impressions of urban life 'force such violent responses, tearing the nerves so brutally hither and thither that their last reserves of strength are spent'.[20] An incapacity thus emerges to react to new sensations with the appropriate energy, giving rise to the characteristic impassivity which Spengler, too, also sees as symptomatic of modern civilisation. Inevitably, however, this nervous exhaustion must be compensated by the craving for more excitement, for more intense stimulation. And here Simmel's description of the mentality of the city dweller is once again in tune with contemporary psychiatry's obsession with nervous degeneration. Richard von Krafft-Ebing himself spoke of the need of the 'blasé metropolitan' for ever more extreme thrills, declaring: 'The more overwrought and unhealthy the nervous system, the more diverse and piquant are the stimuli which it requires in order to guarantee

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 78.
[20] Simmel, 'Metropolis', p. 178.

satisfaction.'[21] Such stimulants are provided by the metropolis in the form of cigars, strong alcohol, gambling, crime reportage in the newspapers, nerve-shattering music and love affairs. Simmel cites the mania for travelling, and, in an article published in English in the *International Monthly* in 1902, the vogue for socialism amongst certain members of the bourgeoisie, which is motivated by 'a diseased longing to experience new sensations' and 'the power of attraction that everything paradoxical and revolutionary is always capable of exerting upon numerous members of a nervously excitable and degenerate society'.[22] This search for bigger thrills explains the modern fickleness with regard to taste and styles, and the occasional attempts at radical breaks with the 'tendency to increase distance' such as naturalism and materialism. But such trends are no more 'healthy' than those which are motivated by a prickly hypersensitivity. Rather, the continual oscillation between both extremes, between close confrontation with objects and an excessive distance from them, as evidenced in the simultaneous enthusiasm for Böcklin and impressionism, for naturalism and symbolism, for socialism and Nietzsche – this fluctuation is a sign of 'the same neurasthenia', of '[e]xhausted nerves . . . drifting between hypersensitivity and lack of sensitivity'.[23]

Writing in the same year as Simmel, in 1903, the historian Karl Lamprecht believed that modern nervousness was no longer pathological in character, no longer a symptom of degeneration. Rather, this 'life of the nerves that has increasingly entered into consciousness' is the basis of a more refined, highly evolved form of sentience.[24] Simmel speaks in almost identical terms of an 'intensification of nervous life'; but although he presents modern nervosity – expressed in the self-defensive reserve and aversion between individuals – as the very precondition for the autonomy and freedom which the inhabitants of the metropolis enjoy in contrast to their rural counterparts, it seems that he views this phenomenon primarily as a form of sickness. In the article published in the *International Monthly* mentioned above, he employs the motif of neurasthenia in contexts which are unambiguously negative and wholly conventional. For example, he refers to the conviction motivating socialism that the upper classes are 'so decadent, so exhausted and neurasthenic' as to be unfit to govern. He speaks of the 'foolish old maid, the mannish and emancipated female, the hyperaesthetic woman, whose sensitiveness borders on perversity', as being the inevitable consequences of the introduction of

[21] Krafft-Ebing, *Ueber gesunde und kranke Nerven*, pp. 9–10.
[22] George Simmel, 'Tendencies in German Life and Thought since 1870', reprinted in David Frisby (ed.), *Georg Simmel: Critical Assessments*, 3 vols. (London: Routledge, 1994), vol. I, p. 9.
[23] Simmel, 'Sociological Aesthetics', p. 80.
[24] Lamprecht, *Zur jüngsten deutschen Vergangenheit*, vol. I, p. 59.

labour-saving technology in a culture in which the activity of women is restricted to the home. He goes on to parrot an entirely commonplace yet pernicious medical misapprehension: the 'masculinization of women goes hand in hand with the feminization of men. The obliteration of specific sex characteristics is everywhere a sign of biological decadence.' Doubtless thinking of Nietzsche, he adds: 'some thinkers even believe that these feminine struggles for freedom are a symptom of the degeneration of the race'.[25]

What is most interesting about Simmel's work is not the fact that the picture of modern society which he presents in many ways closely corresponds to the stock motifs of German cultural criticism, but that one motif is conspicuously absent from it. The defining characteristics of modern culture which Simmel cites in his essay on the metropolis – urbanisation; the predominance of money and its corrosive influence on traditional values; intellectualism; cosmopolitanism; nervosity – these symptoms of social crisis are linked in the public discourse about degeneration by the figure of the Jew. An obvious example is the work of Simmel's contemporary, the sociologist Werner Sombart, who, in his *Das Judentum und das Wirtschaftsleben*, portrayed the Jew as the quintessential modern man, as city-dwelling, money-grubbing, aridly intellectual and end-oriented; as restless, as displaying a pathological subjectivism, as lacking an essence, as an actor. Yet in Simmel's text this figure is wholly absent. Or, more accurately, it has been displaced: the Jew is no longer at the centre of the work, but rather outside it; he is the very consciousness through which this vision of the world is filtered.

Simmel was the son of baptised Jewish parents; he had grown up within the Lutheran Church, and identified deeply and passionately with German culture. Rarely did he explicitly refer in his works to the plight of Jews in Wilhelminian Germany. Despite this, however, his Jewishness was a visible and defining feature of his character for his contemporaries, even for his friends. Sophie Rickert, wife of the philosopher Heinrich Rickert, recalled Simmel as being 'tall, slender' and of 'dark, unmistakably Jewish type'. His features 'could make no claim to beauty', were even 'grotesque'. His wife, on the other hand, was 'at least as tall as he was, light blonde and so "Aryan" that even the Third Reich could not have objected'. Marianne Weber, Max Weber's wife, also contrasted the impeccably Aryan features of Simmel's spouse – who was, she remembered, 'tall and slender, full of grace and dignity, a noble, Nordic apparition, blonde and blue-eyed' – with Simmel himself, who was 'barely medium-seized, smaller than she was, typically Jewish, ugly'. Tellingly, the two women cannot agree whether Simmel was taller than his wife, and this lack of

[25] Simmel, 'Tendencies', pp. 12, 17, 19.

unanimity is repeated in many portraits of Simmel's physique – some recall him as beautiful, others ugly, some remembered his voice as high and penetrating, others as melodic. This perceived physical malleability was reflected in the versatility of his mind.[26]

For Simmel's Jewish inheritance, it seems, was not only inscribed in his external appearance, but also in his mentality and ultimately in his work itself. Martin Buber remarked that Simmel exhibited 'Jewish ways of thinking and gestures'. Others noted his cleverness, his talent for abstraction and mobility – qualities which were commonly associated with the Protean and intellectually agile Jew. More insidiously, Simmel's colleague, the historian Dietrich Schäfer, wrote to the Baden educational authority, advising against his appointment to the Chair of Philosophy at the University of Heidelberg on the grounds that Simmel's works displayed his Jewishness. 'He is . . . an Israelite through and through, in his external appearance, in his manner and in his cast of mind.' Though superficially brilliant, Simmel's thinking lacks profundity and intellectual rigour; the frothiness of his thought is demonstrated by the fact that his lectures are attended by a disproportionate number of women and representatives of the 'oriental world', Simmel's ideas appealing particularly to the tastes and inclinations of the latter. Worse, his world-view is not grounded in the intellectual framework of German culture, and his philosophy is typical of those modern tendencies which are 'more corrosive and negative than foundational and constructive'. Furthermore, it is astonishing how often acquaintances describe him as being himself 'nervous'. Georg Lukács referred to his 'hypersensibility'. Another contemporary suggested that Simmel might be seen as the foremost 'representative of the epoch described by Karl Lamprecht as the age of irritability'.[27] And, according to one reviewer of Simmel's major work, *The Philosophy of Money*, its author possessed 'the almost frightening sensibility of the neurasthenic'.[28] As both Jew and neurotic, then, Simmel came to be seen, rather like Nietzsche before him, as an archetypal figure of degenerate modernity.

Another person who viewed Simmel's work as typically Jewish was the philosopher, author and physician Theodor Lessing. Seeking to establish what he called a 'characterology of the modern Jewish mind', he used Simmel's work as a case-study, which, he believed, exhibited all the hallmarks of degenerate Jewish intellectualism. Like many of his contemporaries, Lessing thought that modern civilisation was dominated by the

[26] Kurt Gassen and Michael Landmann (eds.), *Buch des Dankes an Georg Simmel. Briefe, Erinnerungen, Bibliographie*, 2nd edn (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1993), pp. 212, 213–14.

[27] *Ibid.*, pp. 222, 26–7, 175, 204.

[28] S. P. Altmann, 'Review of *Philosophie des Geldes*', *American Journal of Sociology* 9 (1904), 46.

'Semitic-American man of facts', with rationality and money becoming the decisive factors in German cultural life. And the foremost representatives of this culture – Jewish professors, lawyers and members of the literati – exhibit 'the type of racial decay'. Lessing, too, describes Simmel as a 'purely intellectual personality', as 'nervous to the fingertips', as 'restless', the intellectual descendant of Ahasverus, the Wandering Jew. The difference here is that Lessing was himself Jewish.[29]

Lessing was a complex and controversial figure during his lifetime. A communist, feminist and pacifist, his outspoken condemnation of political events in Germany and his increasingly vocal Zionism resulted in his murder in 1933 by Nazi thugs. At the same time, though, he was pilloried by the Jewish community, who took offence at his disparaging and seemingly anti-Semitic attitude towards the piety and poverty of Eastern European Jews and the materialism and rationalism of their Western counterparts. Lessing, however, never saw any discrepancy between his commitment to Zionism and his scorn for the plight of modern European Jewry. Consequently, he dismissed the outcry which followed in the wake of his revelations of the depravity of Galician Jews as 'Jewish irritability', as 'a piece of social neurasthenia, a pathology of the national soul [*Volksseele*]'.[30] Calling himself an 'unrelenting scourge of Jewish degeneracy',[31] he believed that by forcing his fellow Jews to recognise the evils of contemporary culture he could rouse them to seek national regeneration in a Jewish state. For the present turpitude of the Jews – most obviously manifested in their instrumental and pragmatic reason – was not an inherent characteristic of the race, but was, rather, a consequence of the exigencies of history; a talent for abstraction and commercialism had grown out of its need to adapt to conditions in the ghetto. Indeed, Lessing even suggests that, as the one-time descendants of Aryans, the Jews originally possessed a more intuitive form of consciousness. Nevertheless, modern Germans are, he claims, biologically more primitive – and hence more healthy – than Jews, and presumably less cerebral, more emotional. Interestingly, Lessing suggests that the historically conditioned 'uncanny spiritualisation of mental energies' has made Jewish psychology a counterpart to the psychology of women.[32] For Lessing, it is not the man who is the more rational, logical, biologically and culturally more advanced being, but the woman – and women have been compelled to develop these traits as a result of their greater exposure

[29] Theodor Lessing, *Philosophie als Tat* (Göttingen: Hapke, 1914), pp. 342, 312, 313, 305, 306, 308.
[30] Quoted in Rainer Marwedel, *Theodor Lessing, 1872–1933. Eine Biographie* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1987), p. 141.
[31] Theodor Lessing, *Einmal und Nie Wieder* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1969), p. 397.
[32] Lessing, *Philosophie als Tat*, p. 317.

to pain and suffering. Having had a reasonably easy ride of things, man, like the German, is closer to nature and thus guided more by emotion and instinct. In his own way, then, Lessing perpetuates the anti-Semitic myth that Jewishness and femininity were intimately linked.

Lessing saw his exposure of Jewish degeneration as part of a broader attack on the norms and values of modern civilisation, the philosophical foundations of which he had developed together with his anti-Semitic boyhood friend, the philosopher, psychologist and graphologist, Ludwig Klages. Both thinkers based their later thought on the putative antagonism between two basic principles: the intellect (*Geist*) and the soul (*Seele*). The intellect, which is currently enjoying pre-eminence in modern culture, is the very essence of disease, the harbinger of 'decadence, of depopulation, or at least a vital weakening and physical impairment of the human race', whereas the primordial soul is part of the chthonic, creative processes of life itself.[33] Like Lessing, Klages identifies *Geist* with Jewishness. Unlike Lessing, however, who views these categories primarily in psychological terms, Klages raises the concept of the intellect and thus also the Jew to the level of a metaphysical absolute, a malevolent force lying outside life. The Aryan, on the other hand, who embodies the *Seele*, is characterised by his instinctual spontaneity and earthbound vigour. Yet for all his abundant strength, this healthy, diluvial creature was as powerless as Nietzsche's sovereign individuals before the rise of Judaeo-Christian culture, which – again like Nietzsche – Klages regards as the legacy of 'race-mixing and blood-tainting' among slave peoples.[34] But the degeneracy of modern civilisation is for Klages not just manifested in the predominance of Jewish intellectualism. This 'semitically conditioned racial decline' has also brought with it an epidemic of nervous illness, and, more specifically, hysteria. To be sure, this hysterism does not appear everywhere in a virulent form; in 'smaller doses', however, it colours modern life. To illustrate his point, Klages advances what should by now be a familiar phenomenology of decadence – for he adduces more or less the same examples of cultural decline as critics both before and after him, not least Simmel and Lessing: he lists such symptoms as the adoption of mannered idiosyncrasies, dilettantism, scandal-mongering in the newspapers, the triumph of gesture and style over content, parliamentary democracy, and so on.[35] In other words, this simultaneous process of 'semitisation' and hysterisation destroys the soulful profundity of true German *Kultur*; in its place there is inauthenticity and superficiality:

[33] Theodor Lessing, *Der Lärm. Ein Kampfschrift gegen die Geräusche unseres Lebens* (Wiesbaden: Bergmann, 1908), p. 4.

[34] Ludwig Klages, 'Brief über Ethik', in *Sämtliche Werke*, Ernst Frauchiger et al. (eds.), 9 vols. (Bonn: Bouvier, 1964–82), vol. III, p. 671.

[35] Ludwig Klages, *Die Probleme der Graphologie*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. VII, pp. 94n, 92–3.

'a *faked humanity* seems to prevail where the old-established races fall prey to corruption'.[36] As we saw in chapters 5 and 6, hysterics were regarded by contemporary psychiatrists as sly, deceitful actors; like women, Jews were considered to be particularly susceptible to nervous disorders; and, again like women, Jews were thought, as a consequence of their rootlessness and need to adapt to foreign cultures, to lack an essence. Following Nietzsche, who, in *The Case of Wagner*, draws on this complex chain of associations and portrays his former mentor Richard Wagner as a hysteric, an actor and a Jew, Klages also sees the degeneration of modern culture into histrionism and Jewishness as exemplified not only by Wagner, but by his own former idol, the poet Stefan George. It did not matter to Klages whether Wagner or George had Jewish ancestry or not – with the twisted reasoning peculiar to all anti-Semites, he declares that, though there exists a 'Jewish character', not every Jew has these traits nor does one have to be a Jew to have them.[37]

Lessing's own investigation of the aetiology of modern nervousness took the form of an attack on the increasing problem of noise pollution in urban, industrialised European societies. In a series of works culminating in his monograph *Der Lärm* (*Noise*) in 1908, he warned that progressive loss of hearing and nervous exhaustion would be the inevitable consequences of continual exposure to such jarring sounds as the clatter of public transport, the cries of street vendors, the ringing of telephones, the thunder of automobiles, the beating of rugs, and the chiming of church bells. Max Nordau, whose book *Entartung* had done so much to popularise the concept of degeneration, believed that the increasing sensitivity to noise was a symptom of 'social neurasthenia'. Only feeble degenerates dreamt of a noiseless future; human beings would have to adapt to these circumstances or else perish in the remorseless struggle for existence. Lessing knowingly turns the tables on Nordau. An increased sensitivity to sounds, he counters, is not necessarily pathological. The ear is a richer, more subtle organ than the eye; a more developed sense of hearing, a greater receptivity to music can therefore be the sign of more highly evolved individuals and cultures. It is only *excessive noise* which makes this refinement a danger to the nerves and mental health, and leads to an attitude of indifference which recalls Simmel's description of the neuropathological basis of modern culture: 'It seems as if our nervous systems have become *simultaneously* insensible and hyperaesthetic . . . Modern man seems to have become so "nervous" that only

[36] Ludwig Klages, 'Der Fall Nietzsche–Wagner in graphologischer Beleuchtung', in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. VIII, p. 578; Klages, *Die Probleme der Graphologie*, p. 96.

[37] Klages, 'Der Fall Nietzsche–Wagner', pp. 578–80n. This point is discussed by Lessing in *Einmal und Nie Wieder*, p. 424. Lessing denounced as 'spiteful' Klages' attempt to link 'the concept of "hysteria" with that of "Jewish nature"' (p. 425).

very loud noises can *grip* him.'[38] Nowhere is this nervousness more evident than in modern music – and particularly in the mixture of delicacy and bombast that characterises Wagner's works.

The true hallmark of degeneracy, however, is the need to *make* noise. Although Lessing founded the *Deutscher Lärmschutzverein* (German Association for Protection Against Noise) in order to combat the aural menace of city life, he ultimately believed that it was impossible to legislate against noise; for it derives from an ineradicable, universal *Urtrieb* and is therefore not just a consequence of the 'increased traffic' of the city or a symptom peculiar to the 'restlessness and homelessness of the modern soul'.[39] Lessing may have deplored the rise of modern 'intellectual culture', but he did not, like Klages, believe that this requires a return to a life of primeval spontaneity. For the elemental, emotional forces of life are never wholly extinguished. Instead, they are manifested in sublimated form in religion, art and music, by which humanity can achieve a necessary and periodic release from the ascetic sobriety of reason. Noise is simply the most primitive, crude and ultimately destructive means of accomplishing such deliverance. But making a racket is far more than just an intellectual anaesthetic; it is also symptomatic of the frenzied egoism of Western civilisation, its 'will to power'. The heated rhetoric of demagogues, the clamour of the masses, the empty chatter of cultural life – all these are nothing more than expressions of the still untamed struggle for life in society, a means by which one individual seeks to impose his tyrannical will upon another, to make himself heard amidst the cacophony of screaming voices and throbbing machines. The West's boisterous self-regard is a sign of cultural immaturity, an imperfect internalisation and spiritualisation of the libidinal drives. For Lessing sees culture as an evolution towards silence – towards the contemplation, tranquillity and communality valued by the 'late, biologically old civilisation' of the Orient and achieved through a peaceful self-discipline which imbues life with dignity.[40] Ultimately, Lessing sees the regeneration of European culture taking place not through a programme of social hygiene, but through a wholesale moral renewal – through a transvaluation of values.

Nietzsche, then, is not the only philosopher of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to articulate his ideas within the discursive framework of evolution and degeneration. But no other thinker, it seems to me, has such an ambivalent, complex relationship to the themes of race and disease, progress and decline. Health and sickness may well

[38] Lessing, *Der Lärm*, p. 30. See Lawrence Baron, 'Noise and Degeneration: Theodor Lessing's Crusade for Quiet', *Journal of Contemporary History* 17 (1982), 165–78.
[39] Lessing, *Der Lärm*, p. 8.
[40] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

be the central normative antithesis in the writings of men such as Scheler, Spengler, Simmel, Lessing and Klages, but their work lacks the almost obsessive proliferation of medical metaphors that we find in Nietzsche, his sheer rhetorical exuberance. Nietzsche's biologism is more wide-ranging, more total than that of his immediate successors. Their work also lacks the fundamental contradictoriness of Nietzsche's position – a nineteenth-century faith in the institutional authority of the biological sciences which co-exists uneasily with a belief that these same disciplines are infected with false values; the characteristic hovering between literalness and metaphor, sincerity and irony. We might say that, though Nietzsche shares a common language both with his contemporaries and his intellectual heirs, he speaks it with a different accent. More importantly, perhaps, a consideration of Nietzsche's disciples also underscores the degree to which the rhetoric of health and sickness – even within *Lebensphilosophie* – has been made to serve diverse ideological ends, from anti-Semitism to Zionism, from conservatism to socialism. To appreciate this, to recognise that biologism is a significant thread running through the fabric of much post-Nietzschean German thought, prevents us from making the rash and unhistorical attempt to trace a direct line of descent from Nietzsche's philosophy to National Socialism simply on the basis that both are couched in the same language of evolution and degeneration. Steven Aschheim, for example, has argued that the 'Nazi bio-political understanding of, and solution to, "degeneration" was in multilayered ways explicitly Nietzsche-inspired'.[41] That such a claim is misguided is, I hope, clear from the argument of this book. The doctrines of National Socialism – and the crimes prepetrated in their name – represent the logical conclusion of the academic debates about evolution and degeneration in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, something that one of Hitler's officers at the 1934 Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg was clearly aware of when he proclaimed: 'The German form of life is definitely determined for the next thousand years. The Age of Nerves of the nineteenth century has found its close with us.'[42] Nietzsche's voice, then, as I have repeatedly argued throughout this book, must be seen as only one among many in a larger chorus, and, for the fanatical positivists of the Third Reich, rather less authoritative than that of Fritz Lenz and other respected scientists at the forefront of the eugenics movement. Ultimately, in trying to clarify Nietzsche's troubled relationship to his own time, we may also help to shed light on his often vexed links to a subsequent, darker period of German history.

[41] Steven E. Aschheim, 'Nietzsche, Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust', in Jacob Golomb (ed.), *Nietzsche and Jewish Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 14.

[42] Quoted in William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1960), p. 318.

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