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).