

Gregory Moore, 2002. *Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 228 S.

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The metaphor-dedicated researcher's attention will undoubtedly be attracted by the triptych title of Gregory Moore's 228-page book: *Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor*, first published in 2002 by Cambridge University Press.

The book opens with brief acknowledgments [VI] followed by a short yet useful list of abbreviations [VII]. The tightly-woven introduction [pp.1-17] provides the appetiser for the main course composed of two parts – Part I Evolution [pp.21-111], Part II Degeneration [pp.115-192]. After the conclusion [pp.193-211], the reader shall peruse a well-documented bibliography [pp.212-224] as well as an index [pp.225-228].

In the introduction, Gregory Moore clearly states his objectives. Firstly, his book concerns the alternative in the interpretation of Nietzsche's utterances as regards his 'anti-Darwinian' theory of evolution: is the 21st-century reader confronted to biological reductionism or simple metaphor? Secondly, the author's goal is to demonstrate how Nietzsche, still entangled in his century's values, reinterprets 'the complex web of associations'[p.13] attached to the discourses of evolution and degeneration: the issue that relates to the paradox of the inherent 'metaphoricity of language' is addressed in such a way as to arouse the interest of the reader and we cannot be but grateful to Gregory Moore for it.

The avowed intention to clarify the ambivalence between the Darwinism vs. the anti-Darwinism of Nietzsche endures throughout the book as the primary goal of the author.

Based upon the assumption that all languages are 'inescapably metaphorical'[p.10] and that there is 'no proper knowledge without metaphor'[p.11], the contents of the book are characterised by a high degree of complexity that stems from a wide range of references to philosophical, scientific as well as sociological and anthropological sources. This feature appears quite striking in Part I, which falls into three chapters respectively entitled 'The physiology of power' [pp.21-55], 'The physiology of morality'[pp.56-84] and 'The physiology of art'[pp.85-111]. The main goal of the first chapter is to clarify how Nietzsche's perception of the world was influenced by his more or less intimate knowledge of thinkers like Friedrich Lange or Wilhelm Roux, therefore simultaneously providing a detailed account

of how the sociopolitical and biological parameters were merging at the end of the 19th century.

In the chapter entitled ‘The physiology of power’, a thorough analysis of Darwin’s theory is supported by the requirement to assert a strong foothold in the complex historical framework within which Nietzsche expressed his ideas on evolution. The attitude of Gregory Moore is one of distanciation, which grants his analysis a remarkably original flavour. For instance, the fact that Nietzsche ‘appears never to have read a single work by Darwin himself’[p.22] is explicitly mentioned, thereby leading the reader to sharpen his/ her critical approach.

The issue of progress is tackled thanks to a well-targeted parallel drawn between Nietzsche and Darwin that leads the reader towards a more and more intimate understanding of their mutual although unaware influence. It should be highlighted that the prose design of the book stems from these features: complex, and sometimes fairly intricate, its access seems to be anything but straightforward. Can I go as far as saying that this could be a deterrent, even for the non-innocent information seeker?

The concept of metaphor gradually emerges in its most classical definition: in the aristocracy of the body, for instance, the metaphor of the systems of organs corresponds to the social organism being a stage in the evolution of the natural world. Constantly putting forward the genuinely socially adequate Nietzschean thought vs. his absence of innovative approach, the author cleverly creates suspense and gives impetus to his demonstration, thus producing an incentive for the reader to proceed further. Therefore, the physiology of morality involves the rejection of an instinct of self-preservation, the relationship between the individual and the herd, and the concept of the social organism. Nietzsche’s project ‘can be viewed as a plausible and consistent enterprise when seen as one aspect of this widespread contemporary biologism’.

The physiology of art lays specific emphasis upon the omnipresence and the omni-influence of the creative urge: evolution is viewed as a fundamentally artistic process.

Interestingly, biographical hints merge with sociological parameters in order to provide the highest possible degree of accuracy to the demonstration. Yet, only the reader with a strong cultural background shall fully grasp the tightly-woven account provided in Gregory Moore’s book. The issue remains for him/ her to combine Nietzsche’s rational thought and its mythical aspects ; the dual organisation of the discourse efficiently contributes to making this synthesis possible, since it grants the book a visible framework.

For Nietzsche, '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'. Beyond the notion of biological Romanticism, we are provided with an extremely convincing account of rhythm being fundamental to the process of life. The perspective adopted enables the author to scrutinize the mechanisms, the 'nooks and crannies', of Nietzsche's thought.

With the organic, the artistic also begins. The poet overcomes the struggle for existence. The function of human art is to aestheticize the terror and absurdity of the world. Art conceived as the expression of certain organic functions is in adequacy with Nietzsche's profile so far.

Having comprehended the territory of evolution, Gregory Moore can proceed to the second part of his analysis: Degeneration.

In the Nietzschean perspective, degeneration appears as the necessary counterpart for evolution. The fact that the idea of decadence had become a medical as well as a purely cultural concept at the end of the 19th century is conveniently laid as the basis for the forthcoming part of the book, since the idea of cultural decline 'runs like a red thread' throughout Nietzsche's work.

It is therefore made quite clear through the exhaustiveness of Gregory Moore's system of intertextual references that familiar topoi, such as lassitude, impotence and weakness considered as typical symptoms of degenerate nervousness, are omnipresent in both the literature and medical writing of the late 19th century. Any healthy organism is thus conceived as an 'aristocracy of cells'. The complex web of Nietzsche's revaluation of morality is foregrounded thanks to the chapter entitled 'Christianity and degeneration' which I find particularly articulate and convincing, as it relies upon a tight network of quotations and keywords taken from explicitly referenced texts. Hence the concept of 'a theoretical ghetto of biological difference' logically arises when it comes to race, religion and eugenics. The diverse facets of degeneration are cleverly exploited and interconnected so as to provide an intellectually satisfying report about the scientific basis of a century's literary production, and beyond. The book culminates with the last chapter of Degeneration, 'Degenerate art', whose aim 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.' Health is an index of beauty, which brings Nietzsche close to Goethe for whom morphological harmony is the definition of health.

The whole itinerary of Gregory Moore's book is comprised between two landmarks: how to move from A [Biology] in order to reach B [Biologism], or how metaphor can represent the ideal device to transform science into a doctrine, and make it fit into a given philosophical, historical, sociological and political context.

When the reader reaches the Conclusion, he/ she will probably deem appropriate the following statement quoted from Gregory Moore's text: '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.'