

Robert C. Holub. *Nietzsche's Jewish Problem: Between Anti-Semitism and Anti-Judaism.* Princeton University Press 2016. 296 pp. \$35.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780691167558).

Robert Holub's book on Nietzsche appears to unfold an eternally recurring Greek Dionysian Tragedy. The Tragedy is of the struggles of a great mind that ends its travails not with the achievement of wisdom but with the sorry and lonely death of an insane rage. However, there is a deeper tragedy in Holub's book. Holub reveals the tragic tale of Nietzsche, who seeks a transvaluation of values. But Nietzsche at the height of his great intellect becomes enslaved by the stereotypes embedded in European culture. Nietzsche fails to escape the domination of his own civilization. Nietzsche fails to transvalue the Enlightenment civilization of Europe. It is a civilization corrupted by a phobia based on traditional stereotypes about Jews and Judaism that even its best minds unthinkingly absorbed. How then are we to evaluate the thought of a mind that in its brilliance fails by its own standards?

This Dionysian Tragedy is guided by an Apollonian super-text—the idea that we can only understand and evaluate a thinker in that thinker's cultural context. 'Indeed, the point of this book is that we must situate Nietzsche in his own era, as someone reacting to events and ideas of the late nineteenth century, if we are going to come to a real understanding of his complex views on Jews and Judaism' (xix). One might complain that though Nietzsche also imbibes this super-text of the dominance of historical context for evaluating and interpreting the thought of our great thinkers, one ought to use Nietzsche's own ahistorical theory of valuing one's civilization from above, from outside one's civilization. So, according to Nietzsche's own lights we ought not to judge him from within his own times, but from our times. Only the outsider view will allow us to transvalue Nietzsche's values and see how they distorted his thought.

I leave this double-edged and paradoxical objection aside: we must judge Nietzsche from within his own views, within his own context, and yet, Nietzsche's own views ask us both to respect context but also seek to escape and transvalue Nietzsche's own context. I return to the objection later because it raises a deeper question.

The main questions of the book are: was Nietzsche an anti-semite? If so, how did Nietzsche acquire his anti-semitic views? Was Nietzsche a proto-Nazi, a proto-fascist? Did Nietzsche's thought, at the least, lay the intellectual tracks to the death camps of the Shoah? Plot-spoiler: the questions are from a different historical context and when answered are based on a misunderstanding and misinterpretation of Nietzsche's historical context.

I act as a Greek chorus in Holub's tragic story not only of Nietzsche but of his background Judeophobic culture. As the Greek chorus, I echo Holub's story line in blunt terms to ensure the audience catches every twist and turn in the plot-line and every danger point for the protagonist, Nietzsche, in this tragic drama. I should also point out that Holub is his own excellent Greek Chorus: both the preface and conclusion, in clear Socratic fashion, outline his own contribution to the understanding and evaluation of Nietzsche. The preface and conclusion inform the reader of the content of each chapter, and how each chapter contributes both to the overall argument of the book, but also contributes to how to properly interpret and evaluate Nietzsche's thought—as Nietzsche develops his thought over his *sane years*. So, I will spare the reader a detailed summary because the reader could not find a better summary than Holub's own summaries in the preface and conclusion. Rather, here is an overview of the book in the form of a brief drama:

Greek Chorus: Nietzsche did not have any experience of Judeophobia in his familial home before leaving for university. Nietzsche loved his sister.

Nietzsche: Where there are no Jews, there is no need to be wary of them.

Greek Chorus: Nietzsche went to university, Bonn and later Leipzig. In Leipzig he saw Jews and quickly picked up on and echoed the Judeophobic views of his classmates. He even expressed his views to his family and his sister in letters. This is the first time his sister heard Judeophobic views. She could not have inducted Nietzsche into those views.

Nietzsche: Where there are Jews there is a need to be wary of them.

Greek Chorus: Nietzsche had Judeophobic views before coming under the influence of Wagner. Wagner merely reinforced Nietzsche's Judeophobic views. Nietzsche even learned how to code his Judeophobia in his early works under the influence of Wagner's wife.

Nietzsche: I wanted to avoid censure by the Jewish powers in all the key areas of German society.

Greek Chorus: Nietzsche introduced his sister to the coterie around Wagner where she met her future husband and then became his partner in his political anti-semitic organization. However, Nietzsche was anti all political groups, including the political anti-semitic group of his brother-in-law's organization.

Nietzsche: I avoid all political groups. Plurality of political groups requires democratic-liberalism, and democratic-liberalism is for the weak. Moreover, political anti-semitism is the wrong solution to the Jewish problem or Jewish question.

Greek Chorus: Nietzsche escapes Wagner's hold over him. Nietzsche writes his own great masterworks where he develops his unique outlook on the Judeo-Christian civilization that has dominated the western civilization and adopted the slave mentality of Judeo-Christianity. Moreover, Jews are so clever with their argumentative, Socratic mentality, as to hoodwink those who are more numerous and more powerful to also adopt a slave mentality.

Nietzsche: I alone have transvalued Judeo-Christian civilization. As Holub says, 'It is difficult to locate Nietzsche's sources for his grand view of world history. It appears very likely that his hypothesis of Jewish hegemony over quondam master races, accomplished through the clever insinuation of a life-negating morality, was his own invention' (178).

Greek Chorus: Nietzsche had the ultimate conspiracy theory. Nietzsche said that Jews subverted Christian Judeophobia to their own ends, and by having Christians praise humility and poverty, against Jewish avarice, Christians were deceived into reinforcing the Jewish slave mentality. Jew hatred is a Jewish plot to achieve Jewish world domination.

Nietzsche: 'Nietzsche's introduction of the Jews in *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887) as the originators of a slave morality that has now gained hegemony through Europe uses questionable racist notions...' (206).

Now I come to the question of whether Holub's treatment of Nietzsche in his book is open to the paradoxical objection I raised earlier: Nietzsche's theory of transvaluation and his respect for history requires, on one side, understanding and judging Nietzsche within his own terms, within his context. Also, within his own terms, Nietzsche's theory of transvaluing values requires, on the other side, transvaluing Nietzsche from outside his own context. Is the Nietzsche portrayed in this book capable of going beyond his own background, his own culture—is the Nietzsche, as portrayed in this book, capable of transvaluing his own values? Holub implicitly thinks not. Nietzsche develops an unusual view for his times of how Christianity is an extension of Judaism. However, Nietzsche applies the common stereotypes of Judeophobia to Christianity as well. So, Nietzsche is the ultimate Judeophobic—so ultimate, that Nietzsche takes Judeophobia to the extreme and becomes the stereotype of the Judeophobic thinker, at least until the Nazis arrived on the scene.

A terrible question intrudes itself here: did Nietzsche provide the intellectual rationale for the Nazis to think that the extermination of a segment of humanity is a moral necessity, a categorical imperative? Holub does not answer because the question could not have arisen within Nietzsche's historical context: 'Indeed, the assumption underlying this study of Nietzsche's "Jewish Problem" has been that we cannot properly understand Nietzsche's relationship to Jews and Judaism outside of his historical context' (214). We are bound by our cultural context and cannot raise questions that could lead to the transvaluation of the values of our culture. If so, this book indirectly refutes Nietzsche's major contribution to philosophy and presumes that we must all serve our culture and become instruments for the transmission of our culture. However, if Nietzsche turns out to be correct that we can pose questions, create concepts and theories that reshape our culture—that transvalue our values—then the Dionysian Greek Tragedy of Nietzsche's life could be turned into a Greek satire. Nietzsche failed to transvalue his values, but if he had stretched his mind a bit more and grasped the concept of Judeophobia, he would have realized that the question of the Jewish question is intellectually dishonest and morally corrupt.

Holub could reply to this last comment about Nietzsche's failure to transvalue his culture's own values by referring readers to his footnote—'With regard to the views of Enlightenment philosophers on Jews, we should note that their rationalism and "optimism" did not necessarily lead them to overcome their traditional and cultural Judeophobia' (229). This historical observation and the paradoxical objection to both valuing historical context and transvaluing values surfaces the question at the book's depths: are the feet of philosophers stuck in the mire of their own times and are the visions of philosophy only seen through eyes looking backwards?

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