



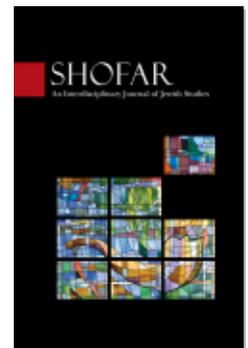
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*Nietzsche's Jewish Problem: Between Anti-Semitism and
Anti-Judaism* by Robert C. Holub. (review)

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BOOK REVIEWS

NIETZSCHE'S JEWISH PROBLEM: BETWEEN ANTI-SEMITISM AND ANTI-JUDAISM
Robert C. Holub. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016. 271 pp.

In *Nietzsche's Jewish Problem: Between Anti-Semitism and Anti-Judaism*, Robert Holub re-opens the case that Nietzsche may have been Judeo-phobic, a case largely considered closed within contemporary Nietzsche scholarship. Holub's work is primarily historical, avoiding a systematic engagement with Nietzsche's philosophy in favor of reliance on Nietzsche's unpublished correspondences and notebooks. Nonetheless, this rigorously researched book deserves attention from Nietzsche prosecutors and defenders alike.

Holub's first chapter details the appropriation of Nietzsche by anti- and pro-Semitic thinkers, as well as by leftist and rightist political ideologies, without commenting on the validity of these varied interpretations. Rather, Holub documents how Nietzsche was (mis)used up to, during, and after the Second World War. The chapter also persuasively argues—*contra* defenses of Nietzsche made by Lukacs, Schelecta, Roos, and Kaufmann—that Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche is not as guilty for Nietzsche's appropriation by National Socialists as previously thought. Her selective editing and falsification of her brother's writings was "primarily personal, not ideological" in motivation. Figures such as Alfred Baeulmer, a Nazi interpreter who incorporated Nietzsche into National Socialism by claiming that his critical remarks against Germans and nationalism applied only to Bismark's second empire, damaged Nietzsche's reputation far more than Elisabeth.

Chapter 2 discusses the cultural and political climate toward Jews where Nietzsche grew up, without taking a stand about how this informs Nietzsche's culpability vis-à-vis accusations of antisemitism. Despite Nietzsche's strong desire to study with the Jewish scholar Bernays and his appreciation for Lessing, who advocated tolerance toward Jews, Holub shows that Nietzsche "blended in rather inconspicuously with a climate of anti-Jewish biases that flourished almost everywhere around him." In particular, Holub highlights offhanded comments Nietzsche makes about the pervasiveness of Jews in Leipzig when recalling his time with Gersdorff, an outspoken antisemite.

Chapter 3 analyzes Nietzsche's relationship with the Wagners. Parts of Holub's argument are speculative, such as the claim that Nietzsche refused a trip with Mendelssohn's son because of his Jewish heritage, though we have

no documentation of Nietzsche's reason for declining the offer. More central to Holub's position is an unpublished—and perhaps undelivered—draft of a lecture written before *the Birth of Tragedy*, which associates Socratism with “the Jewish press.” After receiving a copy, the Wagners encouraged Nietzsche to omit this reference. From this, Holub concludes that the absence of *any* reference to Jews in Nietzsche's writing during his “Wagner period” demonstrates that he now resorts to a “cultural code” to voice his antisemitism and that Nietzsche's criticism of Socratic optimism always obliquely expresses an anti-Jewish stance. The first conclusion begs the question, requiring that we consider Nietzsche an anti-semitite before “decoding” his writings. The second conclusion is philosophically contentious. Nietzsche criticizes Socratic optimism for valuing truth over and against life, while he typically characterizes Jewish optimism as the construction of a fiction to invert values and thereby preserve a mode of life. Nevertheless, Holub again demonstrates that Nietzsche made offhand comments about Jews in personal correspondences, suggesting that he may have been more at home in an antisemitic environment than Nietzsche sympathizers care to admit.

Chapter 4 provides a deflationary account of Nietzsche's break with the Wagners and of his friendships with Paul Rée, Siegfried Lipiner, and Josef Paneth. Holub rightfully notes that Nietzsche's break with the Wagners was likely motivated by personal reasons more than by a rejection of their antisemitism, at least initially. The chapter's most damning evidence against Nietzsche comes from a letter written to Elisabeth after Nietzsche's falling out with Paul Rée over his relationship with Lou Salomé. Feeling betrayed, Nietzsche attacks Rée using the racial stereotype of usury, though, as Holub admits, Rée's Jewish heritage is not referenced in any of Nietzsche's published writings. Holub takes Nietzsche's friendly correspondences with and praise of Lipiner and Paneth as evidence that Nietzsche is either ambivalent toward Jews or merely willing to use them for personal promotion. Holub dismisses §251 of *Beyond Good and Evil*—which commends Jews as “without a doubt, the strongest, toughest, and purest race living in Europe”—in similar fashion: at best, this demonstrates ambivalence; at worst, it is essentialist.

Chapter 5 dismisses Nietzsche's vehement criticism of antisemitism by distinguishing antisemitism as a political movement from Judeo-phobia more generally. After conjecturing that Nietzsche's rejection of the former was motivated by personal disagreements with the Wagners, his publisher Ernst Schmeitzner, and the Försters, Holub takes up Nietzsche's vitriolic condemnation of Theodor Fritsch, editor of the *Anti-Semitic Correspondence*, concluding that Nietzsche

is concerned only with preserving his own reputation. Where Nietzsche openly mocks antisemitism, claiming it is unsuspectingly close to those values it opposes, Holub speciously infers that Nietzsche's brief with antisemites is that they are not anti-Jewish enough.

Chapter 6 discusses *On the Genealogy of Morality* and *The Anti-Christ*. Crucially, Holub takes the former to be a "history of religion"—though this reductive gloss is one many Nietzsche scholars would take issue with, as some take the work to reconsider Judeo-Christian values via an affectively charged, quasi-mythological account of their emergence. Indeed, conflating genealogy and history is a significant faux pas among Nietzsche scholars. Similarly, where most academics think Nietzsche recognizes Judaism as a turning point in Western morality's development, one which enables Christianity's ascent, Holub sees the *Genealogy* as showing that Nietzsche attacks Christianity because it is "merely the vehicle that propagates 'Jewish values.'" Regarding passages from *the Anti-Christ* which anchor Nietzsche's critique of morality in a rejection of Platonism, Holub manages to argue that "Jews were not only at the 'root' of Christianity, but also of Platonic thought." Even if one grants the highly contentious claim that Judaism, more than Christianity and Platonism, is Nietzsche's main target, Holub does not ask whether discriminating against an individual based on their religion is substantively different from an axiological critique of religious values. Nor does he consider how criticizing Christianity on the basis of its Jewish origins inverts the antisemitic tendency to champion Christianity over Judaism.

Holub's conclusion is softer than expected. The answer to the question "Was Nietzsche an antisemite?" is "anything but straight-forward" (208). Furthermore, he suggests that we "recognize that a great deal of Nietzsche's thought has little or no obvious relationship to the Jewish Question" (209). This tempered conclusion notwithstanding, Holub's analysis could be improved. In particular, the heavy reliance on unpublished material from Nietzsche's notebooks and letters requires defending; as Holub's conclusion seems to admit, it is unclear whether and to what extent these materials inform our reading of Nietzsche's published work. More importantly, Holub's analysis requires a serious engagement with Nietzsche's philosophy. Those moments where Holub analyzes Nietzsche's work rely on questionable interpretations that fail to consider other secondary scholarship. Besides, absent an explicit treatment of crucial portions of Nietzsche's philosophy—for example, his philosophical anthropology, his concepts of race, opposition, and optimism, his criticisms of liberalism—it

will be difficult to make even the most damning evidence against Nietzsche the historical individual apply to Nietzsche's philosophy.

Holub's work is admirable and certainly worth reading. His erudite treatment of Nietzsche's personal life demands a reevaluation of those attempts to vindicate Nietzsche currently on offer. In the end, the topic of how Nietzsche and his philosophy relates to the Jewish Question should—and must—remain open.

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JEWES AND ANTI-JUDAISM IN ESTHER AND THE CHURCH

Tricia Miller. Cambridge: James Clarke, 2015. xiii + 210 pp.

Beloved by Jews, the biblical book of Esther has had a checkered history of reception among the gentiles. Early Christian theologians casually overlooking the first few chapters of the book expressed discomfort with its violent and vindictive resolution. Martin Luther famously disparaged Esther for seeming to promote an inchoate form of Jewish nationalism. To this day, the very qualities of the book that ensure its enduring appeal to Jewish readers find their ways into antisemitic tirades of the basest variety, including those targeting the Jewish state.

Acknowledging that unfortunate phenomenon, Tricia Miller proposes to trace a continuous history of Esther's abuse in the hands of Christian critics of the State of Israel apt to misconstrue its message of redemption as a message of hate. A research analyst at the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA), Miller focuses her criticism on those evangelical Christians whom she accuses of blindly subscribing to a Palestinian narrative of Israeli oppression entailing the same outdated supersessionist theology that informed past Christian ambivalence toward the book of Esther.

Regrettably, the author's high-minded premise falls flat on arrival. As she acknowledges in her introduction, the present study originated in Miller's doctoral dissertation, which she published under separate cover as *Three Versions of Esther: Their Relationship to Anti-Semitic and Feminist Critique of the Story* (2014). Yet what she offers in the volume presently under review duplicates so much of her previous work that it barely rates above self-plagiarism. The new book is essentially an abridgement of the old with a few new elements inelegantly tacked on at the end. Consequently, the first four of its five chapters are concerned with issues of no clear relevance to Miller's stated agenda.