

Duncan Large

Ex oriente tenebrae!

Orientalism and Anti-Semitism in Oscar Levy's Nietzsche

1 Introduction: Oscar Levy on Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*

As general editor of the first *Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche* in English translation,¹ Oscar Levy (1867–1946) played a vital part in the first wave of Nietzsche reception in England. Patrick Bridgwater argues: “rarely can a translation of a modern œuvre have exercised such powerful influence on so many important writers”.² None of the translations in Levy's English Nietzsche edition is by Levy himself (although he was translating two of Benjamin Disraeli's novels into German at the same time);³ instead, in addition to negotiating the rights, corralling the translators and financing the edition, he proselytised for Nietzsche in his own writings through introductions and other essays. These certainly had the desired effect of winning readers for Nietzsche and raising awareness of the recently deceased German philosopher at an otherwise highly sensitive period of Anglo-German relations in the lead-up to the First World War. At the same time as Levy was promoting Nietzsche, though, he was not doing him any favours in the longer term by aligning him with various other causes which were dear to him personally, attaching Nietzsche's name to his own dubious political programme. In this essay I want to examine Levy's Nietzsche more closely by focussing on one of the less prominent – but none the less symptomatic – among his Nietzsche essays, his introduction to Nietzsche's late autobiographical text *Ecce homo*.

1 *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, 18 vols., ed. Oscar Levy (Edinburgh and London: T. N. Foulis, 1909–1913).

2 Patrick Bridgwater, *Nietzsche in Anglosaxony: A Study of Nietzsche's Impact on English and American Literature* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1972), 20. On Levy's importance to the developing “Nietzsche movement”, see especially Leila Kais, “*Le Nietzscheanisme, c'est moi*”: *Oscar Levy und die Einführung Nietzsches in England* (Berlin: Parerga, 2010).

3 Benjamin Disraeli, *Contarini Fleming: Ein psychologischer Roman*, trans. Oscar Levy (Berlin: Oesterheld, 1909), and *Tancred oder Der neue Kreuzzug*, trans. Oscar Levy (Munich and Berlin: Müller, 1914).

Levy was one of the first commentators to really appreciate this text. *Ecce homo* was written very rapidly, in the space of only three weeks in the autumn of 1888 as Nietzsche's 44th birthday present to himself, and the searing honesty with which he lays himself (and his family) bare led to the text's being suppressed by his sister Elisabeth and remaining unpublished during Nietzsche's lifetime. It was not first published in German till 1908, and then in a ruinously expensive "bank director's edition",⁴ but only three years later Levy included it (in a translation by Anthony M. Ludovici) in his *Complete Works* as volume 17 of 18.⁵ Perhaps not surprisingly – for the text had already gained some notoriety by this stage – it was a success: 2,000 copies were made of the first edition, 1,500 copies of the 1924 reprint. These figures emboldened Levy (and his publisher Allen & Unwin) to produce a pocket edition of the text with a print run of 5,000 copies in 1927, equipped with a new introduction by Levy himself (the 1911 version had had a fairly brief and factual introduction by the translator Ludovici – this replaced it).⁶

Levy's introduction to *Ecce Homo* addresses four topics: a) the often mean-spirited and hostile reception that greets the figure of the genius; b) the irrelevance of Nietzsche's madness to an interpretation of his work (even a work as late as this, written so close to Nietzsche's breakdown in January 1889); c) the accusation that *Ecce Homo* is "the most conceited book in the world's literature"⁷ (arguing instead that humility was a Christian virtue which Nietzsche rejected); and d) Nietzsche's self-characterisation as a "fatality" (in the title of the book's fourth chapter, "Warum ich ein Schicksal bin" or "Why I Am A Destiny/Fatality"). Characterising Nietzsche as a genius *sui generis* and a gadfly who "gets upon everybody's nerves",⁸ Levy squarely confronts the charge usually levelled against Nietzsche's late work, and defends it robustly against the claim that it is already tinged by Nietzsche's incipient madness, describing it as "one of Nietzsche's best books".⁹

Levy does a tolerable job of covering some of *Ecce Homo*'s main themes in his introduction, though Ludovici had been more successful in doing this in his

4 See William H. Schaberg, *The Nietzsche Canon: A Publication History and Bibliography* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 185.

5 *Ecce Homo (Nietzsche's Autobiography)*, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici, in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 17 (Edinburgh and London: T.N. Foulis, 1911), ed. Oscar Levy, 1–143.

6 Publication details from Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo (Nietzsche's Autobiography)*, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici (London: Allen & Unwin, 1927), iv. References are to this edition.

7 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici, x.

8 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici, vii.

9 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici, x.

earlier introduction, and Levy is ultimately not interested in being dutiful. Instead, his introduction comes alive in its final section when for the most part Levy takes leave of Nietzsche in order to take stock of “our present chaos”,¹⁰ the sorry state of Western civilisation in the wake of the Great War. Levy here describes a dramatic clash of world-historic forces, a global *agon* being fought out between East and West:

the Russian revolution was the victory of faith. They know it not, they even pretend to despise the religion which helped them to victory. And yet, this is the lever which raised them into power, this the lever, by means of which they are raising the whole of Asia against Europe. The nationalism of the East is fast becoming a holy nationalism, a nationalism inspired by a moral ideal, a nationalism directed against “exploiting Europe”, a nationalism whose standard-bearers, like the Jews of old, may one day consider themselves “chosen”, and “the sword of the Lord and of Gideon”.

“India for the Indians”, “China for the Chinese”, “Java for the Javanese”: thus the battle-cries sound in our ears from this awakening East. [...]

Ex oriente tenebrae!

Against the dark cloud threatening from the East, the light, emanating from Nietzsche, will be of help to Europe. The light of the Greek Ideal, rekindled by Nietzsche – a light opposed, now as of yore, to Oriental bombast, savagery and mysticism – should be the pillar of fire leading Europe out of her present desert.¹¹

On one level this is just another version of the standard “Athens vs Jerusalem” trope, with Nietzsche occupying the former position. He is made to represent the Greek Ideal, Europe, light, reason and scepticism in opposition to the East (or Oriental), Asia, darkness (benightedness – “bombast, savagery and mysticism”), Bolsheviks and other “new Jews”, faith and moral ideals. Clearly there are other troubling aspects to this rather freewheeling passage, too: for example, Levy’s (and, supposedly, Nietzsche’s) rejection of Asian nationalisms is overlaid with class- and colonial-political connotations (“exploiting Europe”). Most troubling of all is the idolatrous construction of Nietzsche himself as the divine pillar of fire leading Europe out of the desert, an image borrowed from Exodus 13 where it leads the Israelites out of their Egyptian exile (Exodus 13:21-22). The uppity, nationalistic Oriental populations may construe themselves as “like the Jews of old”, then, but for Levy here the chosen people is actually European, and Nietzsche is not Moses but the Old Testament God himself. Levy concludes his introduction to *Ecce Homo* by making it clear that this analysis is merely looking to

¹⁰ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici, xii.

¹¹ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici, xiif.

extend Nietzsche's own apocalyptic rhetoric of the final chapter in *Ecce Homo* itself, "Why I Am A Destiny", and bring it up to date: "One way or the other 'the clash of consciences', of which Nietzsche speaks in this book, is sure to happen".¹²

This all makes for a highly atypical introduction to *Ecce Homo*, but it is surprisingly typical of an introduction by Oscar Levy. In truth Levy is usually less interested in actually introducing Nietzsche's philosophy than in co-opting him in the service of an ideology, exploiting the authority and respect that his position as highly successful editor and disseminator had afforded him. As a result, his introductions often veer considerably off-piste like this: Levy wrote a lot of introductions, and their tone is invariably quirky, personal and prejudiced. Another case in point is the 1913 essay "The Nietzsche Movement in England: A Retrospect, A Confession, and a Prospect", which was included in the final, Index volume of the *Complete Works*, and where Levy veers off into propagandising this time for the Eugenics Party: "the greatest and truest advocate of Eugenics was not Sir Francis Galton, but Friedrich Nietzsche".¹³ Levy is always most interested in reflecting on what Nietzsche might be taken to represent in world-historic terms, within the contemporary cultural-political climate, and on what kind of resource Nietzsche offers to those looking to mobilise him. In this, he was just trying to be a true Nietzschean and approach the philosopher himself not (to use the vocabulary of Nietzsche's second *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtung*) as an antiquarian historian but, as he saw it, by placing him in the service of life.

In the remainder of this essay I want to do two main things with the introduction to *Ecce Homo*. First I want to dwell on its (predominantly religious, Old Testament) figurative language and consider the purpose of the kind of extended metaphor we have just been analysing. Then in the final section I want to consider in more detail the kind of Orientalism that Levy's rhetoric represents, and examine the extent to which such an Orientalism, and in particular such an anti-Semitic view of the Jews, diverges from that of Nietzsche himself.

¹² Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici, xiv.

¹³ Oscar Levy, "The Nietzsche Movement in England: A Retrospect, A Confession, and a Prospect," in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 18, ed. Levy (London and Edinburgh: T. N. Foulis, 1913), ix–xxxvi, here: xxxv.

2 Levy's Figurative Language

In *Breeding Superman*, Dan Stone argues that Levy ultimately succeeded in interesting the English in Nietzsche because “he took the task on with a fervour that was nothing short of religious”, and in support Stone cites some of the religious vocabulary Levy uses when writing about his task: “holy cause”, “Good News”, “conversion” and so on.¹⁴ While fully concurring with this analysis (to which one might add that Levy contributed all his articles on Nietzsche to the exile periodical *Das Neue Tage-Buch* using the pseudonym “Defensor Fidei”),¹⁵ I want to develop it by looking at some religious (scriptural) tropes which Levy applies not to his own task but to Nietzsche, using them to proselytise for him elsewhere. In this I will range across Levy's output, because it seems to me that he is remarkably consistent in this respect. I want to argue that Levy makes an obsessive, excessive use of figurative language, that he is a fire and brimstone preacher in Nietzsche's name whose rhetoric is, as a consequence, compulsively tropic. He is, of course, inspired by Nietzsche himself to some extent, but ultimately, it seems to me, rather less subtle than his model.

Characteristic of Levy's prose style is a predilection for over-the-top extended metaphors. Even his most charitable commentator Leila Kais concedes that his style is idiosyncratic: “Dabei ging Levy selten argumentativ-methodisch vor”, and “Zuweilen überschritt er dabei zwar die Grenzen des guten Geschmacks”.¹⁶ In his 1913 introduction to Gobineau's *The Renaissance*, Levy develops an image of the “spiritual deluge of the nineteenth century” for two full, dense pages before introducing Gobineau himself as “One of those men, who, like those mighty rocks, is only now beginning to appear above the waters of the receding nineteenth century”.¹⁷ This diluvian image is one he deploys in the context of Nietzsche, too, but with a distinctly Biblical twist. Writing in “The Nietzsche Movement in England” of Helen Zimmern's 1907 translation of *Beyond Good and Evil*,

14 Dan Stone, “Oscar Levy: A Nietzschean Vision,” in D.S., *Breeding Superman: Nietzsche, Race and Eugenics in Edwardian and Interwar Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), 12–32, here: 13.

15 See Steffen Dietzsch and Leila Kais, “‘I don't fit' oder Oscar Levys europäische Nietzsche-Lektion,” in Oscar Levy, *Nietzsche verstehen: Essays aus dem Exil 1913–1937*, ed. S.D. and L.K. *Gesammelte Schriften und Briefe*, ed. S.D. and Julia Rosenthal, vol. 1 (Berlin: Parerga, 2005), 271–341, 318.

16 Kais, “*Le Nietzscheanisme, c'est moi*,” 15, 66.

17 Oscar Levy, “The Life Work and Influence of Count Arthur de Gobineau: An Introductory Essay,” in Arthur de Gobineau, *The Renaissance*, trans. Paul V. Cohn (London: Allen & Unwin, 2nd ed. 1927), i–lxvi, here: iii–v.

Levy says that it “turned out to be a success – a half-hearted success perhaps, but one that at last told the few inmates of the Nietzschean ark that the waters of democracy had diminished, and that at least some higher peaks of humanity were free from the appalling deluge”.¹⁸

Levy specialises in commandeering lurid Biblical images for propagandistic purposes (as in the *Ecce Homo* introduction), and his first book *Das neunzehnte Jahrhundert* (1904) is particularly fruitful terrain in this respect. In the preface to Leonard A. Magnus’s English translation (*The Revival of Aristocracy*, 1906), referring to his own frustrating experience of trying to introduce Nietzsche to the British, Levy writes this time of Nietzsche’s philosophy as a Promised Land for the prophet marooned in the desert wilderness of England:

there was nothing to console your thirsty and disenchanting traveller in the British Sahara. In the depths of his despair, there was sent to him, as to the traveller in the desert, an enchanting vision, a beautiful *fata Morgana* rising on the horizon of the future, a fertile and promising Canaan of a new creed that had arisen in Germany (there too as a revulsion against the desert): the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche.¹⁹

Das neunzehnte Jahrhundert closes with a grand vision of Nietzsche-as-Samson the Redeemer:

Jener Erlöser, auf den die Juden gewartet hatten, der sie wie ihre christliche Glaubensgenossen aus dem Ghetto befreite, sollte nicht dem Samen Abrahams entstammen: er war ein Abkömmling eines polnischen Grafengeschlechts.

Seine Arme waren nicht schwach, wie jene des ersten – ihm gelang die Rache Simsons – und wie Simson begrub er sich und die Philister unter den Trümmern.²⁰

Nor is it just Old Testament imagery that Levy resorts to. Half-way through *Das neunzehnte Jahrhundert*, Nietzsche is figured as the Good Shepherd when Levy is writing of modern men as “eine harmlose Hammelherde [...], die sich gegenseitig

18 Levy, “The Nietzsche Movement in England,” x.

19 Oscar Levy, Preface to *The Revival of Aristocracy*, trans. Leonard A. Magnus (London: Probsthain, 1906), v–xiv, here: xiii.

20 Oscar Levy, *Das neunzehnte Jahrhundert: Schriften 1904–1917*, ed. Steffen Dietzsch, *Gesammelte Schriften und Briefe*, ed. S.D. and Julia Rosenthal, vol. 2 (Berlin: Parerga, 2011), 121; “The Redeemer for whom the Jews were biding their time, who should free them and their Christian co-religionists from the Ghetto, was not to spring from the seed of Abraham. | His arms were strong, unlike Spinoza’s; the vengeance of Samson was to be his, and, like Samson, he bowed himself with all his might and the house fell upon the Philistines and himself” (*The Revival of Aristocracy*, 115).

weder schadete noch nützte”,²¹ and muses: “Aber eine Regeneration des Menschengeschlechts war möglich, es war denkbar, dieser irrenden Herde wieder einen Hirten zu geben, es war die einzige Rettung, für diese gleich und gleich verächtlich gewordene rudis indigestaque moles wieder eine Aristokratie zu schaffen”.²²

Levy rings the changes on Biblical images of Nietzsche as redeemer, both of modern humanity and specifically (ironically) of the Jews. For in Levy’s eyes the degenerate and self-alienated Jews of his time were incapable of redeeming themselves, and Zionism was a dead end, so their Messiah must needs come from without. In the essay “Nietzsche in England” which Levy published in 1909 as the introduction to Ludovici’s *Complete Works* translation of *Thoughts Out of Season*, vol. 1, he closes with another New Testament image, that of the return of the Prodigal Son, elaborated into an extraordinary extended fantasy of return, rejuvenation and redemption. “The venerable Owner” of the old House of Israel stands on its threshold, a strong wind “playing havoc with his long white Jew-beard”, until he spots the redeemer “coming from afar” and tearfully calls for his servants to kill the fatted calf.²³

The culmination of these visions is to be found in *Das neunzehnte Jahrhundert*, in a fable about Nietzsche pitting himself against the Christian God and besting him, this time reminiscent of the “extra-terrestrial fable” with which Nietzsche opens his early unpublished essay “Ueber Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne”. Levy recounts the story of humanity’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden before introducing the Nietzsche figure who “erstand dem Gotte” (uprose against God) and “die arme Menschheit zurückführte ins Paradies” (led hapless mankind back into Paradise) before defeating the angry old God in a sword fight and then succumbing to an evil fever himself.

Nietzsches Wort war ein Fluch, ein langatmiger Fluch, eine fürchterliche Anklage, die schwerste, die je erhoben, die einzige, die je ernst gemeint war, die erste, die je ins Herz

²¹ Levy, *Das neunzehnte Jahrhundert*, 52; “a harmless flock of sheep [...], mutually innocuous and useless” (*The Revival of Aristocracy*, 39).

²² Levy, *Das neunzehnte Jahrhundert*, 64 (quoting Ovid’s description of primal Chaos as a “rude and disordered mass” at the opening of the *Metamorphoses*, I.7); “Was there no hope? This much: man might be regenerated; conceivably might a new shepherd be found for this straying herd of waifs; an aristocracy might be established to counterbalance that equalized and contemptible rudis indigestaque moles” (*The Revival of Aristocracy*, 52).

²³ Levy, “Nietzsche in England,” in Nietzsche, *Thoughts Out of Season. Part 1, The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh and London: T. N. Foulis, 1909), xi–xxviii; here: xxvii–xxviii.

traf – gegen das Christentum. In Nietzsche machte sich die zweitausendjährige Unterdrückung des natürlichen Menschen mit explosiver Gewalt Luft.²⁴

In this extraordinary fantasy, Nietzsche figures as the Messiah reversing the punishment of the Fall of Man, and leading ungrateful humanity back into the Garden of Eden through his critique of Christianity that found its most vitriolic expression in the late text *Der Antichrist*, subtitled (at the very last) “Fluch auf das Christentum” (Curse on Christianity).

Talk of “the natural man finding his vent with explosive force” echoes the passage in *Götzen-Dämmerung* where Nietzsche likens great men to explosives,²⁵ but it also reinforces the image of Nietzsche as volcano which Levy had used twenty pages earlier in the same book:

mit Nietzsche explodiert der Vulkan, und über christliche Kreuze und Klöster und Folterwerkzeuge hinweg ergoss sich der glühende Lavastrom des Heidentums, der die alte Kultur hinwegzuschwemmen bestimmt war, und Platz für eine glücklichere Nachwelt schaffen sollte.²⁶

At times like this, Levy demonstrates that he is not *always* reaching for Biblical imagery, and another case in point is the image he uses (in the 1932 edition of Thomas Common’s translation) to describe *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as leading the way not out of a desert but out of a jungle: “The book has thus survived the decadent era in which it first appeared and now demonstrates to the unfortunate heirs of that Era a way out of the rank jungle of Nihilism and Anarchy”.²⁷ Such alternative images are not as frequent or as effective as their Biblical counterparts, though, which serve a quite specific purpose. For Levy’s anti-Semitic twist

24 Levy, *Das neunzehnte Jahrhundert*, 70; “Nietzsche’s Word was a curse, a life-long curse, a terrible indictment of Christianity, the severest ever pleaded, the only one seriously meant, the first that struck to the heart. In him the natural man, suppressed for two thousand years, found his vent with explosive force” (*The Revival of Aristocracy*, 58).

25 Nietzsche, *Götzen-Dämmerung*, “Streifzüge eines Unzeitgemässen,” §44 (“Mein Begriff vom Genie”).

26 Levy, *Das neunzehnte Jahrhundert*, 51; “with Nietzsche, the volcano shot up, and over the crosses and cloisters and torture-chambers of Christendom there burst the glowing lava-stream of heathendom, fated to sweep away the ancient civilization, ready to rebuild a home for a happier posterity” (*The Revival of Aristocracy*, 38); cf. “The Nietzsche Movement in England,” xxvii.

27 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. Thomas Common, ed. Oscar Levy and John L. Beevers, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 11 (London: Allen & Unwin, 6th ed. 1932), cover text.

on world history is to make the Jews ultimately responsible for all its ills – including Nazism²⁸ – so his solution is to figure a Nietzsche reclaimed for (a transvalued) Judaeo-Christianity, whose mission is to right what the Jews had got wrong in the first place. Levy's Nietzsche is ultimately a version of Nietzsche's own Zarathustra, who was chosen as his mouthpiece precisely in order to put right the historic catastrophe that was his invention, the dualism of good and evil, by advocating a philosophy "beyond good and evil".²⁹ Levy weaves his Nietzsche-adulation into a narrative about the Jews which is very personally inspired, and ultimately anti-Semitic in the sense that Leila Kais describes: "Er war so sehr ein Antisemit, wie Nietzsche ein Antichrist und litt so sehr am jüdischen Selbsthass wie Nietzsche am christlichen".³⁰

3 Levy's Anti-Semitic Orientalism

In the final part of this essay I want to return to another aspect of Levy's characterisation of the Jews that comes out in his response to *Ecce homo*, namely its Orientalism. With "*Ex oriente tenebrae!*" Levy deliberately inverts the standard trope "*Ex oriente lux*" (out of the East, light) – represented, for example, by Sir Edward Arnold's narrative poem about the Buddha as *The Light of Asia* (1879) – in order to figure Nietzsche as representing "The light of the Greek Ideal", "the pillar of fire leading Europe out of her present desert" and combatting "the dark cloud threatening from the East". Again, this kind of claim is actually quite typical of Levy when in full flow, as in his 1914 preface to George Chatterton-Hill's *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*. Here Levy again makes an Asia/Europe comparison, but brings off a startling tactical reversal as he invokes a false consciousness about Nietzsche among those so ignorant about his philosophy as to consider it more Asia than Europe, before turning the tables on them:

It is in Asiatic travel especially that we require guides and cannot possibly do without their aid. Now I am sorry to say that Nietzsche's philosophy is "Asia" to most of our European contemporaries. I am extremely sorry to state this, for it ought really not to be so. No European ought to require a guide to Nietzsche, for in visiting the land of Nietzsche's philosophy he is treading the holy ground of his own forefathers, he is visiting European ground, Aryan ground, the ground from which has sprung all European culture – to wit, Greece. [...] This

²⁸ See e.g. Levy, *The Idiocy of Idealism* (London: Hodge, 1940; repr. Basel: Schwabe, 2017), 14: "Hitlerism is nothing but a Jewish heresy".

²⁹ Cf. Nietzsche, *Ecce homo*, "Warum ich ein Schicksal bin," §3.

³⁰ Kais, "*Le Nietzscheanisme, c'est moi*," 77.

New Hellas is, for every self-respecting traveller, what in travellers' slang is called "the thing to see." [...] Now, as a good guide for this Nietzschean travel, into the Holy Land of strength, light and culture, I can most heartily and conscientiously recommend this book of Mr Chatterton-Hill.³¹

To most modern readers of Nietzsche, Levy argues, he is like Asia in being so unfamiliar that they are reliant on a guide. But they should recognise that he is not like Asia (which brought morality to Europe), rather he is like Europe, indeed his philosophy represents a "New Hellas". In passages such as this, and the introduction to *Ecce Homo*, Levy is keen to cordon Nietzsche's Hellenism off from contamination by the Jewish/Asiatic, but I do not think that this can be so straightforwardly achieved. We can already see that from the fact that "New Hellas" is also intended to function as a "Holy Land of strength, light and culture" – in other words, it seems that Athens and Jerusalem are to be somehow synthesised. The conflicting connotations of the images Levy uses strain these figurative analogies to breaking point, I would argue: he cannot resist over-determining these images and larding them with yet another layer of meaning, even at the cost of them clashing.

Levy is apparently happy to figure Nietzsche's philosophy using redemptive Biblical figures, but his anti-Semitism was such that he could not envisage a noble role for the Jews themselves in this clash of civilisations. Levy addresses "our present chaos" again in the work which ultimately got him expelled from England as an "undesirable alien", his letter to George Pitt-Rivers printed as the preface to the latter's book *The World Significance of the Russian Revolution*:

While Europe is aflame, while its victims scream, while its dogs howl in the conflagration, and while its very smoke descends in darker and even darker shades upon our Continent, the Jews, or at least a part of them, and by no means the most unworthy one, endeavour to escape from the burning building, and wish to retire from Europe into Asia, from the sombre scene of our disaster into the sunny corner of their Palestine. [...] They know nothing of their duty to Europe, which looks around in vain for help and guidance.³²

Now Stone has argued that "Levy's views on the Jews, though they may appear bizarre, were in fact consistent with Nietzsche's",³³ but I want to argue that Levy's

31 Oscar Levy, "Preface," in George Chatterton-Hill, *The Philosophy of Nietzsche: An Exposition and an Appreciation* (London: Heath, Cranton & Ouseley, 2nd ed. 1914), vii–xvi, here: viii–ix.

32 Levy, "Prefatory Letter," in George Pitt-Rivers, *The World Significance of the Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1920), i–xiii, here: xi.

33 Stone, *Breeding Superman*, 23. Kais quotes this view of Stone's twice with approval in "*Le Nietzscheanisme, c'est moi*," 42 and 359.

excoriating Jewish self-hatred as exemplified by an anti-Zionist passage such as this is actually rather at variance with Nietzsche's views on the matter.

Let us briefly consider the Orientalising context into which Nietzsche inserts his remarks on Jewish culture.³⁴ It is true that Nietzsche develops an Orientalist discourse that is in some ways quite typical of his day, but from early on in his philosophical career he is at pains to argue against the supposed exceptionalism of Ancient Greek culture and acknowledge the debt that the Greeks owed to their "Oriental" neighbours. In the 1873 text "Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen" he concedes: "Zwar hat man im Eifer darauf hingezigt, wie viel die Griechen im orientalischen Auslande finden und lernen konnten, und wie mancherlei sie wohl von dort geholt haben",³⁵ so it is quite misguided to try to argue that the Greeks were responsible for creating European culture somehow *ex nihilo*:

Nichts ist thörichter als den Griechen eine autochthone Bildung nachzusagen, sie haben vielmehr alle bei anderen Völkern lebende Bildung in sich eingesogen, sie kamen gerade deshalb so weit, weil sie es verstanden den Speer von dort weiter zu schleudern, wo ihn ein anderes Volk liegen liess. Sie sind bewunderungswürdig in der Kunst, fruchtbar zu lernen.³⁶

At the end of the 1870s he is arguing similarly in *Vermischte Meinungen und Sprüche*:

die Gefahr eines Rückfalles in's Asiatische schwebte immer über den Griechen, und wirklich kam es von Zeit zu Zeit über sie wie ein dunkler überschwemmender Strom mystischer Regungen, elementarer Wildheit und Finstemiss [cf. Levy's "Oriental bombast, savagery and mysticism"]. Wir sehen sie untertauchen, wir sehen Europa gleichsam weggespült,

34 What follows is a summary of the argument of my article "Nietzsche's Orientalism," *Nietzsche-Studien* 42 (2013): 178–203.

35 Nietzsche, "Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen," §1, in F.N.: *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich: dtv; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2nd ed. 1988), vol. 1, 806; "It has been pointed out assiduously, to be sure, how much the Greeks were able to find and learn abroad in the Orient, and it is doubtless true that they picked up much there". *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Washington, DC: Regnery, 1962), 29.

36 Nietzsche, "Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen," 806. "Nothing would be sillier than to claim an autochthonous development for the Greeks. On the contrary, they invariably absorbed other living cultures. The very reason they got so far is that they knew how to pick up the spear and throw it onward from the point where others had left it. Their skill in the art of fruitful learning was admirable". *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, 30.

überfluthet – denn Europa war damals sehr klein –, aber immer kommen sie auch wieder an's Licht, gute Schwimmer und Taucher wie sie sind, das Volk des Odysseus.³⁷

Nietzsche is under no illusions about the historical specificity of European culture, then, for even the ancient Greeks, his benchmark of the European, were but “diese besten Erben und Schüler Asiens”;³⁸ the European only emerges in the first place out of the Asiatic as an *achievement* of the ancient Greeks, Nietzsche argues.

Moreover, unlike Levy, Nietzsche does not subscribe to a unidirectional (East to West) view of the development of world history which is ultimately Hegelian: “Die Weltgeschichte geht von Osten nach Westen, denn Europa ist schlechthin das Ende der Weltgeschichte, Asien der Anfang”.³⁹ Instead, Nietzsche's view on the matter (in *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* §4) invokes the image of a pendulum swinging back and forth. Nietzsche has immense respect for the achievements of Jewish “Asia” and can be dismissive of presumptuous Europe in comparison, as in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* §52, where he writes:

Im jüdischen „alten Testament“, dem Buche von der göttlichen Gerechtigkeit, giebt es Menschen, Dinge und Reden in einem so grossen Stile, dass das griechische und indische Schriftenthum ihm nichts zur Seite zu stellen hat. Man steht mit Schrecken und Ehrfurcht vor diesen ungeheuren Überbleibseln dessen, was der Mensch einstmals war, und wird da-

37 Nietzsche, “Vermischte Meinungen und Sprüche,” §219, in Nietzsche: *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 2, 379–534, here: 472. “[T]he danger of a relapse into the Asiatic hovers constantly over the Greeks, and in fact it did come over them from time to time like a dark, overflowing flood of mystical impulses, elementary savagery and gloom. We see them go under, we see Europe, as it were, washed away, flooded over – for Europe was at that time very small – but always they return to the light, good swimmers and divers that they are, the people of Odysseus” (HH II, “Mixed Opinions and Maxims” §219, in *Human, All Too Human II and Unpublished Fragments from the Period of “Human, All Too Human II”* (Spring 1878 – Fall 1879), trans. Gary Handwerk [*The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 4] (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 91).

38 Friedrich Nietzsche, “Jenseits von Gut und Böse,” §238, in Nietzsche: *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 5, 9–243, here: 175; “these best heirs and disciples of Asia” (*Beyond Good and Evil / On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Adrian Del Caro [*The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 8] (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), §238, 141).

39 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2nd ed. 1989), 134; “World history travels from east to west; for Europe is the absolute end of history, just as Asia is the beginning” (*Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 197). Cf. Rodolphe Gasché, “Hegel's Orient, or the End of Romanticism,” in R.G., *The Stelliferous Fold: Toward a Virtual Law of Literature's Self-Formation* (Ashland, OH: Fordham University Press, 2011), 231–244.

bei über das alte Asien und sein vorgeschobenes Halbinselchen Europa, das durchaus gegen Asien den „Fortschritt des Menschen“ bedeuten möchte, seine traurigen Gedanken haben.⁴⁰

Ultimately Nietzsche does not simply define the Jews as Asiatic at all, and in a crucial passage from *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* (1878) he writes:

in den dunkelsten Zeiten des Mittelalters, als sich die asiatische Wolkenschicht [cf. Levy's "dark cloud threatening from the East"] schwer über Europa gelagert hatte, waren es jüdische Freidenker, Gelehrte und Aerzte, welche das Banner der Aufklärung und der geistigen Unabhängigkeit unter dem härtesten persönlichen Zwange festhielten und Europa gegen Asien vertheidigten; ihren Bemühungen ist es nicht am wenigsten zu danken, dass eine natürlichere, vernunftgemässere und jedenfalls unmythische Erklärung der Welt endlich wieder zum Siege kommen konnte und dass der Ring der Cultur, welcher uns jetzt mit der Aufklärung des griechisch-römischen Alterthums zusammenknüpft, unzerbrochen blieb. Wenn das Christentum alles gethan hat, um den Occident zu orientalisiren, so hat das Judenthum wesentlich mit dabei geholfen, ihn immer wieder zu occidentalisiren: was in einem bestimmten Sinne so viel heisst als Europa's Aufgabe und Geschichte zu einer *Fortsetzung der griechischen* zu machen.⁴¹

For Nietzsche, then, *it is to be hoped* that the Jews will be the standard-bearers of the Enlightenment in the twentieth century, but this was an unpalatable truth for Levy, and represents the point where he parted company from Nietzsche. In a 1914 lecture on “Nietzsche and the Jews” given at Jews’ College, London, Levy

40 Nietzsche, “Jenseits von Gut und Böse,” §52, 72. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, „Zur Genealogie der Moral,” in S. #-#, III 22, KSA 5:393f. “In the Jewish ‘Old Testament’, the book of divine justice, there are people, things and speeches in such a grand style that Greek and Indian writing has nothing to compare with it. We stand in horror and awe before these prodigious remnants of what human beings used to be, and we have gloomy reflections about ancient Asia and its little protruding peninsula, Europe, that wants more than anything to upstage Asia and represent the ‘progress of humanity’”. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §52, 53.

41 Friedrich Nietzsche, “Menschliches, Allzumenschliches,” §475, in Nietzsche: *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 2, 9–366, here: 310f. „[I]n the darkest periods of the Middle Ages, when a band of Asiatic clouds hung heavily over Europe, it was the Jewish freethinkers, scholars, and physicians who held fast to the banner of enlightenment and of spiritual independence while under the harshest personal pressure and defended Europe against Asia; it is not least thanks to their efforts that a more natural, rational, and in any case unmythical explanation of the world could once again emerge triumphant and that the ring of culture that now unites us with the enlightenment of Greek and Roman antiquity remained unbroken. If Christianity has done everything to orientalize the Occident, then Judaism has helped in an essential way to occidentalize it once again: which in a certain sense means making Europe’s mission and history into a *continuation of the Greeks*” (*Human, All Too Human (I): A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. Gary Handwerk, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 3 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), §475, 258f.).

cites both of the above passages and praises Nietzsche's philosemitism, but he also cites the paragraph in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* where Nietzsche anticipates that the Jews and the Russians will determine the future of Europe, and distances himself from the sentiment: "Nietzsche hatte *vielleicht* nicht ganz recht in bezug auf das Schicksal der Juden".⁴² Specifically, Levy views it as misguided when Nietzsche argues that the Jews' desire for assimilation should be accommodated, insisting rather that "die Welt braucht Israel" on account of the strength and purity of the Jewish race. For all the "religious fervour" of his proselytising on Nietzsche's behalf, then, Levy was not in lockstep and was capable of expressing a divergence of opinion, one which is confirmed by his last major text, *The Idiocy of Idealism* (1940), where he criticises Nietzsche's Zarathustra for being too soft on Jesus Christ and taxes Nietzsche himself with "poor insight into Jewish character".⁴³

4 Conclusion

Levy's introduction to *Ecce Homo* is typical of the at times extraordinary Biblical cameos with which he often peppers his introductions to the philosopher. Nietzsche is figured by turns as a volcano and a jungle guide, but more tellingly as shepherd, Samson or prodigal son, as Noah's ark, Promised Land and divine pillar of fire; ultimately (in *Das neunzehnte Jahrhundert*) as a redeemer figure fighting the Christian God in hand-to-hand combat, to which both succumb. All these conflicting connotations can be very difficult to untangle and in the end, I would argue, the complex tropic structure qualifies and undermines the supposed certainties of the anti-Semitic surface argument.

Levy purports to be continuing in the spirit of Nietzsche, and in many ways he is – as we have seen, Levy's "dark cloud threatening from the East" and his "Oriental bombast, savagery and mysticism" are merely paraphrases of Nietzsche's "asiatische Wolkenschicht schwer über Europa gelagert",⁴⁴ his "dunkler

⁴² Levy, "Nietzsche und die Juden," in *Das neunzehnte Jahrhundert*, 285–302; here: 299.

⁴³ Levy, *The Idiocy of Idealism*, 138. Cf. "The Nietzsche Movement in England," where Levy characterises Nietzsche as "a true son of the Semitic idea, a noble defender of that ancient faith and its Christian supplement" (xxv).

⁴⁴ Nietzsche, "Menschliches, Allzumenschliches," §475.

überschwemmender Strom mystischer Regungen, elementarer Wildheit und Finstemiss".⁴⁵ Ultimately, though, Levy distances himself from Nietzsche on Christianity and the Jews because he feels Nietzsche does not go far enough in condemning them and rejecting them wholesale. In this Levy is right, for Nietzsche's attitude towards the Jews (and, indeed, the Russians) is a good deal more generous, more nuanced and less hard-line than his own (which is more reminiscent of the late Nietzsche excoriating *his* own people, the Germans). "The light of the Greek Ideal" may be "rekindled by Nietzsche", but on Nietzsche's analysis the relation in which it stands to the Oriental is definitively not one of "opposition": indeed "the pillar of fire leading Europe out of her present desert" is, appropriately enough, a Jewish one. Nietzsche's Orientalism is in many respects incontrovertible, but any negative evaluation of the Oriental is ultimately undermined, and his is a much more rounded appreciation of Jewish achievement, in particular, whereas after his death Levy allies Nietzsche with a rebarbative political programme of his own, and clearly emerges as the more anti-Semitic writer.⁴⁶

45 Nietzsche, "Vermischte Meinungen und Sprüche," §219.

46 Thanks to Steffen Dietzsch and Leila Kais for first piquing my interest in Levy, and to Rüdiger Görner and Julia Rosenthal for organising the conference "*Ecce homo intellectualis* – Oscar Levy's Nietzschean Mission" (London, March 2017) at which I presented a first version of this piece.