

Introduction to the German Edition

Jacob Taubes's essays collected in this volume range from 1953 to 1983. Since there is no other monograph from Taubes after his *Occidental Eschatology* (1947), it is the task of these essays to represent Taubes's thinking across a span of thirty years. The project of editing a collection of essays represents a challenge similar to that of the volume of lectures on Saint Paul. There, it was a matter of constituting an unwritten text from an oral discourse, while here it concerns the reconstruction of a life's work out of scattered essays. That this important twentieth-century work appears only in essay form is not accidental. This circumstance resulted from the fact that Taubes constitutionally lived in a state of constant physical, psychic, and spiritual unrest, and he had little affinity for the sedentary lifestyle of a professorial scholar. Moreover, the work's essentially polemic character causes it to be documented in fragmentary literary form only. The Taubesian energy of thinking is kindled by conflict, and so, behind every text stands a specific controversy and a concrete adversary, even though they are not always foregrounded. First and foremost, therefore, the editors are faced with the task of illuminating these polemical contexts, in which a rudimentary effort will be undertaken to reconstruct the circumstances and the controversies, which are by now mostly forgotten.

These essays emerge from various time periods and far-flung intellectual contexts (Harvard, Columbia, Berlin, and Jerusalem), and to this day they remain captivating, extraordinarily dense, original, and inexhaustibly inspiring. This certainly has something to do with the particular form of hermeneutics Taubes practiced for more than two decades, holding the chair at the Freie Universität in Berlin and the Institute for Hermeneutics. His hermeneutics does not, as that of Gadamer, draw upon the Protestant theology of the Reformation and the historicism of the

nineteenth century, nor does it go back to the rabbinical tradition that he, in contrast to so many deconstructivist sympathizers of Judaism, as an ordained rabbi knew in extreme detail and valued highly. The form of hermeneutics he cultivated drew from authors such as Nietzsche, Freud, Benjamin, and above all Carl Schmitt. The rule of thumb of this hermeneutic approach reads: "Against whom is this text written?" or "What key issue was this text written to conceal?" It is the matter of a hermeneutic on the trail of the implicit and marginal because it assumes that that which is disguised governs a text more than that which is articulated. It further assumes that the trace of a decisive truth proceeds diagonally toward an encoded communication. He shares with Carl Schmitt a critical sense for that hidden affinity, which binds the sharpest antagonists together. This sort of affinity linked Taubes equally to the Catholic Schmitt and Erik Peterson as well as to the representatives of the so-called dialectical theologies (Overbeck, Barth, Bonhoeffer). Essential elements of his thinking—for example, the negation of the concepts of "religion" or "culture"—stem from those Protestant thinkers.

Viewed together, Taubes's essays delineate a genealogy of modern religiosity. In order to make this subject of a life's fragmented work visible within a prismatic constellation of texts, a selection and thematic arrangement of the present material appears more sensible than a comprehensive chronological arrangement, which ultimately would have to encompass more than sixty texts. In the present arrangement, the numerous relations to the fundamental thoughts behind the two focal points of his work, the *Occidental Eschatology* (of the twenty-two-year-old Taubes) and the lectures on Paul (by the sixty-three-year-old Taubes), become distinct. In this retrospective, the "red thread," or perhaps better said, the motor of restlessness that powered his thinking throughout the decades is clearly visible. This motor is Gnosticism. Gnosticism is, for Taubes, a liminal form of thought and life, which keeps close to the border in order to be able to transgress them. In his thinking, the border does not have the function of keeping two domains apart from one another, but to do the opposite, to play them against each other or to blend them into one another. Taubes thinks from the borders. His point of view is thus one of an exposed outsider, with an advanced position. He writes on themes of theology and the history of religio-historical themes as a philosopher, on philosophical ones

as a theologian and a scholar of religious studies, on Christianity as a Jew, on Jewish themes as a Paulinist, and on themes of culture and politics as a Gnostic and apocalypticist. His genius consists in casting light on what has in each case been suppressed, and in accounting for all the costs that were thus incurred. Yet, the border determines not only his method of hermeneutic border crossing but also his objects of inquiry. Every essay deals with boundary demarcations and Copernican turns.

Consider the boundary between “Cult” and “Culture,” which is discussed in the early essay on Oskar Goldberg. We have chosen the title of this essay as the title for the volume because it casts light *pars pro toto* on the vector of Taubes’s contributions. “From Cult to Culture”—that sounds like an evolutionary expression akin to “From Mythos to Logos.” It should, however, not be understood as such. The decisive figure for Taubes’s thought is not the evolutionary process, but rather the “Copernican turn.” This expression occurs throughout Taubes, in both a literal and metaphorical sense. Copernican turns are transition points where it is made clear that irreconcilable positions must remain bound to one another. If the expression “from cult to culture” is understood in the sense of a Copernican turn, its dialectical tension becomes visible.

In his book *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer* (1925) Oskar Goldberg put forth an uncompromising archaism: his motto was “back to cult.” Taubes, however, knew that there was no return to before the Copernican turn. Against this Goldbergian archaism he opposed the Kleistian insight that the return to paradise can never be found by forgetting, but rather by eating a second time from the tree of knowledge. One can never go back beyond a stage in the history of consciousness once it has been left behind. One can, however, through an excess of reflection and knowledge, remain conscious of boundaries and of that which they have excluded, and in theoretical reconstruction, envision it as an alternative to the given conditions. In light of such alternatives, the absolute tyranny of the world as a given is overcome. This outlines the program of these essays: they probe a realm beyond the border in order to be able to critically illuminate the present. To use the terminology of this essay, they thematize “cult” in order to play it against “culture.” Even if one cannot return to cult, it can still be rendered potent as a critical perspective on culture in philosophical and historical reflection over and against culture. Cult can be used as an

Archimedean point to hoist the world of culture off its safe, complacent hinges: it is made accessible to freedom and negativity. Through the “antagonistic power” (H. Marcuse) of cult, the petrified forms of culture are forced open, preventing culture from becoming a steel cage.

The concept of cult, as Goldberg and Taubes use it, is equivalent to “myth.” They signify a bygone stage of consciousness that depends on the principle of the here and now. For a given, precisely circumscribed “here and now” cult mediates real presence of the holy on the backdrop of its ordinary state of withdrawal. The holy is present and accessible, but not always, everywhere, and for everyone. The mode of its exceptional presence is determined through the normal circumstances of its distance and concealment. The cult concentrates and monopolizes forms of manifestation for the otherwise absent and unapproachable. In contrast, culture is to be determined as the project of creating a sphere of assured supply and satisfaction of needs based on the principle of “everything, always, and everywhere.” Happiness and justice are the central values by which the goals as well as the means of culture are circumscribed.

Considered in this light, cult and culture confront one another as irreconcilable opposites. The thought of withdrawal is unbearable to culture as a project of constant supply. It strives for a homogenous and correspondingly diffuse and diluted propagation of meaning on which human life is dependent. The signature of a culture understood in these terms is, in the terminology of Herbert Marcuse, a “one-dimensional” world. Like Marcuse and Benjamin, Taubes is also in search of resources for alterity, dissimilarity, the unaccountable, of “air from other planets.” Unlike Taubes, Benjamin, Marcuse, Adorno, and today most decidedly George Steiner draw the antagonistic force of their cultural critique not from the source of cult but from that of art, which in place of “cult” moved to a position external to culture toward the end of the nineteenth century and which made “air from other planets” into its program.¹ They defend the “here and now” of art that cannot be translated into the simultaneity and ubiquity of culture without losing its substance—its “aura.” Jacob Taubes belongs to this line of cultural criticism, which is fed by Jewish tradition and nurtured by Kant, Hegel, and Marx, and he stands out as one of the few who did not participate in this turn to aesthetics, but rather still argues from the standpoint of “cult.” Thus Oskar Goldberg, in full recogni-

tion of his fallacies, is interesting for Taubes. In Taubes's reading, critical theory achieves a new actuality because it "passes through the needle's eye of the theological."²

The sites and sources of such opposing forces, the antagonistic perspective of his critique, were in the first place theology and the philosophy of history. For Taubes, theology describes the external horizon of alterity, which in negation and alienation took a stand against culture as the sphere of familiarity and whose antagonistic force he intends to strengthen in a time in which Christian, particularly Protestant, theology in its conventional understanding has long since been incorporated into culture as one of its domains among others. Taubes struggles against this liberal theology, and even though his guarantors here are Kierkegaard, Overbeck, and Barth, he also draws from Jewish sources. In Taubes's understanding, theology is a product of crisis, arising out of crisis of cult and of myth. The antagonistic force of cult is recognized by theology under the conditions of crisis; that in any case is its task, which it forgot often enough. Taubes does not belong to those who believe in an evolution of consciousness in the sense of progressive rationalization. "Mythic energies" do not disappear with the decline of myth, and they "cannot be ignored without danger to society."

Another border—or is it the same one in another light?—intensified for the sake of resistance against facticity and the deployment of antagonistic energy is that between nature and history. Nature for Taubes is blind necessity, compulsion, causality, and natural law—he finds a similar concept of nature in Oskar Goldberg. Greek philosophy stood under the spell of nature glorified as cosmos. The great turn occurred with Descartes: here the human dimension, the spirit, is rendered accessible and as *res cogitans* opposed to Nature as *res extensa*. This occurred in the philosophy of the subject at the expense of the social dimension, which entirely disappeared. Hegel's concept of spirit, which Taubes circumscribes with the concepts of freedom, action, and negativity, catches a glimpse of the social dimension by way of the category of action. The proprium of the spirit is its radical historicity. History liberated from the constraints of necessity and from the course of nature: what was, can end. Everything historical is relative. Marx extends these trajectories into the political, Freud into the psychological realm. Taubes also saw in Freud a liberator who undertook

the task of forcing open the compulsive constraints and restraints of human “nature” through a radical historicization of the individual. What as “nature” had turned into steel and robbed of human dimension is carried over as “history” into the human dimensions of language, of discursive unfolding, hope, and transformation.

Taubes’s notorious antiliberalism, which often brought him into precarious proximity to Carl Schmitt and other conservative antiliberals, stood under the sign of this antagonistic energy. Taubes detested liberalism on the grounds that it did not recognize the very demarcations which for him made the world inhabitable at all. This also applies for the boundary between Judaism and Christianity, whose supposedly clear course, to the dismay of Jews and Christians, he repeatedly obfuscated. Early Christianity turned into Utopia to him, a brief historical phase in which the religions had not yet broken away from one another and the oppositions had not yet become lethal, but rather they channeled every force into an unheard-of escalation of internal tension. The border between Judaism and Christianity can be crossed from the perspective of the radical Gnostics, for whom all further distinctions became irrelevant.

What George Spencer Brown establishes as the first “law of construction”—“draw a distinction”—is for Taubes a law of freedom. All these distinctions have their final ground in the fundamentally Jewish distinction between “this world” and “the world to come,” which Taubes accentuated in a serious and at the same time playful tone when he says, “You have to excuse me, I can’t live in just one world!” The insistence on this border in all its transformations and modifications sharpened his view of the occult history of spirituality in secular modernity. He is not to be counted among thinkers like Max Weber and Hans Blumenberg who hold the project of secularization to be desirable and capable of completion. For Taubes, Gnosticism is the form in which the virulence of religion’s revolutionary potential remains undiminished both after and as a result of the end of its confessional and institutional manifestations. Thus he might decode the traces of a religiosity in the modern world that is not only repressed and ever returning but above all unacknowledged and displaced. A particularly vivid example of this is the controversy with Blumenberg over the implications of surrealist aesthetics.

Taubes’s thinking must be seen in the context of the reinvention

of Judaism in the twentieth century. Today we see more clearly that the Jewish way to emancipation as indexed in the nineteenth century does not point toward a historically irreversible end-station, but rather that the phase of emancipation can be followed by a phase of postemancipation, a de-emancipation. It has become just as clear that the violent disruption of Jewish tradition through persecution, expulsion, and annihilation in the Holocaust actuates new forms of recomposition and reconstruction. Looking for a way from the periphery back to the center, these movements found the kernel of Judaism in various forms: Rosenzweig found it in liturgical existentialism, Buber in the Chasidic movement, Scholem in the kabbalah, Taubes, with the help of Paul, in a spiritualized Judaism. Taubes reconstructed Judaism not out of the sources of Jewish mysticism, but rather out of the Jewish/early-Christian apocalypticism that absorbed the explosive content of Gnosticism. After an encounter with Eric Voegelin, the latter was said to have remarked to a friend with every indication of horror: "Today I met a Gnostic in the flesh!" Taubes understood "Gnosticism" as a tradition of breaking with tradition, which sets on fire the cages of the world that are otherwise frozen in their immanence.

I. Law, History, Messianism

The essays in this section revolve around a concept of history that sets up the historical dimension of human existence as alternative and antithetical to everything that as "nature" or "law" in the form of the given and factual takes on the appearance of being beyond interrogation or annulment. We have placed Taubes's latest essay at the beginning in order to open the volume with a bang: "The Price of Messianism"³ is perhaps the most radical critique that Gershom Scholem encountered during his lifetime. Taubes had submitted the lecture to the 1979 Jewish World Congress in Jerusalem, and it was rejected by the Congress' leadership, an unheard-of occurrence. For Taubes this congress meant the first return to the holy city after twenty-five years of banishment—as one might well call it in light of his fall out with Scholem. Thus it is anything but accidental that he wanted to connect with or rather stage this return as an attack on Scholem. After a minor alteration in the title, the lecture was finally accepted and presented. Members of the audience report that Taubes carried

out the following discussion in six different languages (German, English, French, Hebrew, Yiddish, and Polish).⁴

Scholem had put forth, in two essays, the thesis that Jewish messianism amounts to an exit from history because it puts off the yearning for justice to the world to come and transforms the antagonistic force of critique and change into an attitude of passive expectation and hope. This is what Scholem regards as the price that Judaism has had to pay for messianism on a psycho-economic scale. The price of messianism is the retreat from history into the stand-by mode of hoping and waiting. History is for those whose time has come. That Taubes could not acquiesce without contestation to this thesis should be immediately clear. For him, messianism concentrates and forms antagonistic forces, instead of paralyzing them, and always transposed them into revolutionary action. Messianism provides a basis not for retreat, but rather for an entry into history and an exodus from the natural world of the cosmos and its political order integrated into it.

Thus it is even more astounding that Taubes waited until 1979 to formulate his opposition, and until 1982 (that is, until Scholem's death) to publish it. In 1966 he was still in agreement with Scholem's theses when what was at stake was a discussion of Max Weber's diagnosis of Judaism as a "pariah people" from a Jewish perspective.⁵ In his essay, the Jewish people's outsider position, interpreted by Weber as "pariah," is connected by Taubes with reference to Scholem with messianism, which provided a basis for the abnegation of historical, that is, political action. The 1982 essay adjusts this position, which seems skewed from Taubes's own perspective and is thus to be read as a criticism not only of Scholem but of Weber as well. The outsiderdom of the Jewish people cannot be compared to the position of the pariah. The principle of hope, which promises future reincarnations to the pariah and thereby affirms the existing caste-order, turns the Jewish messianism into an antagonistic force that radically puts into question the given order by historicizing it. For Taubes, an unbroken line runs from here to Hegel and Marx.

This line is drawn out in the essay on "Martin Buber and the Philosophy of History." This essay is at the same time an example that Taubes was as much invested in the intensification of differences as in the deconstruction of conventional dualisms. This primarily concerns the

conventional dualisms that dominate the differentiation between Judaism and Christianity, and particularly between Jewish and Christian messianisms. Scholem had determined this difference as the distinction between interiority and exteriority. Jewish messianism awaits the redemption in the public sphere of history, Christian in the inner sphere of the individual soul. In contrast, Taubes holds that the process of interiorization is part of the logic of messianism as such, regardless of its religious identity. Every expectation for redemption turns inward if the redemption fails to appear on the social stage of history.

Buber, by contrast, drew a completely different distinction with which to oppose Jewish and Christian messianisms: the distinction between “alternation” [*Alternativik*] and “predestination” [*Vorbestimmung*]. Jewish messianism relies on the principle of alternation, by which Buber understands a historical image that is fundamentally open. The course of history is not predestined; repentance (Hebrew: *teshuva*) is always possible, also on God’s side. *Teshuva* means human penitence and divine forgiveness simultaneously. Paul, by contrast, represents a closed image of history: in God’s divine plan, everything is presaged, and history is a secret unveiled in the course of time. The law is historicized as a station on an established course: it is given so that sin, and with it, forgiveness, can grow. The God of Paul turns back, following Buber, just as little as the Spirit of Hegel does. Buber sees the roots of Hegelian philosophy of history with its irreversible evolutionism in Pauline, not Jewish, messianism.

Taubes demonstrates the Jewish roots of the Pauline view of history. If this proprium lies in the notion of a divine plan, then Deutero-Isaiah was the first Paulinian. Paul stands entirely in the tradition of Deutero-Isaiah: “Guilt is healed and lies behind us.” Here it is not a matter of Jewish and Christian, but rather of prophecy and apocalypse, both of which are manifestations of Jewish tradition. The comparison of confession, “alternation,” and “predestination” do not represent a sustainable distinction. Additionally, if the course of history is predetermined, human understanding is not. Here is no necessity. Prophetic alternation does not overturn into a Pauline-Christological end of history, but rather takes on an internalized, spiritual form. Gnosticism is the knowledge of the new to be attained by the individual but within the frame of the community. In this interiorized form, the prophetic alternation constitutes one of the

fundamental themes of apocalyptic literature and Western intellectual history. Here, according to Taubes, lie the roots of Hegelian philosophy of history, which he labels “historical futurism.”

For Taubes, Hegel and his philosophy of history constitute the Copernican turn from ancient to modern philosophy, from metaphysics to history. Up to that point philosophy had been under the spell of the question of Being, of the timelessly true, enduring, and valid, but now the question of Becoming, of the “historical conditionality behind all our experience,” moves to the forefront. In light of such an appraisal the question concerning the roots of historicism attains central significance. The answer to this question, which Taubes provides in his Buber essay, lies wholly in line with his *Occidental Eschatology* from 1947. It is that much more surprising, therefore, that in his essay on Nachman Krochmal,⁶ Taubes answers this same question in a completely different way. We have chosen this essay because it illustrates the complexity of Taubesian thinking: he was able to consider the same issue in manifold perspectives.⁷ This essay poses the question of the roots and origins of historicism, and here he gives a completely different answer than one would expect following the Buber essay. Neither the Jewish prophetic nor apocalyptic messianism is invoked, but rather—and one is tempted to add, by contrast—the Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation. In this theory, the path is already paved for a radical temporalization of reality, later to be explicitly unfolded by the Hegelian philosophy of history. Here Judaism is thus in its rabbinical, law-centered form as eminently antimessianic and ahistorical. Law and history here constitute an opposing pair. Historical thinking has no place within the horizon of the law. With the collapse of the messianic movements of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the historical-philosophical impulses in Judaism went nearly extinct. There is no path leading from the Sabbatian theology of history—and here Taubes contradicts Scholem and Rothenstreich—to Hegel. The central philosophical traditions of Judaism, from Maimonides to Mendelssohn, were in any case based on the halachic order of thinking and were impenetrable for historical experience. Halacha and the rabbinical Judaism based on it form a temporal construction of its own kind, in which history has no place.⁸

Nachman Krochmal, whom Taubes evokes as the guarantor for his thesis on the Neoplatonic origin of the philosophy of history, was a con-

temporary of Hegel and a reader of his work. His central category, “spirit,” was taken up from Hegel. Krochmal’s work is, however, more than an adaptation of Hegel for the Jewish reader: it makes use of Hegelian conceptualization in order to articulate a new antimetaphysic and historiosophic philosophy on the basis of certain Jewish traditions. These traditions, however, which Krochmal describes in long and significant excurses, are all versions and transformations of Neoplatonic metaphysics: Alexandrian philosophy, Gnosticism, Ibn Ezra’s philosophy, and kabbalah. If Krochmal was able to render the Jewish tradition of Neoplatonism as useful for his reception of Hegelian philosophy of history, it appears obvious that Hegel as well drew from Neoplatonic sources—especially since it is well known that he protested against the disregard of Neoplatonic philosophy and instigated a new edition of Proclus’s writings. Taubes sees the common denominator of the philosophy of history and Neoplatonism in the doctrine of emanation, which he understands as the temporalization and dynamicization of ontology: Being as process. The cosmos appears here not as the essence of an atemporal-eternal order, but rather as a process of development. In this doctrine Hegel and Krochmal were able to find an ontological context for their concept of spirit: “The turn to historiosophy is nothing other than a horizontal projection of the ontologically dynamic position: only on the foundation of Neoplatonic ontology can the equation of ontology and chronology become insightful.”

In the same way as the Krochmal essay, the early essay from 1953 on the “Difference Between Judaism and Christianity”⁹ makes the concept of law central and gives it the status of a defining, fundamental category. Not strict monotheism, not the aniconic reverence of the divine, but the recognition of the law constitutes the deciding touchstone and determining force of Judaism. Whoever annuls the law abandons Judaism. But even the annulment of the law, that is, antinomianism, is an inner-Jewish phenomenon in the form of negation. Christianity is part of a series of other inner-Jewish phenomena of crisis, which the history of Judaism has never been in want of. This history obtains its vitality from the tension of self-negation. Mysticism, ecstasy, and interiority (“heart”) are phenomena of an inner-Judaic countermovement against which rabbinical Judaism established itself. This rabbinical core of Jewish identity stands and falls with the law, with the construction of an external public realm of repre-

sentation, of legally defining and legally effective representation, and with the everyday sobriety of justice. This core, circumscribed with the concept of halacha, was in the course of history able to integrate the rationalistic philosophy of Maimonides as well as the wild mystic-mythological speculations of the Lurianic kabbalah, the magical ritualism of Jacob Halevi of Marvege, and the ecstatic prophecy of Abraham Abulafia because they did not destroy halacha, but strengthened it instead. By contrast, the antinomian movements, which wanted to annul the law, were condemned as heresies because they held that the messianic time had arrived and considered "belief" in the Messiah to be more salvific than observance of the law. As Christianity is only one among many inner-Judaic heresies, it is neither a problem nor a mysterium for Judaism. In Judaism there is no "Christian question."

In this construction of Judaism and Christianity, the antagonistic configuration of "cult" and "culture" can easily be detected. In the context of emancipation and assimilation, Christianity appears in the role of culture. "Emancipation opened the gates to Western culture for the Jewish community; yet this culture is based on Christian presuppositions and is marked by Christian symbols." Thus Judaism's liberal tendencies, which attempt to reform and to transform Jewish symbols, that is, the *mitzvot* of halacha in the context of modern culture, place the core of Judaism in question. Whoever considers the *mitzvot* to be only traditional "ritual and ceremony," that is, externalities that are more important than their meaning, exposes himself to a Pauline critique of law, which speaks of the "yoke of the law" and of "blind justice." In this way the antagonistic force is gambled away that Judaism derives from the justice of the law, which kept it alive for centuries and which "alone finally could put the arbitrariness of love in question."

The opposition between "law" and "belief" has of course a Christian history as well. The church fathers described the significant difference between Judaism and Christianity with the conceptual pair of *lex* and *fides*. From the Christian perspective, the law is understood as being ethnically as well as historically conditioned and bounded: it is valid only for the Jewish people and only for the time of proto-messianic expectation, which is finished upon the arrival of the Messiah. Christianity contrasts the ethnic character of the law with the universal validity of redemption through

faith, and the law's collective character with the individual significance of pronouncement of faith, the creed. The law is devalued as "external" in contrast to the "internal" liberating belief. This sufficiently well-known story of Christianity's impact interests Taubes only insofar as it is seized by modern Jewish thinkers like Rosenzweig, Buber, Schoeps, and Herberg. Martin Buber takes up the antithesis of interiority and exteriority and turns it against Christianity.¹⁰ The more original mode of belief belongs to Judaism, in which there exists a relationship of trust in God, while the Christian mode of holding external beliefs for true represents a degenerate form of belief. With their soteriological division of tasks between a Jewish covenant with God and a Christian mission to the Gentiles, Rosenzweig, Schoeps, and Herberg dismiss the exclusivist religious claims to validity of both prophetic religions together with their polemical frontlines.¹¹

Taubes's contribution to this discussion consists of the demonstration that the opposition between law and belief, which from the Christian perspective divides Judaism and Christianity, arose on the horizons of Judaism and has an inner-Judaic history. In the religious experience of Judaism, messianism constitutes the counterpole to the law, out of whose latent antinomistic character Taubes explains the polemical tension between law and belief. While Christianity must diligently serve this antithesis in order to legitimate itself against Judaism, Judaism can assess or dismiss Christianity as one of its many messianic heresies, which in the course of its history produced its own antagonistic dynamic.

II. World Alienation: Gnosticism and Its Consequences

Taubes's preoccupation with Gnosticism arises out of two different impulses. First, Gnosticism interests him historically, as a manifestation of the (late) ancient history of religion, which, parallel to his understanding of Christianity, he regards as deriving from the inner crises and tensions of Judaism. Second, however, and far beyond any historical interest, Gnosticism determines his own religious experience and philosophy; he sees in Gnosticism a highly relevant theology, probably the only one that can cope with the death of God in the catastrophic events of the twentieth century.¹²