

Preface

Invitations for an event at FEST, the Protestant Institute for Interdisciplinary Research in Heidelberg,¹ were issued by Enno Rudolph for January 14, 1987. The speaker was to be Professor Jacob Taubes of the Free University in Berlin, who had offered “to present a four-day course at the Institute on the Epistle to the Romans.” How had this engagement come about? Enno Rudolph first invited Taubes to FEST for a philosophical colloquium on time in September 1986. Taubes’s lecture bore the title “*Galgenfrist*: Apocalyptic Temporal Experience through the Ages.”² What in September 1986 had still been for Taubes a largely philosophical problem had become by the end of February 1987 a matter of existential urgency. The Taubes who arrived for the lecture on Romans was suffering from an advanced stage of cancer. The state of his health was so poor that it was not clear, up to the end of the event, whether he would be able to conduct it in the form originally planned. The lectures were planned for Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday; Taubes spent most of the intervening Wednesday (which was, incidentally, his sixty-fourth birthday) in the intensive care unit.

One might ask why Taubes, who in January was fully aware of his condition, did not ask to be relieved of his commitment. To understand this, it is important to realize that Taubes did not understand his works on Paul as an academic obligation or exercise. He regarded them as an account of what lay at the center of what unsettled him intellectually. These circumstances make clear that the extreme weakness of his constitution, which would have made participation in an ordinary event impossible, here actually served as a physical and mental reprieve [*Galgenfrist*] that made possible and provided a determinate framework for what he had to say.

This is also why Taubes, who did not have the strength to stand even for a moment, could lecture to us with the greatest intellectual intensity, four days out of the week, for three hours at a time, about his reading and contextualization of the Epistle to the Romans. The pressure of the reprieve and the framework of the testamentary situation mobilized all his available strength for a final effort. Thanks are therefore due above all to all

those who called upon him to make this commitment and who supported him in realizing his plan: Enno Rudolph for the contacts with FEST, Edith Picht-Axenfeld for her insistent interest and the musical framing, the late Klaus von Schubert, our host, for his hospitality, generosity, and openness to a highly unconventional event, as well as the invited participants, who for one week listened and joined in the discussion. Thomas Kuhlmann obtained the necessary books and made the tape recordings. Rudi Thyssen accompanied Taubes on his journey and took care of him. And no small thanks are due to Monika Wapnewski, who assisted with the preparations by giving Taubes the opportunity, in Sunday afternoon "Bible classes," to present his approach to a small audience in Berlin.

At the end of the "Paul" week in Heidelberg, Taubes made us promise to take care of the text of the lectures and to see to its publication. He left no doubt about the central value and great seriousness of this, his spiritual testament. We are nevertheless realizing his wish for publication only now, after a six-year delay. There were many reasons for this delay. First, there were problems in preparing the text: the lectures not only had to be transcribed and edited, but they were also circulated among a number of friends and knowledgeable individuals whose expert opinions, supplements, and corrections had to be worked into the text. Second, there were hesitations among the editors, who wanted to ensure that the most important of Taubes's written works could be published before risking that an oral text might compromise the reception of his work. Third, some of Taubes's personal friends had reservations and saw a need to protect him from his text: these people pointed to his scrupulous care in dealing with the written word as well as his great hesitation in publishing anything.

Now that the moment has finally arrived, we wish to thank all those who helped us meet our obligation to Taubes. Aharon Agus, Moshe Barasch, Jochanan E. Bauer, Evelyne Goodman-Thau, Shlomo Pines, Shaul Shaked, Guy G. Stroumsa (Jerusalem), Hubert Cancik (Tübingen), and Emile Cioran (Paris) all participated in the work on the manuscript. Andrea Gnirs, who was funded by FEST, prepared the transcript. Without the active support of the editorial team the whole thing would have easily grown too overwhelming to manage.

Aleida Assman
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