

Depeche Mode

Jacob Taubes between Politics, Philosophy, and Religion

Edited by

Herbert Kopp-Oberstebrink
Hartmut von Sass



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Gnosis and the Covert Theology of Antitheology

Heidegger, Apocalypticism, and Gnosticism in Susan and Jacob Taubes

Elliot R. Wolfson

Today the ways of death or halfdeath have an almost sure and easy stronghold on us. Here each goes his own way into the same darkness. And the ways of life where we walk together and that no man can build from and for himself alone are not yet built. Nor is it anywhere written that they must or will be built. We know only that the power of the mystery may be as strong or stronger, than the power of death.

SUSAN TAUBES, Letter to Hugo Bergman, September 18, 1950

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The hopeful message of tragedy is that though evil is irrepressible it is not endless, that human life has meaning and dignity, though the odds are against man.

SUSAN TAUBES, "The Nature of Tragedy"

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What today is not "theology" (besides theological chatter)?

JACOB TAUBES, Letter to Armin Mohler, February 14, 1952

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Das alles ist nur Vorbereitung für das Heilige das im Schatten wächst.

JACOB TAUBES, Letter to Susan Taubes, April 6, 1952

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In this chapter, I will focus on the readings of Heidegger that may be elicited from the writings of Susan and Jacob Taubes.¹ Needless to say, far more attention has been paid to the latter, and while there are obvious reasons why this has been the case, the fact is that the former displayed an intellectual and spiritual depth of her own that is well deserving of increased attention. Her gnostic interpretation of Heidegger is quite nuanced and innovative, and should not be considered ancillary or subordinate. For instance, Willem Styfhals notes *en passant*, “Susan Taubes lived in Paris for several years and was also interested in the Gnostic features of modern thought.”² The letters of Susan to Jacob, which spanned the years 1950–1952,³ and the one major essay she published indicate that she was more than just interested in the gnostic features of modern thought. She was passionately consumed with the topic, and especially with understanding Heideggerian thought from this vantage point.⁴ Beyond elucidating a figure whose way of reading Heidegger has gained purchase in more recent years, a close examination of Susan Taubes’s thought will shed light on some of the more important insights that may be elicited from the writings of Jacob on Heidegger, Gnosticism, and theology.

1 Gnosis as Jewish Heresy and Self-estrangement in Heidegger’s *Fundamentalontologie*

In the essay “The Gnostic Foundations of Heidegger’s Nihilism,” published in 1954, and again in the essay “The Absent God,” published in 1955, the initial note proclaims that Susan Taubes, the Josiah Royce Fellow at Radcliffe College, was “preparing her doctoral dissertation on the theological elements in Heidegger’s philosophy.”⁵ This plan was never brought to fruition and instead the topic of the thesis, supervised by Paul Tillich and completed in 1956, was

1 In order to avoid confusion, whenever Susan Taubes is discussed in this chapter, I will give her full name or just her proper name. When I use just the last name, it refers to Jacob Taubes.

2 Willem Styfhals, *No Spiritual Investment in the World: Gnosticism and Postwar German Philosophy*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019, 15.

3 For a concise description of this correspondence, see Ole Jakob Løland, *Pauline Ugliness: Jacob Taubes and the Turn to Paul*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2020, 25–26.

4 On Susan Taubes’s interest in vestiges of gnostic motifs in the German philosophical tradition and in non-confessionally bound Jewish intellectuals in the twentieth century, see Sigrid Weigel, “Between the Philosophy of Religion and Cultural History: Susan Taubes on the Birth of Tragedy and the Negative Theology of Modernity,” *Telos* 150 (2010), 115–135.

5 Susan Anima Taubes, “The Gnostic Foundations of Heidegger’s Nihilism,” *Journal of Religion* 34 (1954), 155; idem, “The Absent God,” *Journal of Religion* 35 (1955), 6.

“The Absent God: A Study of Simone Weil.”⁶ It is logical to presume that the study on the gnostic foundations of Heidegger’s nihilism should be viewed as the *urzelle* of the dissertation. Leaving that aside, the epistolic exchange between Susan and Jacob well attests to the fact that she was committed to retrieving Heidegger’s atheological theology through utilizing symbols and images culled from ancient Gnosticism. Consider, for example, the following comment in the letter dated November 12, 1950: “Read Heidegger ‘Über den Humanismus’ in ‘Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit’—till I reached p. 76 ‘Das “Sein”—das ist nicht Gott ...’ I thought he was in the end gnostic—the purest gnostic I have read.”⁷ In the letter from November 25, 1950, Susan muses about her next project, “Perhaps a ‘pseudo’-paper: ‘Existentialism and its relation to older trends of thought: Heidegger and the gnostic myth.’”⁸ We hear of this paper again in letters from November 27,⁹ December 14¹⁰ and 16,¹¹ and in more

6 See Weigel, “Between the Philosophy,” 128–129. According to Weigel, Taubes’s two essays from 1954 and 1955 “announce her decision to change her dissertation project.” I am not sure why Weigel made this assertion unless what she intended by the word “announce” is that the published essays are evidence that the original focus was modified. In any event, Weigel provides no explanation for the change. Christina Pareigis, “Letter from Susan Taubes to Jacob Taubes April 4, 1952,” *Telos* 150 (2010), 113, n. 7, also comments on the change of the dissertation topic. In the letter published by Pareigis, 113, Susan’s original plans are clear, “Otherwise I am preparing the documentation of the gnosis which I can do better in Zürich since I can take out the books from the library.” On the change in the topic of the doctoral thesis, see also Christina Pareigis, “The Conflicting Paths of Nomads, Wanderers, Exiles. Stationen einer Korrespondenz,” in Susan Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz mit Jacob Taubes 1950–1957*, ed. Christina Pareigis, Munich: Fink, 2011, 288, and now in much greater detail in Christina Pareigis, *Susan Taubes: Eine intellektuelle Biographie*, Göttingen: Wallstein, 2020, 265–300, esp. 273–281. A preview of the dissertation was published as Taubes, “The Absent God.” Especially relevant for this study is the discussion of the “Gnostic traits of Simone Weil’s mysticism” on 12, and see the expanded discussion of the “Gnostic Revolt and Amor Fati” in Susan Taubes, “The Absent God: A Study of Simone Weil,” PhD dissertation, Radcliffe College, 1956, 235–251. On the gnostic leanings of Weil, see also Louis Dupré, “Simone Weil and Platonism: An Introductory Reading,” in *The Christian Platonism of Simone Weil*, ed. E. Jane Doering and Eric O. Springsted, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004, 20–21. Dupré approvingly cites the essay on Weil by Susan Taubes, but he does qualify her position to some extent by emphasizing the Christian and Platonic elements that are to be distinguished from the “gloomy picture” of Gnosticism. I note, finally, that according to Susan Sontag, *As Consciousness is Harnessed to Flesh: Journal and Notebooks 1964–1980*, ed. David Rieff, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012, 371, Susan Taubes left behind a manuscript on Simone Weil that she kept in a closet in New York but which she did not read and whose existence was not known by anyone.

7 Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1957*, §34, 95.

8 *Ibid.*, §43, 118.

9 *Ibid.*, §44, 119.

10 *Ibid.*, §54, 143.

11 *Ibid.*, §57, 148. Note that in the morning addendum to this letter Susan inquired if Jacob had access in Jerusalem to books on gnosis he recommended “in case I work on

detail in a letter from the 25th of that month: “As I wrote to you I finished the existentialism paper: a general presentation of Sartre and Heidegger [...] a discussion of the atheistic ground of ontology and thus the pseudo-humanistic traditional metaphysics of the judeo-christian source of existential thinking, the possible *contradicto in adjectivo* in ‘existential ontology’ where Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit* seems to be living [...] that finally ends in gnosis.”¹²

In her published essay on Heidegger, Susan Taubes elaborates on the assumption that Heidegger’s philosophy should be interpreted within the frame of reference of the gnosis of a covert theology.¹³ Relying on a number of scholars for her knowledge of Gnosticism—including Simone Pétrement and Henri-Charles Puech¹⁴—she was influenced mostly by Hans Jonas’s Heideggerian reading.¹⁵ Before delving into this approach to Heidegger, it behooves me to note that there is ample evidence from her correspondence with Jacob that over time Susan struggled with the use of the term *gnosis* to categorize Heidegger’s thinking. One of the sharpest articulations of this doubt, and a clue to what may have been the impetus to forego pursuing her original dissertation topic,¹⁶ is found in the letter to Jacob written in Zürich on April 20, 1952:

Heidegger-Gnosis instead Mythos-Logos.” Regarding the latter topic, see the letter from October 26, 1950, *ibid.*, §23, 69.

12 *Ibid.*, §65, 162. In the continuation, the superiority of the treatment of myth in Plato or Heidegger is noted in comparison to contemporary works described as the “pseudo-mytho-cosmo-biologies of all the Nazi literature.”

13 Taubes, “The Gnostic Foundations,” 155.

14 See Susan Taubes, “Review of *Tragedy and the Paradox of the Fortunate* by Herbert Weisinger,” *Ethics* 64 (1954), 324, n. 3; Susan Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz mit Jacob Taubes 1952*, ed. Christina Pareigis, Munich: Fink, 2014, §132, 16, §224, 187; Weigel, “Between the Philosophy,” 124–125.

15 For references in Jonas’s own writings to parallels between Heidegger and ancient gnostic sources, as well as scholarly analyses of the impact of Heidegger on Jonas’s study of Gnosticism, see Elliot R. Wolfson, *Heidegger and Kabbalah: Hidden Gnosis and the Path of Poiësis*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019, 25–26, n. 97. To the sources mentioned there, one could add Benjamin Lazier, *God Interrupted: Heresy and the European Imagination between the Wars*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, 35, 46–48, 121, and Christian Wiese, *The Life and Thought of Hans Jonas: Jewish Dimensions*, trans. Jeffrey Grossman and Christian Wiese, Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2007, 60. Wiese duly notes that in *Gnosis and spätantiker Geist* (1934), Jonas “focused on describing the nihilism inherent in Gnostic mythology,” and to that end he availed himself of Heideggerian forms of thinking, whereas his “later reflections on Gnosticism were meant to expose the Gnostic nihilistic character of existential philosophy, mainly in its Heideggerian version.”

16 See the analysis of this letter in Pareigis, *Susan Taubes*, 277–278.

As for my “thesis” it breaks down insofar as I am not competent to show the “gnostic” elements in Heidegger in their total historical setting. H. writing in the 20th C. *after* the history of the gnostic-self* [*as it passes through Mysticism, Idealism, Descartes, Hegel.] and the secularization of the gnostic [apocalyptic?, JT] eschatology in Marxism (partly already in Protestantism) and having to come to terms with historicism, [(]psychologism, biologism) lives in a different horizon than the early gnostics who actually experienced the “newness” of a revelation, who stood at the beginning of a new era. H’s, is an end-vision—a catastrophic vision. In the later works a variety of “gnostic” motifs are tangled up without coherence. φύσις becomes identical with the eschatological Sein = world history = history of Occidental metaphysics. The history of metaphysics is the history of nihilism. “Das Sein beirrt das Seiende”¹⁷ and at the same time it is the light of truth. Man is the “Hirt des Seins”¹⁸ but this Sein is a monster in the image of Prof. H. going forever astray on in Holzwege.¹⁹

The thesis to which Susan refers is, of course, the subject of the study she did publish on the gnostic foundations of Heidegger’s nihilism. Initially, she

17 The citation is taken from the paraphrase of a passage from Heidegger’s essay “Der Spruch des Anaximander”(1946) in Karl Löwith’s essay “Heidegger: Denker in dürftiger Zeit,” first published in *Die Neue Rundschau* 63 (1952). I will cite the version found in Karl Löwith, *Heidegger: Denker in dürftiger Zeit*, Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1953, 51: “Das Sein entzieht sich nämlich gerade dann, wenn es sich in das Seiende entbirgt, und beirrt so das Seiende; gehört doch die ‘Irre’ überhaupt mit zum Wesen der Wahrheit.” For the English translation, see Karl Löwith, *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, ed. Richard Wolin, trans. Gary Steiner, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, 76: “For Being withdraws precisely when it reveals itself in beings, and it thereby confuses [*beirren*] beings; indeed this ‘error’ [*Irre*] is part of the very essence of truth!” For the original text, see Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege* [GA 5], Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1977, 337: “Das Sein entzieht sich, indem es sich in das Seiende entbirgt. Dergestalt beirrt das Sein, es lichtend, das Seiende mit der Irre.” And the English version in Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. and ed. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 253–254: “By revealing itself in beings, being withdraws. In this way, in its illuminating, being invests beings with errancy” (translation slightly modified).

18 The reference is to a passage in Heidegger’s “Brief über den ‘Humanismus’” (1946) in Martin Heidegger, *Wegmarken* [GA 9], Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1976, 331: “Der Mensch ist der Hirt des Seins.” See Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 253: “The human being is the shepherd of being.”

19 Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §230, 199–200 (emphasis in original).

contends that the breakdown was due to her incompetence to tackle the topic, but it becomes clear that, in fact, the uncertainty is related to what may be elicited from Heidegger. In particular, she demarcates the difference between ancient Gnosticism as a revelatory phenomenon, which tenders the hope for something novel to emerge, and Heidegger's end-vision, that is, the catastrophic vision of his eschatology,²⁰ a vision that revokes the prospect of redemption whether in history or from history. Heidegger's "theologizing" the world of anxiety and error into which we are thrown only capitulates to that world and, in doing so, commits blasphemy against the logos. However, disorder is possible because there is order rather than absolute chaos, and hence we must conclude that the impossible annihilates itself.²¹ Criticizing the respective nihilistic postures of ancient Gnosticism and Heidegger, Susan writes: "Retreat from the world is necessary not because there is no salvation or truth, except in retreat, but because only in the hour of quietness, of love, understanding + prayer are we freed from the bondage of the demons of the day and given a vision of ages, + experience past + future as presence."²²

In a letter to Jacob written in April 1952 from Paris, Susan reports that Hannah Arendt told her about a lecture from Jonas at Columbia University on the gnostic elements in Heidegger of which she was "very suspicious."²³ Then Susan offers her own thoughts on the matter:

This bloody thesis is certainly giving me a headache. I don't care whether the "drama of self" is gnosis or a new "schmuis" between Profs. Bultman — Jonas — Heidegger ... Bultman + Jonas write exegeses on Christian + gnostic texts using Heideggerian categories + if these exegeses read like H's philosophy — sometimes verbatim, maybe H's philosophy is also an "exegesis." But the "Heid. categories" are certainly a re-interpretation of theological categories whether this re-interpretation can be

20 Heidegger explains his use of the term *eschatology* in "Der Spruch des Anaximander" as the "departure of the long-concealed destiny of being," the end, the "once of the latest" (*das Einst zur Letzte*), that is symmetrical with the beginning, the "once of the dawn of destiny" (*das Einst der Frühe des Geschickes*). The gathering of this departure is not to be construed either theologically or philosophically but rather in terms of the "eschatology of being" as such, that is, the "absolute subjectivity of the will to will." See Heidegger, *Holzwege*, 327; idem, *Off the Beaten Track*, 246–247.

21 Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §230, 200.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., §233, 206. The lecture was published as Hans Jonas, "Gnosticism and Modern Nihilism," *Social Research* 19 (1952), 430–452.

called “gnostic” is disputable + rather a question of choice. It’s certainly not the old visionary gnosis* [*and I think the gnosis is essentially visionary rather than “nihilistic” (the nihilism comes after the vision evaporates like a soap-bubble) therefore “atheistic theology” doesn’t work — nor is it gnostic + the gnosis is not the key to *the atheistic re-interpretation of theological categories in Sein und Zeit.*]24

Notwithstanding the misgivings expressed in this passage, other letters confirm her use of the word “gnostic” to refer to Heidegger’s thought, the view she took when she wrote the essay.²⁵ The themes most relevant to the gnostic interpretation of Heidegger—or the Heideggerian interpretation of gnosis²⁶—were thrownness and homelessness to explain *Dasein’s* estrangement in the world. In her own words, “Both for Heidegger and for the gnosis, thrownness expresses, beyond the manner of the self’s entrance into the world, the essential violence of the self’s being-in-the-world.”²⁷ Although Susan’s name is not mentioned, the conceptual background for her viewpoint is well summarized by Jacob Taubes in the 1971 essay “Der dogmatische Mythos der Gnosis,” a response to Hans Blumenberg’s “Wirklichkeitbegriff und Wirkungspotential des Mythos.”²⁸

24 Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §233, 206 (emphasis in original).

25 See the letter of Susan to Jacob from May 3, 1952, *ibid.*, §237, 214: “The roots of H’s mythos reach into the gnostic experience but they pass through Kant + German Idealism.”

26 See the letter of Susan to Jacob from April 6, 1952, *ibid.*, §220, 177. Studying Bultmann’s commentary to the Gospel of John occasioned this reflection: “Maybe instead of the ‘gnostic fundamentals of H.’s ontology’ one should study the heideggerian [*sic*] fundaments of gnosis interpretation. What kind of conspiracy!” For the continuation of this letter, see below, n. 31.

27 Taubes, “The Gnostic Foundations,” 163.

28 Both essays were printed in *Terror und Spiel: Probleme der Mythenrezeption*, ed. Manfred Fuhrmann, Munich: Fink, 1971: Hans Blumenberg, “Wirklichkeitbegriff und Wirkungspotential des Mythos,” 11–66, and Jacob Taubes, “Der dogmatische Mythos der Gnosis,” 145–156. An English version of the latter, “The Dogmatic Myth of Gnosticism,” appeared in Jacob Taubes, *From Cult to Culture: Fragments Toward a Critique of Historical Reason*, ed. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Amir Engel, with an Introduction by Aleida Assmann, Jan Assmann, and Wolf-Daniel Hartwich, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010, 61–75. On the intellectual exchange between these two thinkers, see Herbert Kopp-Oberstebink, “Between Terror and Play: The Intellectual Encounter of Hans Blumenberg and Jacob Taubes,” *Telos* 158 (2012), 119–134; Styfhals, *No Spiritual Investment*, 214–222.

The predominant interpretation of late ancient Gnosticism by the Bultmann school takes the Gnostic alienation from history at face value, or hermeneutically akin to its subject (and dependent on Husserl's unhistorical, absolute phenomenology and Heidegger's existential analysis of Dasein [*Daseinanalyse*]) had interpreted the ahistorical index of Gnostic doctrine itself unhistorically, that is, phenomenologically. But even the Gnostic negation of history arose in a particular historical constellation. The stronger the loss of reality, the more intensive does the negative consciousness of world and world-creator become, and thus the more enshrouded does the mystery of redemption become. It seems to me to be important, for an interpretation of the history of Gnosticism, to recall the connection between Gnosticism and apocalypticism.²⁹

Several years later, Jacob restates the main point of his critique in "Das stählernde Gehäuse und der Exodus daraus, oder Ein Streit um Marcion, einst und Jetzt" (1984), "Hans Jonas, in *Gnosticism and the Spirit of Late Antiquity* (1934), interpreted the Gnostic teachings by means of Heidegger's *Dasein* analysis so that the Gnostic form of Heidegger's philosophy itself was brought to the fore."³⁰

What is distinctive to Susan's argument was the claim that there are suppressed currents of Christian theology—and, more specifically, currents of a gnostic and more esoteric nature—that come to expression in Heidegger's antitheology:

The suggestion is not so strange if we consider that his attack on Christian theology is not at all on naturalistic grounds. In fact, he accuses the Christian theological frame of being too *naturalistic*; the line of attack that was used against classical ontology applies to theology as well: theology still moves in a cosmological frame. [...] Heidegger's antitheological polemic is thus directed from a more radical theological position. We must recall that Christian theology is syncretistic. We are confronted

29 Taubes, *From Cult to Culture*, 73.

30 Ibid., 137. On the impact of Weimar Marcionism, see Løland, *Pauline Ugliness*, 65–68, and the specific influence of Heidegger noted on 67. See also Yotam Hotam, "Gnosis and Modernity: A Postwar German Intellectual Debate on Secularisation, Religion, and 'Overcoming' the Past," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8 (2007), 591–608; Lazier, *God Interrupted*, 27–36; Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Gnostic Anxieties: Jewish Intellectuals and Weimar Neo-Marcionism," *Modern Theology* 35 (2019), 71–80; Styfahls, *No Spiritual Investment*, 28–60.

with a tradition originating in a (gnostic) Jewish heresy which not only absorbed in itself the heterogeneous elements of Hellenistic mystery cults but had to reconcile itself with systems as incompatible with each other as they were alien to itself, first with the Old Testament and then with Aristotelian metaphysics. Heidegger's polemic is directed against the biblical and metaphysical compromise of Christian theology and is thus carrying on a secret, esoteric, heretical, "Christian" tradition.³¹

It is interesting to compare this passage with the assessment of Jacob Taubes in a letter to Susan from May 1952:

1. *Heidegger hat keinen Ort für die 'Natur', antikosmologisch [...]*
 2. *'Seinsgeschichte' hat nichts mit Weltgeschichte zu tun, sondern kann nur als neutralisierte 'Heilsgeschichte' verstanden werden. H. ist in fast naiver Weise saekularisierter Theologe, er 'übersetzt' einfach das theolog. Vokabular. H. gehört in die Reihe des deutsch. Idealismus vor Nietzsche, der die christliche (und alle Filiationen) Interpretation überwinden wollte.*³²

Susan carried forward both of Jacob's points, that Heidegger has no real sense of nature and thus can be branded as anticosmological, and that his history of being has nothing to do with world history but should be understood as a

31 Taubes, "The Gnostic Foundations," 157 (emphasis in original). Susan's thesis is summarized in the letter to Jacob from April 6, 1952, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §220, 177: "One thing is clear H.'s concern is utterly theological. The major preoccupation with 'Sein'— the 'is' as such (instead of 'God') — is motivated by a theological interest — because the sense of the 'is' determines the sense of 'God is' therefore the 'is' must first of all be thought theologically; this seems to me the tendency of the later writings, while S+Z develops the 'anthropological' (– conceived in *opposition* to the theological) interpretation of 'is' to its last consequences. However the theological interpretation of the 'is' coming from *this* side of Seinsdenken does not bring us nearer to the living god. God is on the other side — not of the world but of the self" (emphasis in original). See the letter of March 26, 1952, *ibid.*, §210, 160–162, which includes a portion of Susan's working notes in German on the "theological frame" of Heidegger's ontology. A somewhat more conciliatory assessment of Heidegger's religious sensibilities can be found in Susan's letter to Jacob from March 24, 1952, *ibid.*, §207, 155. Cf. the criticism of Heidegger and mysticism in the letter from Susan to Jacob, dated March 4, 1952, *ibid.*, §191, 122–123.

32 Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §244, 226–227. On Heidegger's blurring the distinction between historical consciousness and myth, see Jacob Taubes, *Apokalypse und Politik: Aufsätze, Kritiken, und kleinere Schriften*, ed. Herbert Kopp-Oberstebrink and Martin Tremel, Paderborn: Fink, 2017, 241–242.

neutralized history of salvation whence we can also designate him a secularized theologian, translating theological vocabulary in his effort to overcome Christianity.

Also relevant is the following comment in *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus*, based on lectures held in Heidelberg, February 23–27, 1987:

The same kind of appeal to Kierkegaard happens at the same time in theology and in philosophy. I can't expound here on how Heidegger wants to subvert this and wants to neutralize the Christian in Kierkegaard; this is something the theologians have never understood, that Heidegger wanted to dig the grave of theology, but I can't go into the Bultmannian naivetés today, who wanted to understand natural man using Heideggerian categories and Christian man using Pauline categories. And Heidegger played along and managed in this way to make the entire theological Marburg circle into his apostles, which was no small matter. Heidegger, you see, was a tactician, a strategist of the highest order.³³

Subsequently, I will return to Jacob Taubes's understanding of Gnosticism in relation to Judaism, but what is of relevance to note here is his assessment that Heidegger's philosophy in *Sein und Zeit* is a radical endorsement of finitude that neutralizes the ontotheological and yet he strategically encouraged others to embrace his thought as the ground for their own theological ruminations. In *Abendländische Eschatologie*, there is no overt attempt to link Heidegger and Gnosticism as we find, for instance, in the aforementioned study "Der

33 Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, ed. Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann, in conjunction with Horst Folkers, Wolf-Daniel Hartwich, and Christoph Schulte, trans. Dana Hollander, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004, 66. I note the irony that Taubes himself was sometimes described by others in terms not unlike those that he used to describe Heidegger. For instance, see Arendt's letter to Scholem from April 9, 1953, in *The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Gershom Scholem*, ed. Marie Luise Knott, trans. Anthony David, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017, §106, 176, and the letter from July 8, 1954, §110, 180. See Scholem's response in a letter from August 3, 1954, *ibid.*, §111, 183. On the negative assessment of Heidegger and his being triangulated with Schmitt and Hitler, see Taubes, *The Political Theology*, 103–105. On Taubes's stupefaction over the Nazi flirtation on the part of Heidegger and Schmitt, see *ibid.*, 99–100, and parallel text with slight variations in Jacob Taubes, *To Carl Schmitt: Letters and Reflections*, trans. Keith Tribe, with an Introduction by Mike Grimshaw, New York: Columbia University Press, 2013, 50. See also the letter of Taubes to Armin Mohler from February 14, 1952, in Taubes, *The Political Theology*, 107–108. For discussion of Taubes's engagement with Schmitt, see Bruce Rosenstock, "Palintropos Harmoniê: Jacob Taubes and Carl Schmitt 'im liebenden Streit,'" *New German Critique* 121 (2014), 55–92.

dogmatische Mythos der Gnosis.”³⁴ It is reasonable to surmise that this crucial point was Susan’s innovation, although we can presume from the extant letters that her understanding of both Heidegger and Gnosticism was indebted to Jacob’s own cogitations on these topics.³⁵

Be that as it may, what is worthy of emphasis is that Susan’s reading Heidegger through the prism of an esoteric current of Christianity was more than an intellectual exercise. The clue that this is so is in the demarcation of that gnostic current as originating in a Jewish heresy, a position affirmed by a number of scholars, including Scholem, to some extent,³⁶ and by Jacob Taubes,

34 On the possible influence of Heidegger on Taubes’s *Abendländische Eschatologie*, see Romano Poci, “Die Angst und das Nichts. Überlegungen zu Heideggers ‘Was ist Metaphysik?’,” in Richard Faber, Eveline Goodman-Thau, Thomas Macho, eds., *Abendländische Eschatologie. Ad Jacob Taubes*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001, 331–340.

35 If my supposition is correct, it would be another example of Jacob eclipsing the influence that Susan had on his intellectual curiosity. Another example would be his account in a conversation with Peter Sloterdijk in January 1987 of how Scholem drew his attention to Simone Weil and then eventually Susan wrote a dissertation on her. See Thomas Macho, “Der intellektuelle Bruch zwischen Gershom Scholem und Jacob Taubes. Zur Frage nach dem Preis des Messianismus,” in *Abendländische Eschatologie. Ad Jacob Taubes*, 541; English translation: “On the Price of Messianism: The Intellectual Rift between Gershom Scholem and Jacob Taubes,” in Anna Glazova and Paul North, eds., *Messianic Thought Outside Theology*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2014, 39. For a more extensive analysis, see Thomas Macho, “Moderne Gnosis? Zum Einfluß Simone Weils auf Jacob und Susan Taubes,” in *Abendländische Eschatologie. Ad Jacob Taubes*, 545–560. See also Weigel, “Between the Philosophy,” 130–132. As the author duly notes, 132, “there is a clear proximity between Susan Taubes’s writing from the 1950s, Jacob Taubes’s preceding dissertation on occidental eschatology, and his later work from the 1960s to the 1980s—above all in respect to Gnosticism, in both his fascination with the ‘prince of the world’ and his discussion of Marcion. Here Jacob Taubes’s Heidegger essay of 1975 and his Marcion essay of 1984 are of special interest.” Finally, consider the somewhat disparaging remarks about Simone Weil and Susan Taubes in Jacob Taubes’s letter to Arthur A. Cohen from November 3, 1977, published by Jerry Z. Muller, “‘I Am Impossible’: An Exchange Between Jacob Taubes and Arthur A. Cohen,” *Jewish Review of Books* (2017), <https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/authors/?a=jerry-z-muller>. The specific reference is to Susan Taubes, “The Riddle of Simone Weil,” *Exodus* 1 (1959), 55–71, in which she displayed empathy with Weil’s criticism of Judaism as promoting a worldly and legalistic particularism in contrast to Christianity’s embrace of a universalistic spirituality. See Helen Thein, “Das Rätsel um Susan Taubes—eine Spurensuche,” *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 59 (2007), 378.

36 For a partial list of scholars who have discussed this topic, see Elliot R. Wolfson, *Along the Path: Studies in Kabbalistic Myth, Symbolism, and Hermeneutics*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995, 195, n. 20. It goes without saying that since that publication many more scholars have weighed in on the relation of Gnosticism and Judaism in late antiquity, but this is not the place to elaborate.

as we shall see, but rejected by Jonas, who argued that it would be preferable to think of Gnosticism evolving in the vicinity of or in close proximity to the intellectual-spiritual milieu of Judaism and therefore betraying the influence of Jewish structures of thought and modes of scriptural exegesis but also reacting polemically and antagonistically to other vital aspects of late-antique Judaic monotheism.³⁷ Following the former line of thinking, Susan proffered that the secret and heretical tradition that fueled Heidegger's rejection of Christian theology was a form of Jewish-Christian gnosis. The philosophical assumption undergirding this historical explanation is the belief that heresy "implies a most intimate and complex relation to orthodoxy wherein repulsion and attraction go hand in hand."³⁸ This statement is offered to explain the theological bedrock of Heidegger's antitheology but it may be extended to the gnostics: the anarchic aspects of Gnosticism are, in part, anti-Jewish interpretations of Judaism,³⁹ and, as such, they are not to be deciphered as a heterodox refutation of orthodoxy, terms that are widely inappropriate for the period when Judaism and Christianity evolved as distinct liturgical communities. The gnostic heresy disrupts the setting of impervious boundaries; the rupture ensues from a bending rather than a breaking of tradition. Alternatively, the heretic imparts the secret that nullification of tradition is the supreme gesture of sanctioning tradition.⁴⁰ As Susan put it in the letter to Jacob, dated September 15–16, 1950:

It seems that wherever one raises the lid of a question the same old Gnostic serpent twists up its seductive head and gives me its key to enter the problem of the "double truth" in scientific and mythopoietic language. [...] Forgive me for being so "academic" the Muses weep when I speak so; but I listen to the serpent, for he seduced us away from the source only to seduce us back to the source. And I trust the serpent who knows the secret of the passage and who embodies the mysterious

37 Hans Jonas, *Philosophical Essays: From Ancient Creed to Technological Man*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, 278–279, 289–296. See Wiese, *The Life*, 40, 60–65.

38 Taubes, "The Gnostic Foundations," 155.

39 In the letter of Susan to Albert Camus from February 2, 1952, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §267, 257, the classification "Old Testament" is said to have been "created in the split between judaism and christianity, and expressed the christian, and already anti-jewish interpretation of judaism." For more on this letter, see below, n. 75.

40 See Susan's letter to Jacob from April 15, 1952, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §227, 195: "I would like the orthodox laws to be enforced absolutely, so as to break the law from within by driving it ad absurdum: we love a 'consequential' enemy because we know he is digging his own grave."

necessity wherein “the way up and the way down are the same” and the way of going hence is the way of returning; moreover this may be the only ultimately legitimate use of the copula.⁴¹

Susan avails herself of the gnostic symbol of gnosis, the serpent, which provides her with the key to gain access to the problem of the double truth of adulation and abhorrence. One is here reminded of the “double doctrine of truth” posited by Harry A. Wolfson to name the widespread belief in medieval Islamic, Jewish, and Christian philosophical sources of two equally legitimate modes of articulating a single truth, the scriptural and the rational.⁴² For Susan, the doubleness of truth signifies that the single truth can be expressed scientifically and mythopoeically. But what is the nature of that truth? It is to be discerned from a more careful consideration of the symbol of the serpent. In a manner intriguingly reminiscent of Sabbatian thought wherein the serpent is identified with the savior (based on the fact that the words *naḥash* and *mashiaḥ* both equal 358),⁴³ Susan notes that the serpent assumes the paradoxical role of seducing one back to the source from which the serpent has seduced

41 Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §2, 17–18. In the same letter, *ibid.*, 18, Susan reflects on Heidegger’s idea of naming the holy: “And in this effort to regain the holy the poet drives the cursed-godgiven-language through all the excluded and forbidden realms of genesis, through all the secret passages of the creation out of nothing. (And I must confess, speaking as a heretic, I can’t think of a greater poet than the writer of the Bible.)” Compare Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §193, 129. After writing about the creation of new symbolic forms generated by return to the source—the amorphous substratum of the real—by stepping into the ocean of formlessness, Susan speculates, “This sounds a little like the old Heidegger (or the ‘new’—time runs both ways, the oldest is the youngest) except that H. sees the descent and the transtemporal moment of union when the poet names the holy as a contemplative act, as a moment in the process of ‘Seinsdenken’. [...] And H.’s Seinsdenken and naming of the holy remains an empty form on paper. Let him come out dancing from his cubiculum and then I’ll believe him.”

42 Harry A. Wolfson, *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, vol. 1, ed. Isadore Twersky and George H. Williams, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973, 583–618.

43 For references to this numerology, see Elliot R. Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 142 n. 53. It lies beyond this chapter to delve more deeply into Susan’s various uses of the image of the serpent, but one usage is worthy of note as it relates to the paradox of the convergence of the holy and the demonic, namely, her reference to kindling the Sabbath candles as lighting the fire or the candle of the serpent, or sometimes simply as lighting the serpent. See Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §7, 32; §10, 39; §24, 70; §28, 79; §33, 90; §37, 104; §42, 116; §47, 128; §62, 156; §111, 233. I intend to explore this matter in a separate study, but in the meantime see Pareigis, “The Conflicting Paths,” 286. According to Pareigis, the serpent serves as a symbol for the “deep synthesis of knowledge and eros,” which was part of “the execution of an esoteric private cult between the partners.”

one away. To appreciate the truth communicated in these words, we must bear in mind that the two gestures are concomitant and not sequential, and hence the seduction to depart is itself the seduction to return and the seduction to return is the seduction to depart, a point confirmed by the reference to the Heraclitean dictum that the way up and the way down are one and the same. Most provocative is the concluding remark that the paradox that the way of going is the way of returning may be the only legitimate use of the copula. Candidly, I am not entirely certain what Susan intended by these words, but perhaps a clue may be elicited from the technical definition of a copula as a word or a phrase that links the subject of a clause to a subject complement, which may take the form of an adjective, an adverb, or a prepositional phrase. If we add to this the fact that the primary verb “be” is sometimes referred to as the copula, perhaps Susan was intimating that the serpentine wisdom of the paradoxical identity of ascent and descent, or of progression and regression, provides a window through which one can gaze into the mystery of being.

Heidegger’s *Fundamentalontologie* may have been constructed on the basis of Christian luminaries, and especially the existential categories of Kierkegaard, but the theological underpinnings of the “destruction of the entire history of ontology”⁴⁴ can only be understood by reference to the gnostic revolt against the harmony of human and cosmic nature. The “acosmic notion of the self”⁴⁵ has a parallel in Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* where the ontological concern is “not the Being of cosmos but the Being of *self*. [...] The self defies all worldly categories; it is discovered not through the world but in opposition to it.”⁴⁶ Herein lies the core of the spirit of gnosis—an insurgency that has its roots in a heretical form of Judaism but whose repercussions can be detected in the Gospel of John and some of the Pauline epistles—the belief that humanity is not at home in the cosmos, and hence we may say of the logos of this gnosis that it is not, quite literally, of this world.⁴⁷ Generalizing in a manner that would not

44 Taubes, “The Gnostic Foundations,” 157.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., 156–157 (emphasis in original).

47 Ibid., 158. In a letter to Jacob dated February 12, 1952, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §172, 91, Susan shrewdly captures the logical contradiction of identifying world-denial as the central trope of Gnosticism: “If the gnostic revolt is absolute it must in order to remain consistent negate the world as world, absolutely without reference to judgement; i.e. negate good as well as evil, meaning as well as absurdity, purpose as well as senselessness; in other words it must negate salvation and eschatology. But then it is no longer ‘gnosis.’ If the analysis is right then the moving principle of the gnosis is a dialectical trick, an evasion, a self-betrayal.” Cf. the letter from April 21, 1952, *ibid.*, §232, 204, where Susan points out that the gnostic judgment on reality contains an implicit affirmation of the world it

be fashionable today, Susan concludes, “All gnostic mythology and speculation revolve around the drama of the self, its fall and redemption. [...] The phase of self-estrangement is the dialectical point of the gnostic drama, since there strangeness reaches its climax: the strange self is estranged from itself to the strange world.”⁴⁸ The self’s realization of its estrangement is the first moment of recovering from the forgetfulness of its original self; homesickness initiates the homecoming.⁴⁹ History, then, is “the way from and at the same time the way back to the source. The way of the self into the world is represented by the notion of a fall or ‘thrownness’; the way through the world by erring, exile, and homelessness; the way out of the world by homesickness, remembering, and redemption.”⁵⁰

Gnostic soteriology is predicated on discerning that one is born into a material world from which the spirit is alienated, doubly so to the extent that the embodied spirit lives in a state of *agnōsia*, that is, ignorance of being ignorant, an imprisonment that leads to the estrangement from one’s own estrangement, a dislocation that engenders a feeling of dread. The disenchanting spirit awakened by the call is not redeemed in but rather from the world. An allusion to this gnostic myth is discerned in Heidegger’s transferring the ontological delimitation of being as the most general to the most particular, the concrete situation of *Dasein*.⁵¹ Ontology, in other words, is grounded in the existential analysis of the self, and insofar as the latter is identical with time, the temporal serves as the horizon for any understanding of being.⁵² In contrast to the ancient gnostic myth, for Heidegger, “*Dasein* is not a ‘spark’ thrown off from the beyond into the world. There is no world independent of *Dasein* nor *Dasein* independent of the world; rather, the possibility of self as an estrangement from the Being is coequal with the possibility of a world. That there is a drama at all is due to the essentially temporal ek-static structure of the self.”⁵³ Whereas

negates. Susan contrasts the “sentimentality of gnostic (pseudo)-nihilism” and “Buddhist nihilism.” Various letters attest to her interest in Buddhism. For instance, see Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §20, 63: “I find a great deal of hints, bibliography on the nothing in Buddhism.” See also *ibid.*, §34, 97; §51, 137; §92, 209; Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §141, 33.

48 *Ibid.*, 158. For Susan’s personal rejection of this gnostic or mystical portrayal of the self, see, for instance, the letter of April 9, 1952, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §224, 187.

49 Taubes, “The Gnostic Foundations,” 158–159.

50 *Ibid.*, 159.

51 *Ibid.*, 156.

52 *Ibid.*, 157.

53 *Ibid.*, 162. Susan’s point corresponds to Jacob Taubes’s remark in “The Development of the Ontological Question in Recent German Philosophy,” *Review of Metaphysics* 6 (1953), 662, that Heidegger’s concept of *Dasein* should be rendered as *homo absconditus*, a locution

the “ethical nihilism of early gnosticism was tempered by an eschatological hope and a positive, if mythical, faith in a ‘beyond’ which promised a perfect community of spirits,” for Heidegger, the “nihilism is naked and unadorned. There is no question of transcending ethical norms or of an apotheosis⁵⁴ of man by breaking through the limits of individuality, as in gnostic-Dionysiac cults.”⁵⁵ Notwithstanding this crucial distinction, Susan still maintains—drawing particularly from the essay “Was ist Metaphysik?” (1929)—that the “nihilistic features” of Heidegger’s thought “are rooted in the same experience as the cosmic nihilism of the gnosis.”⁵⁶

In a letter from November 29, 1950, Susan laid out to Jacob her argument concerning the theological footing of Heidegger’s gnostic antitheology:

As far as I can judge Heidegger sees the relation of “Sein” to “Seiende” and to the “eksistentz” of man only in the moment of *thinking*: i.e. to ask a “cosmological” or “dialectical” question like how does the “Seiende” “come out” of the “Sein” would be illegitimate since the Being is the “light” that makes things “visible” and the ultimate relation of Being to things and to thought is not cosmological, the ultimate happening is not any kind of producing of things and world: the relation is not even ontological in the usual sense [...] but theological. That is Being, things, and ek-sistence, in the moment of thinking the truth of Being are prior to any “cosmos” all the problems of one + many, actuality + potentiality [...] implied in “cosmos” [...] and I do not quite understand what the world of transactions (Seiende) “is” except that it is the openness wherein we are thrown from the “Being”— and our ek-sistence, our exile in the world, in the lighting of Being, remembering and being shepherds of the Being is as “simple” as the Biblical story only even more mysterious.⁵⁷

This is an astute account of the theological ground of Heidegger’s antitheology: being assumes the posture of God as the invisible light that makes all

that conveys that the human is the locus for the opening to being. Taubes acknowledges the similarity to *deus absconditus*, but he cautions against interpreting *homo absconditus* as a secularized derivative of the theological idea. On the contrary, for Heidegger, the theological is derivative from categories that describe the human condition. It is noteworthy that Susan translated this essay. For the German translation by Herbert Kopp-Oberstebrink, see Taubes, *Apocalypse und Politik*, 64.

54 This strikes me as a typographical error that should be corrected to “apotheosis.”

55 Taubes, “The Gnostic Foundations,” 168.

56 *Ibid.*, 168–169.

57 Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §46, 125.

beings visible. The relation of being to the multiplicity of beings is not cosmological or ontological but theological inasmuch as the world of beings is the openness wherein we are thrown from and presumably can return to being. Salvation comes by way of remembering, a recollection that allocates to humanity the task to shepherd being in the fallen state of beings. In a letter from December 3, 1950, Susan tells Jacob she was inspired by a conversation with Eugen Kullmann to delve more deeply into the appropriateness of thinking about Heidegger in light of Gnosticism, going so far as to question whether we can apply “gnostic vocabulary” to him at all, since one of the basic premises of *Sein und Zeit* is that “there is no objective time, and so no objective history i.e. no objective stage on which the drama of the fall, exile, wandering through the world, remembering and homecoming could be played.”⁵⁸ Adopting a somewhat peculiar locution, Susan ascribes to Heidegger “an Augustinian kantism which says that all our terms for what lies prior to the Fall and what is beyond the state of fallenness, even the conception of God is only born out of our state of fallenness. Beyond this state we cannot speak of Being or God or of anything.”⁵⁹

Whatever the historical merits of the argument that ancient Gnosticism was a Jewish heresy, I propose that for Susan Taubes, this hypothesis underscores what is at stake existentially with her own marginalization and rootlessness, the perspective whence she postulates a more generic philosophical sense of disorientation, “the truth that the thinker however deeply and organically his thinking is married to and with the world, thinks at a point outside the world.”⁶⁰ The point outside the world does not denote a transcendental axis but rather the externalization of self, a detachment of consciousness from the world to which it is attached by nonattachment. Consider the summary of the gnostic acosmism offered by Susan in her doctoral thesis:

58 Ibid., §48, 129.

59 Ibid. Perhaps the reference to an “Augustinian kantism” can be elucidated from the letter written January 12, 1951, *ibid.*, §87, 202: “Our conception of the soul is as good and no better than our conception of the world — so we either stay locked in Kant’s ‘bad cosmos’ or we run out ‘negatively’ in the gnostic mad-alley. In either case the bad cosmos remains as a blot negatively attributable to the ‘good’ God — but does the negative explanation i.e. that the badness of the bad world is simply his absence, in any way ‘excuse’ him — for he is entirely responsible for the world, he creates it unless we assume another God. But the mysteries of the nothing are deeper and beyond the ‘badness’ or ‘goodness’ of the cosmos.” For an elaboration on the theme of fallenness and *Dasein*’s mode of being-in-the-world, see Taubes, “The Gnostic Foundations,” 162–163.

60 Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §37, 105.

The early gnostics expressed their hatred for the “natural order” by acts of defiance against law and custom; their revolt against the “cosmos” could take libertinistic forms of lawlessness, excess and cynical contempt for worldly authorities, as well as ascetic forms of abstinence. By reducing the transcendental good to a total negation of all possible modes of existence and by stripping it of all analogical resonances that could be sounded by the “otherworldly” and the “supernatural.” Simone Weil has removed the antinomian sting from gnostic nihilism and has converted a vision of the beyond which received its impetus from *revolt* into a principle of *obedience*.⁶¹

I will refrain from assessing the accuracy of the comments about Weil. For our purposes what is noteworthy is highlighting the world-negating nature of Gnosticism and its antinomianism,⁶² themes that were crucial to Jacob Taubes’s gnostic apocalypticism as well as his portrait of Paul promulgating the principle that the abrogation of the law is the most perfect implementation of the law, the transvaluation of values enacted through the crucifixion, that is, the death by defamation mandated by the strictures of halakhah.⁶³

On occasion, Susan expressed displeasure with the Heideggerian trope of *Geworfenheit*, even insisting that “the locus of authentic Being” is to be sought in the “juncture of the world and the Holy, and not the individual.”⁶⁴ In a letter to Jacob from January 27, 1951, Susan writes, “If Heidegger is truly gnostic then only through history can we pass beyond history and come ‘home’ — otherwise the animals and degenerate savages are dwelling in the holy more than man. So, man ‘belongs’ in history as his ‘exile’ — and his ultimate being at home in the ‘beyond’ is already pointing to his exile.”⁶⁵ In a letter to Jacob from

61 Taubes, “The Absent God: A Study,” 243–244 (emphasis in original).

62 Cf. the reference to “the gnostic heretical (both Christian and Jewish) doctrine of redemption through sin, of sin as a necessary phase in redemption,” by Taubes, “Review of *Tragedy and the Paradox*,” 324. Insofar as Scholem’s *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* is mentioned there explicitly, we can assume that Susan Taubes was influenced by him in her formulation of the “antinomistic” idea of transgression for the sake of salvation and the related image of the coincidence of saint and sinner.

63 Taubes, *From Cult to Culture*, 4–5; idem, *The Political Theology*, 10, 24–25. See Agata Bielik-Robson, *Jewish Cryptotheologies of Late Modernity: Philosophical Marranos*, London: Routledge, 2014, 167–174; Løland, *Pauline Ugliness*, 112–113, 115–117; Styfhals, *No Spiritual Investment*, 113–119. Taubes’s interest in the antinomian spirit of messianism is part of his well-known engagement and disagreement with Scholem. Concerning this matter, see Wolfson, *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, 332, n. 197, and other references cited there.

64 Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §51, 136. Compare *ibid.*, §59, 151.

65 *Ibid.*, §99, 218.

January 4, 1952, Susan offers a more intricate critique of the gnostic reverberations of Heidegger's discussion of the anxiety of being-in-the-world and the nonbeing of death:

Philosophy is nevertheless a highly dubious occupation. In the end, science, the will to conquer the beings in the world may be more legitimate than philosophy: the will to conquer "non-being": death, "le temps perdu" + the strangeness, the quality of otherness of being. [...] Nevertheless, I would say against Heidegger that the feeling of vertigo [...] before the past, that one lived, that one was, and that is no more, testifies to a relation, indeed a painfully negative relation to the non-temporal. What I would like to say (but I don't dare) is that in the dread before the constant and the ultimate annihilation, without ceasing to fear one reaches god, god is present in the fear,—or it is because of god that one fears. [...] Heid. only speaks of "wovor die Angst sich ängstet"⁶⁶ but not of why there is Angst, or why man is "unzuhaus."⁶⁷ The "why" does not ask for an "answer" but rather for dwelling more totally more humbly within the question itself, living the question and rejecting false solutions.⁶⁸

Several days later, in a letter to Jacob from January 11, Susan contrasts the biblical emphasis on trust in God and the pessimism of the gnostic vision in terms that are jarring in light of how her own life ended: "The gnosis tries to resolve the agony of mistrust and distrust by relieving God of all responsibility for the

66 The reference is to a passage in the section on anxiety as the disclosedness of *Dasein* in Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1953, §40, 186. See idem, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, revised and with a foreword by Dennis J. Schmidt, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010, 180.

67 Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §40, 189; idem, *Being and Time*, 183. For Heidegger, *Unzuhaus*, "not-being-at-home," is synonymous with *Unheimlichkeit*, "uncanniness," but literally "unhomeliness." On the use of the category "mythical" in relation to Heidegger's discussion of angst and the myth of the *Nichtung des Nichts*, related to Husserl's idea of the fragility of being (*Brüchigkeit*), see Jacob Taubes, "The Development of the Ontological Question," 661. For the German version, see Taubes, *Apocalypse und Politik*, 63.

68 Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §136, 21. See Susan's letter to Jacob from late January 1951, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §99, 217, on the matter of Heidegger's sense of angst, and compare the discussion of Heidegger's *Sein zum Tode* in the letter of Susan to Jacob from March 12–13, 1952, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §198, 140–141. Susan presents a starkly different view of death in the concluding verses from her poem "Post Apocalypse," reproduced in *ibid.*, §266, 255: "After we have tasted death how shall we taste/any other thing?// A great shudder we felt at the instant of unveiling/Our faces peeled off, face to face with the faceless." I hope someday to revisit this captivating image of death as the face to face encounter with the faceless.

world, for fate and for history. But we who have chosen to live on earth eating the bread, suffering and enjoying and struggling to sanctify the bonds of human love, we long to be reconciled with the God of the wor[ld], the God of fate and history. The other way is no reconciliation, it is pure negation, whose only legitimate form of expression is suicide.”⁶⁹

Deviations of this sort notwithstanding, the preponderant sense one gets is that the gnostic-Heideggerian idea of thrownness resonates with Susan’s perception regarding the shattered nature of the world in general and the Jewish propensity to be somewhere by always being elsewhere in particular.⁷⁰ Comparable to Jacob’s apocalyptic messianism, and his interest in the Marcionite theopolitics of Paul,⁷¹ the delineation of Gnosticism on the part of Susan as a Jewish heresy offered her a way of relating to a tradition from which

69 Ibid., §142, 37–38.

70 That dislodgment applies even to living in the state of Israel may be gathered from the depiction of that country and the trepidation expressed about the moral implications of the nationalistic drive of Zionism in the letter Susan wrote to Jacob, dated February 26–27, 1952, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §186, 113: “If there is one thing that draws me to that part of the world it is the land, a harsh and obscene and inhuman land, whose cruelty, indifference and silences haunt me, so that I would like to return again and again and be refused again and again the secret of the sphynx. Therefore I hate all the more the willful vision of a people that is driving out the silences, and is resolved to conquer the desert in order to realize their will ‘to be a people’. [...] Misery and injustice may be the lot of man; but a programmatic misery and planned injustice is the worst of all; one cannot breathe one can neither revolt nor consent because everything is ‘necessary’. One is robbed even of the knowledge of the senselessness of misery and the stupidity of injustice because all the evils are essential for the realization of the ideal. The experiment may succeed, but can the people worship any other god than the one that created them as a people, can they do otherwise than to defy their success? They will be like all the other peoples, only more proud and pretentious.”

71 Hent de Vries, “Inverse Versus Dialectical Theology: The Two Faces of Negativity and the Miracle of Faith,” in Ward Blanton and Hent de Vries, eds., *Paul and the Philosophers*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2013, 466–511, esp. 480–483. On Taubes’s reading of Paul, see also Larry L. Welborn, “Jacob Taubes—Paulinist, Messianist,” in Peter Frick, ed., *Paul in the Grip of the Philosophers: The Apostle and Contemporary Continental Philosophy*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013, 69–89; Gordon Zerbe, “On the Exigency of a Messianic Ecclesia: An Engagement with Philosophical Readers of Paul,” in Douglas Harink, ed., *Paul, Philosophy and the Theopolitical Vision: Critical Engagements with Agamben, Badiou, Žižek, and Others*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010, 268–271; Daniel Colucciello Barber, *On Diaspora: Christianity, Religion, and Secularity*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011, 62–87; Sigrid Weigel, “In Paul’s Mask: Jacob Taubes Reads Walter Benjamin,” in Willem Styffhals and Stéphane Symons, eds., *Genealogies of the Secular: The Making of Modern German Thought*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019, 193–216. On Taubes’s Marcionism, see also Bielik-Robson, *Jewish Cryptotheologies*, 178–182.

she was becoming increasingly more alienated,⁷² including from Zionism and the political situation that was evolving in the newly formed state of Israel.⁷³

72 For instance, see Susan's musings, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §1, 15–16. After she acknowledges that she went to an Orthodox service and then to a Reform temple, she writes: "It is clear to me that I must follow the voice that speaks in my soul and not to deceive myself by any talmudic or jesuitical rationalization that I can attach and commit myself to any mass belief and tradition. It simply is not true what I believe and what the laws and scriptures and traditions uphold are two different things they are of different dimension and I am not at the moment concerned with how to discipline the masses or how to keep priests and rabbis employed and although there is nothing I desire more than to worship in community and not in loneliness I will suffer my loneliness rather than to give myself to hypocrisy [*sic*] and falsehood. I don't think you have a right to force me to repeat and repeat the same process of decision. [...] I would be deeply hurt if you expect that because you are good to me I must compromise my beliefs and to please you go along with the ritual. This would be very cheap." See Susan's letter to Jacob from April 15, 1952, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §227, 194: "Father gave me to read Bialiks Halacha + Aggada. It's an unfortunate thesis: granted that human life can be the material of a work of art, and the education of a people analogous to the building of a cathedral — the Jewish people can hardly stand up against a cathedral or a symphony. The divine experiment failed."

73 It lies beyond the main concern of this study to discuss Susan Taubes's attitude toward the land of Israel. I will mention, however, a few intriguing comments, the first from a letter written to Jacob on November 28, 1950, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §44, 119–120. Referring to Gershom and Fanja Scholem, she writes, "Their attitude is really insufferable and I really would not like to be involved in his circle. I think too highly of the holy land to treat it in this kind of stupid + adolescent chauvinism as the Scholems + co." The second example is a startlingly candid and heartrending effort to encourage Jacob in Susan's letter from November 29, 1950, *ibid.*, §46, 124: "I am sick of words becoming defiled on my own lips, I am sick of learning the tactics of a war where my victory is my defeat, and I think I fear destitution, disease, dirt and death less than I fear devaluation, being in 'bondage to strange lords' and to strange gods. What I see, my dear, — and from looking at men in such enviable positions as Tillich or Weiss — that if we want to be successful we will have to sell ourselves: for that is simply what is meant by being a 'professional'. There is no place for contemplation, and whatever shall be spoken from the silence of contemplation shall not be understood or wanted. The face of this land is sealed with cement and there is not one crack where spirit could break through: all is skin without pores: The only category of Being is being-outside, and all 'inwardness' cast out is doomed to [be] a dead figure [...]. And where is it better? Nowhere. But there is one 'place' where at least I can say with full conviction and authority that it 'ought not be so'. For where is it written that America should not be [']a face sealed to God' -? [...] But about Jerusalem something is written. And to remember that is worthwhile at the price of a hard and drab existence and even at the price of ultimate defeat; and to remember what is written on Jerusalem and Israel is more worthwhile than all the possibilities of all the world." See the more explicit criticism of Zionist nationalism in the letter cited above, n. 70. In many of the letters, Susan tries to embolden Jacob, urging him to work in spite of his feelings of despondency fostered by difficult relations with other intellectuals and academics in Jerusalem. See Pareigis, "Letter from Susan Taubes," 112: "I wonder how you are, beloved

Consider her remark in a letter from October 26, 1950, after having finished Arthur Koestler's novel *Thieves in the Night: Chronicle of an Experiment* (1946).⁷⁴ Recognizing at an early stage that the situation in Israel-Palestine would likely worsen as the immigration of Jews increased, she laments that *the only gnostic answer to history is to bathe one's self in blood*, a sentiment that she startlingly links to the proclamation for war in Deuteronomy 32:42.⁷⁵ The repetitiveness underlying the realization that "nothing changes" confirms the futility of history and its inability to promote its own redemption. This gnostic repudiation did not mean that Susan advocated for a morose affirmation of death over life—although we know tragically that this was her eventual fate⁷⁶—but

child. Now that I am with the parents and so much love is poured on me I think more of your loneliness [*sic*] than mine." And *ibid.*, 114: "Write to me dear one how you are + you must be cheerful even 'alone in Jerusalem'; it is not a question of 'feeling' but of 'service' cheerfulness should be like prayer, fast and feast." On Jacob's depression and loneliness during his time in Jerusalem, see the comment of Pareigis, *ibid.*, 112, n. 2. See the letter of April 11, 1952, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §225, 189, where Susan expresses her desire not to return to Jerusalem and mentions Scholem as a detrimental presence for Jacob. For a passionate description of Susan's discouragement with academia and her preferring the oral transmission of the living word (à la the rabbinic sage) to scholarly writing, see the letter from December 20, 1950, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §60, 153. That Jacob, too, harbored an antipathy toward academia is attested in his remark in Taubes, *The Political Theology*, 3: "And this is how I—a poor Job—came to the Letter to the Romans: as a Jew and not as a professor (which, actually, I'm not all that invested in, except that it should provide me a decent living)."

74 Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §23, 68–69.

75 Compare the letter of Susan to Albert Camus from February 2, 1952, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §267, 257–258. Responding to Camus's referring to the militant and cruel God of the "Old Testament," she writes, "By insisting on a literal interpretation and by ignoring jewish history and the interpretations it has developed, you and Simone Weil actually ally yourself with the most zealot of zionist terrorist [*sic*] who used the primitive battle cries of the Bible for their war slogans. The same terrorists professed themselves atheists, rejected judaism as a religion, since despite of their propagandist abuse of the Bible, their inspiration was not as much biblical as national-socialist. The two are not identical, or even similar as you seem to suggest. I might add that the religious jews of Palestine, those who claim to live by the word of the Bible, have to this day refused to recognize the State of Israel and have chosen to endure the greater deprivations rather than take out their identity cards without which they cannot buy rationed food, clothing and other necessary articles, but whose acceptance would be equal to acceptance of citizenship on the State." See below, n. 183.

76 Apart from her personal suffering, the subject of the tragic was of philosophical interest to Susan Taubes as can be seen in the brief but incisive essay "The Nature of Tragedy," *Review of Metaphysics* 7 (1953), 193–206. Tragedy is delineated as the struggle for a balance between the poles of hope and nihilism that cannot be maintained. The tragic situation, consequently, is one in which opposites cannot be reconciled. See Weigel, "Before the Philosophy," 116–121.

rather the idea that life must be affirmed in spite of its fragmentation and meaninglessness.⁷⁷ Belief in a divine force is not lacking in her worldview, but it is not the traditional *deus ex machina*.⁷⁸ One can well imagine that in Susan's description of Simone Weil we are offered a glance at her own post-Nietzschean negative theology: "Atheism, which used to be a charge leveled against skeptics, unbelievers, or simply the indifferent, has come to mean a *religious* experience of the death of God. The godlessness of the world in all its strata and categories becomes, paradoxically and by a dialectic of negation, the signature of God and yields a mystical atheism, a theology of divine absence and nonbeing, of divine impotence, divine nonintervention, and divine indifference."⁷⁹ Several years before this essay was published, Susan speculated on Weil and the possible convergence of the mystical and the atheistic, in a letter from January 17–18, 1952 to Jacob, whom she addresses as the "devil boy" (*Teufelsknabe*). The fuller context in which Weil is invoked is a discussion about the hiddenness or absence of God, a "crisis" that necessitates the fact that "mystical life"—which for Jacob meant adherence to a Jewish orthopraxis—must be lived in secret "because we are not able to pray even alone with ourselves, because the estrangement from God means estrangement from our own 'non-worldly' self: sacraments, prayers, sanctifications are not ways of conjuring or evoking the divine presence when we have lost it, but just ways of being in the divine presence. The only experience of God accessible to us is the awfulness of the absence; the only experience of eternity: the anguish before the nothingness into which our life passes; the only experience of certainty: the anguish that our very anguish is baseless, incomprehensible, absurd because the only legitimate basis of our anguish would be that God *is* absent — that nevertheless 'somewhere' God is waiting for us, and in contact with us."⁸⁰

77 See the letter of November 24, 1950, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §42, 116.

78 *Ibid.*, §42, 117. Cf. Susan's letter to Hugo Bergman from September 18, 1950, *ibid.*, §127, 255. After stating that religion cannot be based simply on remembering the divine past or hoping and believing in the divine future, but rather requires that there be a divine present, she writes that "we are not yet in full possession of the essential forms and forces of our life, since we can exist simply nihilistically, as if nothing mattered, nothing was of any worth, as if life and death were the same. [...] Surely, we all move in this limbo, and in this sense have only a glimmering of the sacramental and the nothing, but the Limbo is open to both ways. Both heaven and Hell exist, the nihilistic possibility is not to be 'refuted'; it is legitimate in its own right." For a particularly poignant expression of Susan's sense of the futility of living and the pettiness of human beings, see the letter from December 18, 1950, *ibid.*, §58, 149.

79 Taubes, "The Absent God," 6 (emphasis in original).

80 Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, § 149, 50 (emphasis in original).

The current spiritual disaffection is not only a “Jewish problem,” but it is rather the post-holocaust predicament of God’s hiddenness from history. However, if that which is occluded can only be experienced as absent, then even the hopefulness that God is waiting must itself be rooted in the acute anguish that the absence of God is the only viable presence of God. There is no doubt that these words express the author’s own bleak sense about the existential condition of humanity. To articulate the paradox of a religious faith that ineludibly takes the form of doubt, Susan turns to the oxymoronic phenomenon of *mystical atheism* that may be drawn from the thought of Weil:

Simone Weil’s logic of the absurd (as she qualifies la logique de la raison surnaturelle) is quite of a different dimension: her experience is not so much of the absurd as such in its purity but of the irreducible *contradiction* between God and creation. The basis of the logic of the absurd is the fact of creation, of existence whereby the law of contradiction (not of non-contradiction) becomes the principle of knowledge (γνώσις—says she!). That is we cannot describe our ultimate situation except in contradictory statements. I.e.: God abdicated for our sake because he is good; we consented to exist ... because we are evil. Or: from God’s side, life is a gift, from our side it is a theft. We cannot contemplate God unless we renounce everything even that God exists in the same thought. It is the problem of Rabbi Nachman: the situation of the man standing in the “space” vacated, abdicated by God’s withdrawal: which is an essentially atheistic situation; is there a “way out”? Yes and no. I.e. only by suffering-through the divine absence, the divine non-being. This suffering is made possible through the love of God (l’amour surnaturelle) which S. Weil understands mystically as the joyous-suffering distance between God and his Son.⁸¹

From both the Christian mysticism of Weil and the kabbalistic piety of Nahman of Bratslav—a provocative association that cannot be properly explicated here—Susan finds support for the insight that gnosis is linked to the

81 Ibid., 51 (emphasis in original). In the concluding part of the letter, Susan speculates about Weil’s “real affinity to Jewish mysticism,” and the “secret bridge between Jewish + Christian gnostic mysticism.” Susan admits, however, that the proper explication of this matter would depend on her knowing more about Jewish mysticism. On Nahman of Bratslav, see Susan’s remark to Jacob in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §62, 157: “I do not quite understand the basis of your negative ontology: you are as Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav would say standing on atheist soil.”

principle of contradiction, and specifically, the contradiction between God and creation. Just as Weil extracted from the theological idea of kenosis the cosmological presumption that the divine is manifest in the world by being hidden from the world, so based on the Lurianic idea of *šimšum*, the primordial act of contraction and withdrawal of the infinite light that gives rise to the vacated space in which the worlds seemingly external to the divine will come to be, Nahman articulated the paradoxical idea that God is most present in the place from which God is most absent.

The existential despair was expressed somewhat differently in a letter written to Gershom Scholem on November 8, 1950, “I confess to you, it is no pleasure to be here at all. The only spirit that I have found here to converse with is the angel of apocalypse. (He-she sends his-her greetings to you).”⁸² Ostensibly, the focus of this comment is her discomfort living in America, since Susan is responding to rumors that she wished to be separated from Jacob, who at the time was living in Israel. However, I do not think it is unreasonable to surmise that the reference to conversing with the angel of the apocalypse is a metaphorical way of marking a deeper disillusionment. The apocalyptic sensibility is commensurate with the gnostic insofar as both convey a sense of foreboding. The finitude of being cannot be placated by escape to otherworldly realms or the positing of transcendence. This crucial insight is linked to Heidegger’s worldview in a letter from November 21, 1950: “The ‘scientists’ so strickt [*sic*] about meaning speak meaninglessly when they say that those that see angles⁸³ live in their ‘own world’ and ‘escape’ from the facts of reality; escape *where?* what world of one’s ‘own’ can the positivist permit? In his world there is ‘nowhere’ to escape and *no* ‘own’ world — and from this ‘no’ we must go to the ways of Heidegger in ‘What is Metaphysics?’”⁸⁴ And a few days later, on November 24, Susan writes to Jacob, “And you my mad one, my mystical one — ? [...] All the places are wrong for us because the time is wrong. I think of you in the dark night hours of illuminations. Ah I’m so exiled. The earth is without sex here and dead as a rug.” She goes on to write that in Israel, signified by the Star of David, she “experienced a positive hopelessness because hope stood there only raped at every turn. Here there is a sheer hope-less-ness, hope cannot even form itself.”⁸⁵ In contrast to the utter hopelessness of America in which hope cannot assume any shape, Israel offered some sense of hope

82 Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §128, 256–257. On the detrimental impact of America, see *ibid.*, §60, 153.

83 It seems that this should be corrected to “angels.”

84 *Ibid.*, §40, 110–111 (emphasis in original).

85 *Ibid.*, §41, 114.

in the hopelessness, and hence it is a positive hopelessness, but it is a hopelessness nonetheless, and the hope is raped at every turn, quite an arrestingly violent image.

Tellingly, in an undated letter, but one which seems to have been written from Paris in early May 1952, Susan remarks that the language of Heidegger's "Das Ding" reminded her of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, a "language of madness" that "finds its justification in the experience of ultimate perplexity. [...] The strange thing is not so much that such works are written, but that they are read. It seems the poets have really taken over the function of priests; like priests they are dedicated to their absolute, they pray for us who go on living in half measures + compromises, + give a Sunday to our weekday. But the many priests serve each a different God + the world is not healed."⁸⁶ In his response, Jacob confirmed that despite the fact the Susan's "antijudaism" was neither Christian nor Gnostic but rather paganistic, she still knew that the poets or priests serve different gods and the world is not healed.⁸⁷ What Jacob seemed to miss was that for Susan, in a way ironically that has affinity to his own view, the heresy of Gnosticism provides a taxonomy of hybridity that, at once, reinforces and destabilizes the hyphen that separates and connects the two foci of identity construction, Judaism and Christianity. Hence, as Sigrig Weigel noted, the ancient phenomenon could serve as a model for a "post-assimilatory, post-confessional or secularized culture in which loci of Jewish and non-Jewish thinkers can *no longer* be clearly distinguished."⁸⁸ Moreover, the comparison of Heidegger to Joyce centered on a language of madness provides an important key to understanding Susan's fascination with the relationship of myth and logos. Logic is the vehicle to express the myth that has the potential to subvert logic. Years later, Jacob Taubes articulated a similar view, although he would substitute logos with revelation: "Gnostic symbolism is shaped by the contradiction between the mythic intentions of late ancient Gnosticism and the boundary making that grounded the myth-liquidating doctrine of revelation."⁸⁹ For Susan, the commingling of myth and logic is another point of affinity between Gnosticism and Heidegger. In a letter to Jacob from November

86 Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §241, 219. For further remarks on the characterization of Joyce as a gnostic, see the letter of Susan from April 21, 1952, *ibid.*, §232, 205. Also pertinent is the discussion of the role of poetry as "prayer, prophecy, and redemption" in the summary of Jean Wahl's lecture on Heidegger's interpretation of Hölderlin in *ibid.*, §141, 35. And see the misgivings about this "blind poet-worship" in *ibid.*, §142, 37.

87 *Ibid.*, §244, 227.

88 Weigel, "Between the Philosophy," 126 (emphasis in original).

89 Taubes, *From Cult to Culture*, 72.

18, 1950, Susan described Francis M. Cornford's *From Philosophy to Religion: A Study in the Origins of Western Speculation* (1912) as "excellent material for my Mythos + Logos." Most tellingly, she elicits from her reading of this book an inference that is Heideggerian in tone: "And isn't 'nature' 'mythological' in hiding the mysterious becoming in the secrecy of darkness and enclosure, in covering the seed by the egg-shell or womb with the naivety of mythopoesis?"⁹⁰ The mythopoeic blurs the boundaries between what is imagined to be real and what is really imagined.

An allusion to this traversing of the divide separating the virtual and the actual can be detected in Susan's letter from November 8, 1950, "I was reading Heidegger's translation of Plato's parable of the cave. It could almost fit into Kafka's Gleichnisse."⁹¹ To understand the juxtaposition of Heidegger and Kafka, we must probe Heidegger's interpretation of Plato's allegory of the cave in the *Republic*. In a separate study, I offered a composite analysis of this topic based on Heidegger's lecture course *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit: Zu Platons Höhlengleichnis und Theätet* from the winter semester of 1931–1932, the lecture course *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* from the winter semester of 1933–1934, and the essay "Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit," written in 1940.⁹² Since the last source is the one to which Susan alluded, I will focus mainly on that text even though it should be read in conjunction with the other sources.⁹³

Explicating the fourth and final stage in the occurrence of truth from Plato's allegory, Heidegger focuses on the fact that the "movements of passing out of the cave into the daylight and then back from there into the cave require in each case that the eyes accustom themselves to the change from darkness to brightness and from brightness back to darkness."⁹⁴ The acclimation to each region is the essence of what Plato calls *paideia*, the equivalent of the German *Bildung*, literally "formation," but interpreted by Heidegger as a crossing (*Übergang*)

90 Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §37, 104. For Heidegger's notion of nature as the concealing unconcealment, often linked exegetically to fragment 123 of Heraclitus, *physis kryptesthai philei*, see Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, new trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, 121–122, cited and analyzed in Wolfson, *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, 115.

91 Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §31, 84. Kafka and Heidegger are briefly compared with regard to the question of alienation (*Entfremdung*) in the world by Jacob in a letter to Susan from March 21, 1952, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §206, 152.

92 Elliot R. Wolfson, *The Duplicity of Philosophy's Shadow: Heidegger, Nazism, and the Jewish Other*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2018, 131–136.

93 That Susan Taubes was familiar with *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* is attested in a letter from December 7, 1950, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §51, 136.

94 Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 165; idem, *Wegmarken*, 216.

that occasions “the whole human being in the turning around [*Umwendung*] of his or her essence.”⁹⁵ The meaning of the allegory of the cave is to instruct the reader about the nature of truth but this pivots around the idea of education as the ascent of the soul to the place of its essential being. The justification for the juxtaposition of *Bildung* and *Wahrheit* lies in the fact that truth and the transformation (*Wandlung*) it undergoes facilitate the basic structures (*Grundgefüge*) of education.⁹⁶ To be educated is to be delivered from the shadowy world of appearance, but this deliverance comes about through disclosure of the essence of truth. Rejecting the conventional idea that has prevailed in Western thinking, Heidegger insists that truth is not the “agreement of the representation in thought with the thing itself: *adequatio intellectus et rei*,” but it is rather the unhiddenness (*Unverborgenheit*)—rendering the Greek *alētheia*—that makes accessible whatever appears by revealing its concealment in the concealment of its revealing.⁹⁷

Those held captive in the cave are blinded by the shadows and are thus unable to recognize the *shadows as shadows*. The unconcealment of which they are capable covers up the uncovering of the ideas, the agency of the self-showing (*Sichzeigen*) by which the nonappearance of the appearance becomes apparent, the light that alone can expose the shadowy nature of the shadow. For the prisoners, the shadows appear to be truth, what is unhidden, but, in truth, they do not even see the shadows, since they do not apprehend either the things of which the shadows are shadows or the fire in whose luminosity the shadows are cast; indeed, they are unaware of the distinction between light and darkness.⁹⁸ Truth is thus the mystery of the unconcealing

95 Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 166; idem, *Wegmarken*, 217.

96 Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 167; idem, *Wegmarken*, 218.

97 Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 168; idem, *Wegmarken*, 218. Already in *Sein und Zeit*, § 7, 29–30 (*Being and Time*, 28–29), Heidegger opined that the self-showing (*Sichzeigen*) of a phenomenon coincides with a presence that does not show itself. Appearing is thus “a *not showing itself* [*Sich-nicht-zeigen*].” In its self-showing, the appearance makes manifest the nonmanifest (*Nichtoffenbare*). Cf. Gert-Jan van der Heiden, *The Voice of Misery: A Continental Philosophy of Testimony*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019, 152–155. Implicit in this section of *Sein und Zeit* is a theme that informed all stages of Heidegger’s thinking. Inasmuch as concealment belongs essentially to unconcealment, untruth as un-disclosedness (*Un-entborgenheit*) is indissolubly bound to the comportment of truth as disclosedness (*Entborgenheit*). See Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth: On Plato’s Cave Allegory and Theaetetus*, trans. Ted Sadler, New York: Continuum, 2002, 66; idem, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit: Zu Platons Höhlengleichnis und Theätet* [GA 34], Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1988, 91–92; idem, *Pathmarks*, 148; idem, *Wegmarken*, 193.

98 Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 169–170; idem, *Wegmarken*, 220–221. Cf. Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 20–21; idem, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*, 26.

of the concealment, the opening that tears away the unhidden from its hiddenness.⁹⁹ The complete removal of all hiddenness foreshadows the awareness that there is nothing to illumine but the illumination. By unearthing the shadow as shadow, the one who is emancipated reveals that the “unhidden is such that, precisely in its showing, the beings hide themselves;”¹⁰⁰ that is, what is disclosed is the showing of the nonshowing, the concealment that conceals itself in its disclosure. From Heidegger’s perspective, the essence of truth was not revealed by Plato because as he conceived it, “unhiddenness remains harnessed in a relation to looking, apprehending, thinking, and asserting. To follow this relation means to relinquish the essence of unhiddenness.”¹⁰¹ The unhiddenness is fully unhidden when we discern that the essence of truth as unconcealment consists in overcoming the concealing, which is to say, when we fathom that unhiddenness is connected essentially with hiddenness, that untruth belongs inextricably to truth.¹⁰²

The goal of Heidegger’s exegesis of Plato is to establish the ground for his retrieval of the unconcealment of truth as the concealment of untruth. I propose that it is this insight that led to Susan Taubes’s comparison of Heidegger’s treatment of Plato’s allegory of the cave to Kafka’s parables. As we learn from her letter to Jacob, dated December 26, 1950, the parable in Plato and Kafka instructs us “negatively” in the way to compare allegorically the allegedly incongruent realms of the heavenly and the earthly. Only through the parable can one converse about the “hidden’ realms” that “do not allow straight forward description — and about that what cannot be spoken one should be silent or speak in a ‘silent’ way i.e. using words that point to the silences between the words.”¹⁰³ Returning a few days later to the issue of the mimetic function of

99 Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 171; idem, *Wegmarken*, 223.

100 Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 65; idem, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*, 89.

101 Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 182; idem, *Wegmarken*, 238.

102 Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 66; *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*, 92. For a more extensive discussion of the inseparability of truth and untruth in Heidegger’s idea of *alētheia*, see Elliot R. Wolfson, *Giving beyond the Gift: Apophasis and Overcoming Theomania*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2014, 48–52, 130–131; idem, *The Duplicity*, 6, 131–145; idem, *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, 4, 17, n. 31, 20, n. 61, 39, 94, n. 170, 120, 158, 266, 304–305, 324, nn. 66 and 72. For previous studies on Heidegger’s notion of truth, see the sources cited in Wolfson, *Giving*, 314–315, n. 106, 316, n. 128, 347, n. 339; idem, *The Duplicity*, 251–252, n. 1; idem, *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, 17, n. 29; to which may be added Rudolf Bernet, “Phenomenological Concepts of Untruth in Husserl and Heidegger,” in *Husserl: German Perspectives*, ed. John J. Drummond and Otfried Höffe, trans. Hayden Kee, Patrick Eldridge, and Robin Litscher Wilkins, New York: Fordham University Press, 2019, 239–262.

103 Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §66, 164. The description in this letter of speaking silently can be profitably compared to Heidegger’s view of language as the *poiēsis* through which one speaks what cannot be spoken not by not speaking but by unspeaking

the gnostic parable to overcome metaphysical binaries, Susan comments in the letter to Jacob from January 2, 1951: “The gnosis gives the key to the formulation of the basic question of which ‘Mythos vs. Logos’ ‘Fact vs. Fancy’ ‘world of sense vs. world of ideas’ and all the ‘dualisms’ — whether mythically, dialectically, allegorically, parabolically, etc. etc., ‘reconciled’ — are just reflection — because the gnosis makes the ‘brokenness’ its fundamental question and is by its very starting-point prevented from answering the question ‘discursively’ it can only hint at the relation of the ‘one’ to the ‘other’ through the parable.”¹⁰⁴ From gnostic literature we adduce that the parable presupposes a gap between dichotomies that is continuously crossed but never collapsed, a fissure of language that allows disparate entities to converge without resolution of their divergence. The parable is the bridge that spans the breach between literal and figurative, the rift between reality and appearance, the chasm between fiction and nonfiction, the verbal leap that propels one across the space of an irreducible opposition. Inasmuch as truth is intrinsically parabolic, it can be apprehended only through another parable, which is to say, the face of truth is unmasked through the mask of truth that is untruth.¹⁰⁵ If we invoke the

what is spoken. See Elliot R. Wolfson, “Heidegger’s Apophaticism: Unsayings the Said and the Silence of the Last God,” in Nahum Brown and J. Aaron Simmons, eds., *Contemporary Debates in Negative Theology and Philosophy*, New York: Palgrave, 2017, 185–216; idem, *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, 299–334. Cf. Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §193, 129, where in the context of a lengthy discourse on the nature of the symbol, Susan writes, “We cannot escape signification altogether unless through a mystical and saintly discipline of dissolving the forms of thought and I wonder if even silence (internal as well as outer) isn’t a form of signification.” On the poet’s use of language to overcome language, see Susan’s letter to Jacob written on January 9, 1952, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §141, 35: “the poet tries to find his salvation through poetry. ... This being so, the poet identifies sin with the non-poetic; but the ultimate obstacle of poetry is language. So that the poet, driven to the extreme of his position ends by having to destroy language.” Heidegger’s “romantic” theory of poetry is criticized by Susan in the letter to Jacob from February 12, 1952, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §172, 92. See also the letter from March 12–13, *ibid.*, §198, 140, and the passage cited above, n. 41. And compare the letter from December 20, 1950, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §60, 153, and Jacob’s response in the letter from December 28, 1950, *ibid.*, §68, 166–167. I hope someday to dedicate a study on silence and poïesis in Susan Taubes’s thought. Let me conclude by citing from her lengthy letter, dated February 22, 1952, on the topic of redemption, responding to a letter from Jacob on the topic of law and redemption, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §181, 105: “Eternity haunts us and we cannot shut our heart to it. But eternity is a mystical category, and the language of mysticism is silence or poetry.” Examples of Susan’s own poetry can be found in a letter to Jacob from June 14, 1952, *ibid.*, §266, 254 and 255, n. 2. See above, n. 68.

104 Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §74, 177.

105 See Elliot R. Wolfson, “Suffering Eros and Textual Incarnation: A Kristevan Reading of Kabbalistic Poetics,” in Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller, eds., *Towards a Theology of*

metaphor of light for truth,¹⁰⁶ then we could say there is no lucidity that is not concurrently obscurity.¹⁰⁷

Further support for my suggestion may be gleaned from the discussion of Heidegger's doctrine of truth as *alētheia* in the fifth section of "The Gnostic Foundations of Heidegger's Nihilism." I will focus on the part of the argument that is most relevant to our topic. As Susan remarks, Heidegger follows Heraclitus and interprets truth and error as "dis-discovery" (*Unverborgenheit*) and "covery" (*Verborgenheit*). Philologically, the first syllable of *alētheia* is decoded as an alpha privative, and hence "truth means to lift out of oblivion (*lethe*)."¹⁰⁸ At the same time, based on an analysis of a saying of Anaximander, Heidegger construes the interplay between concealment and unconcealment as the cosmic drama between being (*Sein*) and beings (*Seiendes*): "The being itself does not step into the light of being. The unconcealment of the being, the brightness granted it, darkens the light of being. By revealing itself in the being, being withdraws [*Das Sein entzieht sich, indem es sich in das Seiende entbirgt*]."¹⁰⁹ The last sentence, we are told, "is the key to Heidegger's concept of the dialectic between the nothing and the world, from which he develops his interpretation of history. The world that in its very apparentness covers the ground of the nothing is in error: its erring coalesces with its openness. [...] The world, as such, by being there as a world, is 'out of joint.' Not this or that relation in the world is out of joint, but the very fact of there being relations, testifies

Eros: Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of Discipline, New York: Fordham University Press, 2006, 342–343; idem, *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, 6, 120, 158, 317.

106 Hans Blumenberg, "Licht als Metapher der Wahrheit. Im Vorfeld der philosophischen Begriffsbildung," *Studium Generale* 10 (1957), 432–447, reprinted in idem, *Ästhetische und metaphorologische Schriften*, selection and afterword by Anselm Haverkamp, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2001, 139–171. English version: "Light as a Metaphor for Truth at the Preliminary Stage of Philosophical Concept Formation," in David Michael Levin, ed., *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, 30–62; slightly revised translation in *History, Metaphors, Fables: A Hans Blumenberg Reader*, ed., trans., and with an introduction by Hannes Bajohr, Florian Fuchs, and Joe Paul Kroll, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020, 129–169.

107 I would thus take issue with Blumenberg's suggestion, *History, Metaphors, Fables*, 137: "The skeptic is the negative version of the mystic: he too closes his eyes, not against the dazzling abundance of absolute light, but against the questioning and confusing urgency of *obscuritas rerum*." The entanglement of truth and untruth yields the insight that every translucence is opaque and every opacity is translucent. Nothing is shown that is not at the same time withheld from being shown.

108 Taubes, "The Gnostic Foundations," 169.

109 Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 253; idem, *Holzwege*, 336–337.

to a resistance against the sheer negativity of time.”¹¹⁰ I note, parenthetically, Susan’s observation that “Heidegger’s concept of the self-withdrawal of Being recalls the idea of divine retraction in gnostic mysticism which infused German idealism through Schelling’s philosophy of freedom.”¹¹¹ Curiously, no mention is made of the kabbalistic doctrine of *šimšum*, the paradoxical contraction of *Ein Sof* to create a vacuum within the plenum of infinite light, a mythopoeic idea that may have influenced Schelling.¹¹² To return to the main point, the paradox of the concealment of being in the unconcealment of the beings of the world brings Heidegger to the conclusion, “*The oblivion of being is oblivion to the difference between being and the being* [Die Seinsvergessenheit ist die Vergessenheit des Unterschiedes des Seins zum Seienden].”¹¹³ The comment on the ontological difference is explicated by Susan in a decidedly anthropogenic way as the shrouding of being occasioned by the internment of the self in nature: “Because the self is lost to the world and has forgotten that it belongs to Being, forgotten the difference between the world and Being, the self is in error. Since the self is essentially fallen prey to the world (*wesenhaft verfallend*), the self *is* in untruth. The untruth is the veiling of the Being. This cover is not only a darkness; it has its own light, its own presence, a ‘dark’ light, as the gnostic myth would say.”¹¹⁴

In the letter from November 21, 1950, Susan made the following observation after having read Ernst Cassirer’s *The Problem of Knowledge*: “Schelling was the first to say that the truth of the Mythos is not allegorical but ‘tautogorical’. Heidegger goes so far as to say that the word is in its ‘metaphorical’ meaning in its *authentic* meaning and is merely allegorical in its ‘everyday’ meaning. [...] Is not there something quite ‘Kabalistic’ (or at least mystic) in conceiving of the empirical as mere ‘allegory’[?] So that to speak of the ‘arm’ of God is no crude anthropomorphic ‘projection’ but rather the ‘animal’ arm in all its forms is only an echo, a reminiscence, a symbol of the ‘divine’ arm — that is not merely a form, or idea, but more substantial than its physical ‘copy’.”¹¹⁵

110 Taubes, “The Gnostic Foundations,” 170. The Shakespearian expression is used as well by Taubes, “The Nature of Tragedy,” 195.

111 Taubes, “The Gnostic Foundations,” 171.

112 Susan Taubes would have known the idea of *šimšum* from Scholem’s *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, a work she most certainly had read by the time she wrote this essay. See above, n. 62. On the resonance of kabbalistic motifs, especially the doctrine of *šimšum*, in Schelling, see Wolfson, *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, 8, 18–19, n. 40, 170–171, 193–194, n. 279, 209–211.

113 Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 275; idem, *Holzwege*, 364.

114 Taubes, “The Gnostic Foundations,” 169–170 (emphasis in original).

115 Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §40, 109–110.

One might question Susan's distinction between the "metaphorical" and the "merely allegorical," but what she fittingly grasped is that the mystical tenor of Heidegger's poetic understanding of language breaks down the barrier between the literal and the figurative.¹¹⁶ Commenting in his essay "Andenken" (1942) on a passage from Hölderlin's *Werden im Vergehen*, "[in] the state between Being and not-Being, everywhere the possible becomes actual, and this is in the free imitation of art a terrible but divine dream,"¹¹⁷ Heidegger writes that the poetic calling (*Dichtertum*) allocates to humankind the historical task of dwelling upon earth to disclose the nonreal (*das Unwirkliche*) that precedes everything real, the fullness of the imponderable gift suspended between the no-longer-actual (*Nichtmehr-Wirkliche*) and the not-yet-actual (*Nochnicht-Wirkliche*), the advent of the holy that appears unexpectedly in the "divinely terrible nonreality" (*furchtbargöttliche Unwirkliche*) of the dream, the space of the "free imagination of poetry" (*freien Bildens der Dichtung*), the state between being (*Seyn*) and nonbeing (*Nichtseyn*), wherein the possible becomes real and the actual ideal.¹¹⁸ The image of the dream is not invoked in this depiction of the poetic craft but it is undoubtedly relevant inasmuch as the oneiric can be characterized as well by the propensity to symbolize the actually real by means of sensuous images of what is considered to be unreal. In the essay "Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung" (1936), Heidegger made the point explicitly: "Poetry awakens the illusion of the unreal [*Schein des Unwirklichen*] and of the dream as opposed to the tangible and clamorous actuality in which we believe ourselves to be at home. And yet, on the contrary, what the poet says and undertakes to be is what is truly real [*was der Dichter sagt und zu sein übernimmt, das Wirkliche*]."¹¹⁹ The unreal—or what I would prefer to call in Husserlian terms the irreal¹²⁰—is determinative of what is perceived noetically to be real, and as a result, the line separating facticity and fictionality is conspicuously blurred.

116 Cf. Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §134, 18, where Susan writes the following about Heidegger's *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, "I was trying to read the Heid.book — it is not sane — a mysticism of words accomplished with such passion it is almost worthwhile. It would be interesting to make an analysis."

117 Martin Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, trans. Keith Hoeller, Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2000, 136; idem, *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung* [GA 4], Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1996, 113.

118 Heidegger, *Elucidations*, 136–137; idem, *Erläuterungen*, 113–114. I have here abbreviated my lengthier analysis in Wolfson, *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, 115–118.

119 Heidegger, *Elucidations*, 62; idem, *Erläuterungen*, 45.

120 Elliot R. Wolfson, *A Dream Interpreted within a Dream: Oneiropoiesis and the Prism of Imagination*, New York: Zone Books, 2011, 46–57. For an assessment of the oneiric phenomenon along similar lines, see Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei, *The Life of*

Remarkably, Susan discerned an analogy between Heidegger's *poiēsis* and the kabbalistic assumption that all things empirical should be considered allegorical in relation to the divine realities.¹²¹ What she is calling "allegory" is what Scholem famously designated as "symbol" in contrast to allegory.¹²² Bracketing the question of nomenclature, this brief remark demonstrates that she understood something fundamental about the kabbalistic attitude to language and being. Reversing the typical approach to anthropomorphisms articulated by medieval philosophical exegetes, the kabbalists maintained that the spiritual entities can be described in human terms, for the tangibility of the human body is determined by the divine body to which it corresponds, a body whose limbs are constituted by the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Biblical anthropomorphisms, accordingly, are not to be explained simply as a concession to the limitations of human reason—"the Torah speaks in human language," according to the talmudic maxim appropriated by the philosophers to formulate the principle of accommodation—but they inform us about the comportment of divine bodiliness, which illumines, in turn, the corporeal nature of the world and that of the human being.¹²³ This mystical conception—and perhaps it should also be considered Platonic in nature, as Jacob Taubes submitted in his handwritten gloss to the aforementioned letter of Susan from November 21, 1950¹²⁴—is ascribed to Heidegger and to the kabbalists.

2 Apocalyptic Alienation, Theopolitical Nihilism, and Historical Overcoming of History

The luminal darkness of the demand to redeem an inherently irredeemable world lies at the core of the eschatological essence of history promulgated by Jacob Taubes. The eschaton, the reader is told at the beginning of

Imagination: Revealing and Making the World, New York: Columbia University Press, 2018, 89.

121 Cf. Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, 34, where in her description of Wahl's lecture on Heidegger (see above, n. 86) Susan coins the expression "Heideggerian Kabbala."

122 For references to Scholem's understanding of the symbol, see Elliot R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2005, 402–403, n. 57, 407, n. 88.

123 Elliot R. Wolfson, "Bifurcating the Androgyne and Engendering Sin: A Zoharic Reading of Gen 1–3," in Caroline Vander Stichele and Susanne Scholz, eds., *Hidden Truths From Eden: Esoteric Interpretations of Genesis 1–3*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014, 88–95.

124 Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §40, 113, n. 6.

Abendländische Eschatologie, is that through which history surpasses its limitations and is thus seen for what it is.¹²⁵ History is calibrated from the standpoint of the unidirectional (*einsinnig*) and irreversible (*unumkehrbar*) timeline steered by an impulse that is always moving toward an end.¹²⁶ The interdependence of time and history is possible by virtue of their origin in eternity whence we can deduce that time is a stage of eternity corresponding to an interim of history. “Time emerges when the eternity of the origin is lost and the order of the world is gripped by death. The face of death is the sign of this world.”¹²⁷ No mention is made here of Heidegger despite the affinity between his preoccupation with being-toward-death as the possibility of the absolute impossibility of *Dasein*’s authenticity and Taubes’s demarcation of death as the ultimate signifier of human existence in time. However, in the fourth part of the book when discussing the philosophical eschatology of Europe, Taubes does remark that as a successor to Kierkegaard, Heidegger was “preoccupied with finitude and postulates nothingness as an absolute.”¹²⁸ The absoluteness

125 Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, trans. with a preface by David Ratmoko, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, 3; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, with an afterword by Martin Treml, Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2007, 11.

126 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 3–4; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 11.

127 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 4; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 12.

128 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 159; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 211. Heidegger’s idea of “immanent transcendence” and his rejection of the traditional notion of eternal and transcendent truth is discussed by Taubes, “The Development,” 662–664. On Heidegger’s deliberations on the status of the nothing, see the 1974 essay “From the Adverb ‘Nothing’ to the Substantive ‘Nothing’: Deliberations of Heidegger’s Question Concerning Nothing,” in Taubes, *From Cult to Culture*, 124–136. See esp. 133–134. Taubes concludes that the nothing of Heidegger is not the *nihil* of the mystic-theological tradition from Johannes Scotus Eriugena to Jakob Böhme and Schelling, nor is it disclosed in ecstasy or meditation but rather in anxiety, even though he acknowledges that it is still worth ascertaining “how the most paradoxical formulations of the mystical insight into God are related to the Nothing that Heidegger emphasizes.” Taubes does not discuss the mystical nothing in kabbalistic symbolism, but he does illumine Heidegger’s perspective through a citation from Gershom Scholem’s “Schöpfung aus Nichts and Selbstverschränkung Gottes,” which deals with the mystical interpretation of *creatio ex nihilo* whereby “God and his Nothing are established as two aspects of his own essence, and sometimes both are regarded from a deeply heretical perspective that invokes the mythical from the deepest abyss” (cited in Taubes, *From Cult to Culture*, 133). See below n. 160. To my ear, the position taken by Jacob resonates with what Susan Taubes argued in “The Gnostic Foundations.” See the letter of Susan from December 23, 1950, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §62, 157, and the letter from December 30, 1950, *ibid.*, §71, 171. On Susan’s reflections on the identity of being and nothing in Jacob’s thought, see also the letter from October 6, 1950, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §9, 37–38. In this letter, Susan has correctly discerned that his appropriation of the Hegelian dialectic leads to the conclusion that being in its pure beingness is identical to and inseparable from nothingness. However, she adds the

of that nothingness presumes that the degeneration of death is the final stage of finitude, or as Hegel put it in his dialectical account of being turning into nonbeing (*das Sein umschlägt in das Nichtsein*), the power over the perishing necessities that the perishing itself perishes (*aber sie ist wieder die Macht des Vergehens, so daß das Vergehen vergeht*).¹²⁹ I am not sure that Taubes is correct to apply to Heidegger the Hegelian notion of the degeneration of the degeneration—an alternate way of naming the sublation (*Aufhebung*) of the negation of negation, the negation that relates itself to itself, and is thus the absolute affirmation (*die Negation der Negation, die sich auf sich beziehende Negation, und dies ist absolute Affirmation*)¹³⁰—but by arguing this point he brings Heidegger into his theory, based on the conjecture of Ferdinand Christian Baur, regarding the gnostic dimension of Hegel's dialectic of *Verendlichung*, that is, the process of finitization by which absolute spirit attains self-knowledge as absolute spirit and thereby returns back to itself in the negation of finitude.¹³¹

In a manner that seems far from Heidegger, Taubes postulates a dichotomy between time as the Prince of Death and eternity as the Prince of Life. “To conquer time eternity has to enter the temporal zone of history [*zeitlichen Ort der Geschichte*]. History is the place where the substance of time and the substance of eternity, death and life, cross paths.”¹³² What is disclosed in time is the triumph of time by eternity, a conquest of history to be played out on the

incisive question if this identity of opposites compels one to posit a third reality that is beyond the binary of being and nothing, which we can call God, the holy, or the mystery. Creation demands the division of being and nothing and the setting of a metaphysical distance between light and darkness, the ontic severance that fuels the erotic tension of the two poles of existence striving toward and pulling away from each other. See also Susan's letter from November 8, 1950, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §31, 85. All the dichotomies and antitheses in the history of Western philosophy are traced to the “original ‘splitting of the Parmenidean-egg’—the putting of Being + Nothing in a specific tension.”

129 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion I* [Werke 16], Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2014, 316.

130 Ibid., 312. Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, volume 1: *Introduction and the Concept of Religion*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, and J. M. Stewart with the assistance of J. P. Fitzer and H. S. Harris, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, 305. Whereas Hegel's dialectic proposes the twofold negation, the negation of negation that is the affirmation, I think Heidegger's thinking ventures beyond that dialectic to the threefold negation, the negation of the negation of negation that is neither negation nor affirmation. See Wolfson, *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, 79–80, 109–110, 336.

131 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 35–40, 160–161; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 52–58, 213–215.

132 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 4; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 12.

stage of history, culminating in the *Endzeit*, the end of time in which the temporal order has been fulfilled and sublated.¹³³ “Seen from the perspective of the course of history, the end is a temporal end. Seen from the perspective of complete *full-fulfillment* [*Voll-endung*], this temporal end is eternity. In the order of eternity, being is sublated as time [*das Sein als Zeit aufgehoben*].”¹³⁴ The attuned ear will discern the Hegelian drift of Taubes’s language, and inasmuch as he accepts the connection between Hegel and Valentinian Gnosticism, we can presume that he views history through the eyes of a world-negating gnosist.¹³⁵ Support for this claim may be derived from any number of passages of which I will here cite the following striking account of the “monstrous inversion” (*ungeheurer Umkehrung*) of the apocalyptic debasing of the world as an abundance of what is bad:

Apocalypticism negates this world in its fullness. It brackets the entire world negatively. [...] The world is a totality which keeps itself distinct from the divine, forming an auto-nomy in relation to God. [...] As the world does not contain its real source of power but is determined by an opposite pole, God is also held in tension at a distance from it. This relationship of tension is mutual and determines both poles. The world is that which stands in opposition to God [*das Gegengöttliche*], and God is that which stands in opposition to the world [*das Gegenweltliche*]. God in this world is alien and unknown. [...] He is nonexistent [*nicht-seiend*] in the world. [...] The “non-existent” God is an annihilating God [*nichtender Gott*] who clasps and destroys the world [*die Welt umklammert und vernichtet*]. The “nonexistent” God puts the being of the world in question by contesting the entire validity [*Gültigkeit*] and finality [*Endgültigkeit*] of what exists.¹³⁶

133 On the intertwining of the political, eschatological, and gnostic in Taubes, see Carsten Colpe, “Das eschatologische Widerlager der Politik. Zu Taubes’ Gnosisbild,” in *Abendländische Eschatologie. Ad Jacob Taubes*, 105–129.

134 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 4–5; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 13.

135 Consider the description of Sabbatai Şevi in Taubes, *The Political Theology*, 9: “He has descended to the abysses of impurity, which is the world, so that he can there gather in the sparks of purity. That is the Kabbalistic vision: the world lives off the sparks of purity, and when these are scattered throughout the world and when they are gathered, the world of impurity collapses into itself.” Taubes’s identification of the world as the abysses of impurity to which the messiah descends is his reformulation of Scholem’s account of the Lurianic basis for the Sabbatian doctrine to which he is indebted.

136 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 9–10 (translation slightly modified); idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 19–20.

The dualistic posture could not be expressed more clearly and dramatically: the world is counter-divine and God counter-worldly (*Die Welt ist das Gegengöttliche und Gott ist das Gegenweltliche*). What the apocalypse reveals is that God is alien and unknown in this world (*Gott is in der Welt fremd und unbekannt*), and thus ontically nonexistent (*nicht-seiend*). This nonexistence is not ontologically disempowering; on the contrary, the nonexistence empowers God as the annihilating force that takes hold of and destroys the world. In this negating power lies the theopolitical basis for the revolutionary longing of nihilism: “The ‘nonexistent’ God in the world and against the world sanctions the nihilistic viewpoint mankind has of this world. The ‘nonexistent’ God, and that means the ‘not-yet-existing’ [*noch nicht-seiende*] God, is the powerful promise of a turning point. God will annihilate the world and then appear in his might.”¹³⁷ The temporal logic of the nonexistence portends a not-yet—albeit a not-yet that is now in virtue of now being not-yet—that marks our conflict with the world that should invoke political resistance mirroring God’s own annihilating potency vis-à-vis the world. The nonmanifest is manifest when the manifest is obliterated. With this in mind we can better understand Taubes’s claim that history and truth have a common origin in the essence of freedom, since freedom alone lifts humankind out of nature into the realm of history, but freedom can “only reveal itself in apo-stasy [*Ab-Fall*]. For as long as freedom is caught up in the divine cycle of Nature, it is subject to the necessity of God and Nature. [...] Only mankind’s answer [*Antwort*] to the word of God, which is essentially a negative one [*ein Nein*], is evidence of human freedom. Therefore, the freedom of negation is the foundation of history.”¹³⁸

The ground of history is in human freedom, but human freedom in its most pristine form is the negative response to the divine, the negation that is an act of apostasy, *Ab-Fall*, literally, a falling away, a decline. Taubes’s apocalyptic-gnostic perspective—indebted to Jonas’s delineation of the revolutionary and indignant elements in the physiognomy of Gnosticism¹³⁹—rests on proffering an act of abandonment of that which is foreign to God and to nature, the renunciation that is the measure of freedom by which history is grounded.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, just as the essence of history is founded on freedom, so too is the

137 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 10; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 20.

138 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 5; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 14.

139 Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, Erster Teil, Vierte Auflage, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1988, 214–251; idem, *Philosophical Essays*, 276–277.

140 See Tsutomu Haga, *Theodizee und Geschichtstheologie: Ein Versuch der Überwindung der Problematik des Deutschen Idealismus bei Karl Barth*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991, 24–27.

essence of truth, but insofar as truth is founded on freedom, concealment and obfuscation will be inevitable corollaries of disclosure and transparency. Although Heidegger again is not mentioned, Taubes's words bring to mind the Heideggerian idea that truth cannot be disentangled from untruth, that every unconcealment is inescapably a concealment.¹⁴¹ "Forgetting the mystery, the world is fashioned according to the latest designs; the constructions of the world block the path to the mystery, so that there is no escape from the labyrinth of constructed routes. The labyrinth of this world is the state of error [*Stätte der Irre*]. [...] Knowledge of error, as error, is the pathway to escaping from error on the way to the revelation of the truth."¹⁴² The truthfulness of the mystery is the foundation of history, but that truthfulness inevitably entails the concealment that is necessary for the survival of the worlds we confabulate. As indispensable as these imaginary worlds are for human subsistence both individually and collectively, they block the path to the mystery. In a manner consonant with the way he understood Gnosticism, Taubes contends that the divulging of the mystery begins by recognizing the knowledge of the error that is the labyrinth of the world. To flee from error one must unveil the error as error, not to disclose a truth behind the veil of the error, just as Heidegger taught that enlightenment in the inexorably fractured world consists of inundating the shadow with light so that the shadow will be illumined as shadow. Departing from the Platonic underpinning of the gnostic mythos, there is no escaping the shadowy world by absconding to the realm of radiant and everlasting truth.¹⁴³

In one telling passage, Taubes articulates the gnostic ramifications of positing revelation as the subject of history by combining scriptural imagery and the language of Heidegger, albeit reframed theistically:

Revelation is the fire which casts light upon the clearing [*Lichtung*] between God and the world. The burning fire reaches the center of

141 See above, n. 102. On Taubes's particular engagement with Heidegger's "On the Essence of Truth," see Taubes, *The Political Theology*, 3.

142 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 6; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 14. Cf. Susan's language in a letter to Jacob from February 5/6, 1951, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §105, 226–227: "I wonder if the 'gnosis' — alias, existential ontology, alias negative theology — is not simply the most drastic formulation of 'philosophy' as such. But from the gnosis there is no way out — the mystical outlets deceive and lead only deeper in the labyrinth. [...] The gnosis unbalances the 'it is good' of God: the twofold objective and subjective genitive of 'God's revelation' that is not only God's revelation of himself to Creation but the revelation of Creation to God: that it is good."

143 Wolfson, *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, 321, and references on 334, n. 205.

heaven; the world is darkness and gloom. The voice of God, which is the very essence of revelation, is to be *heard* in this fire, but has no visible form. It sprays flames of fire. Mankind cannot break through to God without being scorched. It can only see God from behind, but not face to face. Nobody can see the face of God and live.¹⁴⁴

Taubes avails himself of the Heideggerian *Lichtung*—the opening in which beings are disclosed in the concealment of their disclosure, and not a clearing between God and the world—to reinterpret the biblical idea of revelation. What is revealed is that God cannot be revealed because of the insurmountable chasm separating the divine and the cosmos. As such, revelation exposes the brute fact that this world is a place of darkness and gloom. In a beguiling exegetical turn, exemplifying the best of rabbinic sophistry, Taubes extracts evidence for a gnostic dualism from the deuteronomist's account of the Sinaitic theophany: the mountain was ablaze with flames to the heart of the heavens and the Israelites heard the voice of God from within the fire but they saw no shape (Deuteronomy 4:11-12). The rebuke against positing a visible divine image, confirmed by the allusion to the response to Moses's request to behold the glory that he could see the back but not the face (Exodus 33:18-23), is interpreted in a gnostic register; that is, the face of light cannot be perceived in the corporal world, the realm of historical time where concealment perforce is concealed. In the paradisiacal state—described by Taubes in Schelling's portrayal of art in *System des Transscendentalen Idealismus* (1800) as the “holy of holies, where burns in eternal and original unity, as if in a single flame, that which in nature and history is rent asunder”¹⁴⁵—we can imagine that God was seen face to face, but as a result of the primordial transgression, the “oneness of God and the world is torn apart, and the face of death weighs heavily on the world.”¹⁴⁶ The phonocentric interpretation of the divine epiphany is transferred to the summoning of the redeemer: “The beyond, which is not at home in this world, is heard as a *call* in the world [...]. The call is a fundamental symbol

144 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 7 (emphasis in original); idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 16.

145 Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), trans. Peter Heath, with an Introduction by Michael Vater, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978, 231. Taubes cited the passage from Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 3, Stuttgart: Cotta, 1858, 628. For a more recent edition, see Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *System des Transscendentalen Idealismus 1800*, ed. Harald Korten and Paul Ziche [*Werke* 9], Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2005, 328.

146 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 7 (emphasis in original); idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 16.

in the context of apocalypticism and Gnosis. Mandaean and Manichaean religion can be described, like Judaism, as the religion of the call.¹⁴⁷ Preserving the scriptural denunciation of ocularcentrism, Taubes maintains that God or the savior, the nonworldly (*Nicht-Weltliche*), comes into being through the call, and hence the entirely other becomes audible in this world as the entirely other (*Das Ganz Andere wird hörbar im Hier der Welt, freilich aber als das ganz Andere*).¹⁴⁸

It is likely, as Susan Taubes suggested,¹⁴⁹ that the emphasis on the call of the beyond, which arouses the stranger to the plight of self-estrangement, may also reflect what Heidegger famously designated in *Sein und Zeit* as “the call to conscience” (*Ruf des Gewissens*), that is, the call that summons *Dasein* from its being subsumed in the everyday they-self of heedful being-with-one-another to its ownmost potentiality-of-being-a-self (*eigensten Selbstkönnen*).¹⁵⁰ The possibility that Heidegger’s philosophical translation of the gnostic motif impacted Taubes’s understanding of apocalypticism is supported by this passage:

History is the source of revelation for mankind and his pathway through time. In the aeon of sin, existence begins as time, aiming toward death. Time contains the principle which brings death. [...] Time is not the place of life, but contains the pestilential smell of death, and plunges life into the Sheol of the past. Not until the End Time, at the end of time, when transience itself passes away, will eternity triumph over the deadly principle of time.¹⁵¹

One might counter that Heidegger did not entertain an *Endzeit* in which transience would pass away, but the main gist of the passage aligns with the Heideggerian dismissal of any attempt to posit a transcendence that would liberate humankind from the temporal yoke of finitude. Time can be redeemed only by time in the same way that death can be defeated only by death—the death of death, in the end, is still death. Analogously, Taubes harbored a demonstrably negative view about time and history: the endtime signifies

147 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 30–31 (emphasis in original); idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 46.

148 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 31; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 46. For discussion of the figure and the voice in Taubes’s apocalyptic-gnostic understanding of the messiah, see Bielik-Robson, *Jewish Cryptotheologies*, 174–177.

149 Taubes, “The Gnostic Foundations,” 164–165.

150 Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 272–273; idem, *Being and Time*, 262–263.

151 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 8; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 17.

hyperliterally the time of the end that is the end of time, the victory of eternity over temporal becoming. Paraphrasing Heidegger, we could say that the nature of that eternality is not a timelessness that negates time but rather the deepest oscillation of time in its concomitant withholding and bestowing.¹⁵² The victory over temporal becoming, on this score, would consist of the fact that time is permanent in its impermanence, abiding in its nonabiding.

The gnostic reconfiguration of the Jewish idea of redemption in *Abendländische Eschatologie* is sharply—albeit obliquely—critiqued by Susan in letter from February 22, 1952:

The apokalypse is what we hope; and we cannot hope for anything from it, beyond itself. If our hope is a peaceful, just and prosperous community we should fight for it on earth; if what we crave is love in its purity and faithfulness we must learn to love our father, mother, brother, friend, wife, child etc. But if we chose apokalypse, it means we have renounced these hopes and that we have no right to look forward to a heavenly paradise, End of the world does not mean the accomplishment of a “perfect” world, perfect love, perfect justice. Analogical truth boils down to affirming a finitude infinitized or an infinite finitude; a monster. [...] I cannot envisage the God of Israel in a “gnostic Judaism.” I rather see him walking beside the just, beside the patriarchs and David and Salomon, bringing up his people to live in the sacred order of the world, that is god’s world, whose law is god’s law. And as long as the word of god is on the lips of men as long as long as redemption is experience *through* the law, the craving for redemption is without ever being stilled partially fulfilled. But we seem to be as exiled from that sacrum as from Hellas.¹⁵³

As this passage rightly indicates, Jacob Taubes’s position is invariably dualistic: time is the darkness of death that must be overcome by the light of life that is eternity. A possible challenge to this conclusion might be made on the basis of a passage from Hans Leisegang’s *Die Gnosis* (1924), cited by Taubes to elucidate the structure of apocalypticism and gnosis, wherein the “circular patterns of basic concepts” (*kreisförmige Führung der Grundgedanken*) in Gnostic thinking, which are both dualistic and monistic, are said to be incompatible

152 Martin Heidegger, *Überlegungen VII-XI (Schwarze Hefte 1938/39)* [GA 95], Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 2014, 120; idem, *Ponderings VII-XI: Black Notebooks 1938–1939*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017, 93. See Wolfson, *The Duplicity*, 94–97.

153 Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §181, 102–103.

with modern philosophical terminology. The starting point and goal of the path of gnosis is the *coincidentia oppositorum* rather than the division of the world into two irreconcilable forces.¹⁵⁴ Taubes maintains that Leisegang's "summary of the pattern of apocalyptic and Gnostic thought is wrong only in the assumption—and this is a significant barrier to understanding apocalypticism—that it is incompatible with modern philosophical terminology. Apocalypticism and Gnosis inaugurate a new form of thinking which, though submerged by Aristotelian and Scholastic logic, has been preserved in the present and was taken up and further developed by Hegel and Mark."¹⁵⁵ The logic of the dialectical method meets the criterion of being both dualistic and monistic insofar as it reconciles the opposition of thesis and antithesis into a synthesis within the course of history, a view that was rejected by Susan in a letter written on April 26, 1952.

Leisegang's argument that the gnosis must be characterized as at once dualistic + monistic + that the source + aim of the gnosis is not the dichotomization of the world into 2 hostile + irreconcilable forces but the "Ueberwindung der gegensätze" (which you cite and accept in your A.E. [*Abendländische Eschatologie*]) seems to me very questionable. Isn't the major thesis of the gnosis that "God" (the source of the self) is not the source of the world? The evil is not the "dualism," the contradiction, but the "mixture" of self + world. To "forget" the contradiction (the difference between Sein + Seiende) is root of all error. Therefore Hegel is not a gnostic but a Christian rationalist + Heidegger is a gnostic. The end of history is not the fulfillment of reason but the catastrophe [*sic*] of error.¹⁵⁶

While I understand Taubes's strategy to accept Leisegang's point in order to substantiate his hypothesis that the dialectic is "the ontological form of apocalypticism and Gnosis which is passed down to Hegel and Marx,"¹⁵⁷ I concur with Susan's critique. I would add that the Hegelian interpretation does not cohere with Jacob's understanding of Gnosticism, and by implication apocalypticism, which is far more unequivocally dualistic. Recall the aforementioned statement *Die Welt ist das Gegengöttliche und Gott ist das Gegenweltliche*. There does not seem to be any space for a dialectical resolution by which this antinomy

154 The passage from Leisegang is cited by Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 34–35; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 51–52.

155 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 35; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 52.

156 Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §235, 210.

157 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 37; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 55.

could be sublated; on the contrary, the apocalyptic revelation exposes the truth of God annihilating—not sublating—the world. Indeed, the justification for Taubes treating Gnosticism as the “kindred spirit” of apocalypticism—or as he literally put it, “Gnosis is the spirit of the spirit of the apocalyptic [*Die Gnosis ist Geist vom Geiste der Apokalypitik*]”¹⁵⁸—turns on the irresolvable enmity between God and world: “In their narration of the history of the world the apocalyptic myths introduce self-estrangement as a dramatic leitmotif, and it is only on this very theme that the more theoretical, ontological speculations of Gnosis are founded.”¹⁵⁹ Based on this deduction, I do not see justification for Taubes’s assertion that the foundations of the dialectic are to be found in God’s alienation from the world, which coincides with the division of the human into the psyche and the pneuma, and that the process of redemption occurs ontologically in God’s sublation of the world and anthropologically in the pneuma’s sublation of the psyche.¹⁶⁰ The first part of this statement is consistent with Taubes’s exposition of Gnosticism, beholden to Jonas, who argued as well that a salient feature of gnostic apophaticism is that the transcendence of the unknown God does not stand in any positive relation to the essence of the world but represents its negation and cancellation.¹⁶¹ From the vantage

158 Taubes, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 54.

159 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 36; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 54.

160 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 38; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 55. The Hegelian explanation works better with the brief description of the kabbalah in Taubes, *Apokalypse und Politik*, 14: “Die Kabbala sagt: die Welt ist polar gebaut, sie besteht aus entgegengesetzten Kräften, aus positiven und negativen, aus männlichen und weiblichen. Es handelt sich darum, diese auseinanderstrebenden Kräfte zu vereinen und damit das Gleichgewicht herzustellen: die *Harmonie der Kräfte*” (emphasis in original). Cf. Jacob’s letter to Susan from January 7, 1952, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §139, 29–30, where he describes Scholem’s seminar on Lurianic kabbalah that focused on “the problem of the dialectic” applied to explain the presence of anger and fury within the *Ein Sof*. On the one hand, to deny the presence of judgment in the primordial ground (*Urgrund*) would curtail the perfection of God, but, on the other hand, negation cannot be attributed to the infinite. The resolution of the dilemma, attributed to Joseph Ibn Ṭabul, involved interpreting *creatio ex nihilo* mystically such that judgment is the “being” in the divine nothingness (*das “Sein” im göttlichen Nichts*), and hence there is a reversal of the postulate of medieval Christian-Jewish metaphysics that to assign negation to the essence of God is equivalent to ascribing a fault to that essence. On 30, n. 2, it is correctly noted that implied here is the mystical understanding of *creatio ex nihilo* related to the Lurianic doctrine of the self-contraction of God (*šimšum*). See above, n. 128.

161 Jonas, “Gnosticism and Modern Nihilism,” 442. The essay was reprinted as the epilogue “Gnosticism, Existentialism, and Nihilism,” in Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*, third edition, Boston: Beacon Press, 2001, 320–340, and then again in *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology*, with a foreword by Lawrence Vogel, Evanston: Northwestern University Press,

point of the world, God is always other, the *deus alienus*. Hence, the apocalyptic ethos is such that one has “no spiritual investment in the world as it is.”¹⁶² The second part of the statement, however, is more problematic. Not only is Taubes’s extrapolation regarding sublation not corroborated philologically or textually, it contradicts his own description of the final revelation as one in which God annihilates the world. Annihilation is not sublation. Even if we think of the latter as the annihilation of annihilation, in the case of God annihilating the world, the double annihilation would amount to an unmitigated extinction, and thus there would be nothing in the world that could be labeled as innately redeemable. Once more, let us listen to Taubes’s own language:

In Gnosis the cosmos is seen as a world and an order devoid of meaning. For Gnosis, the unity [*Geschlossenheit*] of the ancient cosmos is conceived as a barrier or wall against which we collide in desperation. It is only this barrier, in its unity, which enable us to say that the beyond exists, which means precisely the beyond of the outermost shell enclosing the cosmos. The cosmos, as portrayed in Gnosis, has not been emptied to a point of utter powerlessness; rather, the abundance of evil contained in it renders it powerful. The cosmos is ruled by the substance of darkness. [...] This shows that the division between God and the world, and mankind’s self-estrangement, are taken to extremes in Gnosis. Gnostic mythology turns over on itself [*überschlägt sich selbst*] and rages against the origin from which it derives its revolutionary pathos. To the extent that Gnosis sees Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament, as the guarantor of this world by virtue of his creative word, the apocalyptic, revolutionary hatred of the world changes into Gnostic outrage against that God and his principle.¹⁶³

Taubes attempts to salvage his Hegelian reading of the gnostic myth by arguing that the “rigorous negation of the cosmos is possible only because the cosmos is held in tension with its opposite pole, God. God and world are not distant [*entfernt*] but estranged [*entfremdet*] and divided [*entzweit*], and therefore hold each other in mutual tension [*so gegenseitig aufeinander zugespant*]. Just as there is nothing of God in the cosmos, so God is the nothing of the world. [...] The apocalyptic, Gnostic God is not *beyond* this world [*überweltlich*] but

2001, 211–234. The aforementioned passage appears in *The Gnostic Religion*, 332, and in *The Phenomenon of Life*, 225.

162 Taubes, *The Political Theology*, 103. For a more positive interpretation of this passage, see Bielik-Robson, *Jewish Cryptotheologies*, 168–169.

163 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 38; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 56.

essentially *against* this world [gegenweltlich].¹⁶⁴ One would be hardpressed to discern in these words the dialectical logic of Hegel. The contrast made between distant, on the one hand, and estranged and divided, on the other hand, amounts to the proverbial distinction without a difference. The tension of which Taubes speaks does not allow for any sublation as is attested by the statement *Wie im Kosmos nichts von Gott ist, so ist Gott das Nichts der Welt*. Positing such an intractable disparity is far from Hegel. Transcendence denotes not what is beyond but against the world, and hence the enunciation (*Aussage*) of the unknown God necessarily comprises the renunciation (*Absage*) of the world.¹⁶⁵ Here it is well to mention the language of Taubes in a letter to Carl Schmitt from September 18, 1979: “One can argue over the boundary between the spiritual and the worldly, and this boundary will constantly be redrawn (an everlasting task of political theology), but if this distinction is neglected, then we breathe our last (Occidental) breath.”¹⁶⁶ Reiterating the point in even stronger language in a second passage, Taubes writes, “You see now what I want from Schmitt—I want to show him that the separation of powers between worldly and spiritual is *absolutely necessary*. This boundary, if it is not drawn, we will lose our Occidental breath. This is what I wanted to impress upon him against his totalitarian concept.”¹⁶⁷ It is well-nigh impossible to interpret such an absolutely necessary separation of the worldly and the spiritual in terms of Hegel’s dialectic.

It behooves me to acknowledge one passage where there is a more concerted effort to uphold the Hegelian perspective:

Dialectic is the signpost on the pathway of history, from creation to redemption. The inherent possibility of dialectic springs from the essence of freedom. Freedom only exists where it allows for the freedom of negation. [...] The gap between thesis and antithesis reveals the principle of freedom as history. The thesis is the totality [*das All*], when God and the world are not yet differentiated. The antithesis is the separation of God and the world; synthesis is the union of God and the world through mankind, so that in *freedom* God may be all in all.¹⁶⁸

164 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 39 (emphasis in original); idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 57–58.

165 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 39; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 58.

166 Taubes, *To Carl Schmitt*, 30.

167 Taubes, *The Political Theology*, 103 (emphasis in original).

168 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 15 (emphasis in original); idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 26.

I acknowledge that in this text the resonance of Hegel's logic is incontestable. However, in many other passages, Taubes relinquishes the threefold structure of the dialectic by denying that there is any mitigating factor by which the friction between God and world can be assuaged.¹⁶⁹ Insofar as the cosmic is antithetical to the divine and the divine to the cosmic, God is the counter-principle to all things natural and nature the counter-principle to all things godly. As such, the world does not provide the context in which God may become all in all. One might protest that the passages wherein the sharp dichotomy between God and world is upheld represent the second state of the dialectic, but this does not compute with the overall sense one gets from Taubes's insistence that the darkness of temporal existence is irreparably adversarial to the luminosity of the spirit of life, that redemption is from and not within history.

It may be the case, as Taubes writes, that "it is the essence of time to move forward, irreversibly straining toward something new," and therefore, "the spirit is strictly bound up with time."¹⁷⁰ History, which is technically the project of spirit that surpasses nature, is impelled by "time directed toward something which has not yet been but will be, and which, when reached, will not be lost again."¹⁷¹ From that perspective, history is necessarily the history of salvation (*Heilsgeschichte*), the interim between creation and redemption.¹⁷² However, the messianic hope expressed here is short-lived as the inevitable deferral of the end—that for which there is constant expectation no matter how often salvation is delayed¹⁷³—cuts a wedge between the double sense of the eschaton as the axiological that-which-once-was of creation and the teleological that-which-one-day-will-be of redemption,¹⁷⁴ a temporal incision that results in the melancholic realization that time cannot find its reconciliation in time. In an interview conducted in 1987, Taubes recapitulated the thesis of his dissertation by saying about the notion of the apocalypse, "Whether one knows it or not is entirely irrelevant, whether one takes it for fancy or sees it as dangerous is all uninteresting in view of the intellectual breakthrough and experience of time as respite [*daß Zeit Frist heißt*]. [...] There is no eternal return, time does not

169 For a different assessment of Taubes's relationship to Hegel, see Bielik-Robson, *Jewish Cryptotheologies*, 169–172.

170 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 12; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 22.

171 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 12; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 23.

172 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 13; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 24.

173 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 21; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 34.

174 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 13; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 23.

enable nonchalance [*Lässigkeit*]; rather, it is distress [*Bedrängnis*].¹⁷⁵ Taubes's apocalyptic-gnostic view of history is pithily summarized in the statement that *time is distress*. Undoubtedly, Taubes maintained that this lack of tranquility is true for humanity at large, but he emphasized—in the spirit of Pauline universalism that signifies the election of Israel¹⁷⁶—that it is a fate borne most uniquely by the Jewish people, “the restless element in world history, the leavening that first actually produces history.”¹⁷⁷ Reverberating in Taubes's biblical exegesis is the familiar ethnocentric chord that the divine can be disclosed only to “one race [*Geschlecht*] which has not trodden the same path as other nations [...]. The revelation of God wrenches the race of Abraham from its homeland, its birthplace and ancestral home, and promises a land ‘which I shall show you’ [Genesis 12:1]. Abraham is a stranger on this earth, a foreigner to the lands and nations he meets. Abraham's race regards itself not as belonging to the nations, but as a nonnation [*Nicht-Volk*].”¹⁷⁸ The notion of a nonnation—that is, a nation differentiated from all other nations in virtue of its nationhood (*Völkertum*) no longer being determined by territorial occupation and political sovereignty—corresponds to Rosenzweig's identification of the Jews as the metahistorical reference point in history.¹⁷⁹ Indeed, like Rosenzweig, who argued that the Jewish sense of peoplehood is based on the ancestral blood-community (*Blutsgemeinschaft*) and not on attachment to the land,¹⁸⁰ and in accord with Levinas, who extricated the holiness of the holy land from geopolitical ownership, maintaining that, for the Jew, expulsion from the worldliness of the world is the truest sense of returning to the autochthonous property of

175 “Jacob Taubes,” in *Denken, das an der Zeit ist*, ed. Florian Rötzer, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1987, 317, trans. in Joshua Robert Gold, “Jacob Taubes: ‘Apocalypse From Below,’” *Telos* 134 (2006), 145.

176 Taubes, *The Political Theology*, 25.

177 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 16; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 27.

178 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 17; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 29.

179 Alexander Altmann, “Franz Rosenzweig on History,” in *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr, Hanover: University Press of New England, 1988, 124–137; Paul Mendes-Flohr, “Franz Rosenzweig and the Crisis of Historicism,” in *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, 138–161; Amos Funkenstein, “An Escape from History: Rosenzweig on the Destiny of Judaism,” *History and Memory* 2 (1990), 117–135; David N. Myers, *Resisting History: Historicism and Its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, 68–101.

180 Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. Barbara Galli, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000, 318; idem, *Der Mensch und sein Werk: Gesammelte Schriften II. Der Stern der Erlösung*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976, 332. I have elaborated on Rosenzweig's position in Wolfson, *The Duplicity*, 71–76.

their covenantal pledge,¹⁸¹ Taubes emphasizes the nomadism and diasporic condition that is intrinsic to the identity of the Jewish people.¹⁸² Enrootedness is not, as Heidegger and the Zionists maintain, being tied to a specific soil.¹⁸³ Expressing the scriptural imagery in gnostic terms, Abraham is described as a stranger in the world at large, a foreigner to all nations and their lands. Taubes cites a passage from Schelling's *Philosophie der Mythologie* (1842)¹⁸⁴ to substantiate his gnostic interpretation of the essence of what it is to be Jew: "This is exactly what the name Hebrew means: 'Abraham who is called *Ibri*, that is, Abraham, belonging to those who pass through, having no fixed abode, living as a nomad as the patriarch was still known in Canaan: because he who does not bide a while anywhere, is only a stranger, a wanderer.'"¹⁸⁵

The Jew is most fully inside the home as the outsider that has no home, the one who resides with no fixed residence. Echoing a theme shared by any number of thinkers, Taubes downplays the spatial facet of Judaism: "The power of the origin and rootedness in space break down when it comes to Israel. Thus, Israel is able to become a 'people without space' [*Volk ohne Raum*]. It does not perish because it knows itself to be a 'people of time' [*Volk der Zeit*] who have been uprooted from their rootedness in space."¹⁸⁶ Note that even though Taubes cites the verse from Genesis in which Abram is commanded to leave his native land and to go to the land he will be shown, this promise does not

181 Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, 233, 263–264; idem, *Proper Names*, trans. Michael B. Smith, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996, 44–45; idem, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, trans. by Bettina Bergo, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, 193, n. 6. See also the essay "Promised Land or Permitted Land," in Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. and with an introduction by Annette Aronowicz, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, 51–69. See the summation of Levinas's position in Wolfson, *The Duplicity*, 75. For references to other discussions of the Levinasian view on Zionism and the status of the land in his thinking, see *ibid.*, 223, n. 238.

182 Løland, *Pauline Ugliness*, 38.

183 On the comparison of the myth of origin and the romantic longing for an earthly paradise in Heidegger and Zionist ideology, see the letter of Jacob to Susan from April 16, 1952, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §228, 196. See also Susan's referring to the Zionist defenders of the state of Israel as "national-socialist" in the letter cited above, n. 75. And compare my discussion of the "Ethnolinguistic Enrootedness and Invocation of Historical Destiny," in Wolfson, *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, 335–381.

184 Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 2, pt. 1, Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856, 157–158: "Abraham der Ibri heißt also: Abraham, der zu den Durchziehenden, an keinen festen Wohnsitz Gebundenen, nomadisch Lebenden gehört, wie der Erzvater in Kanaan auch stets der Fremdling, ein Wanderer."

185 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 17; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 29.

186 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 12; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 22–23.

mollify the patriarch's sense of being an interloper in the world. Even the assurance of inhabiting the land of Canaan does not bestow upon Abraham and his progeny the dispensation of indigeneity.¹⁸⁷ Taubes would have agreed with Rosenzweig that since the "full proprietorship" of that homeland is disputed—an allusion to the biblical admonition that "the Canaanites were then in the land" (Genesis 12:6)—the Jewish people "is itself only a stranger and tenant in its land."¹⁸⁸ Regrettably, the promise to Abraham of emplacement in the land leads not only to the displacement of the other but also to his own displacement. Inasmuch as the connection between the people and the homeland is not a matter of autochthony but derives from the fact that the land belongs to God, the Israelites can reside therein only as foreigners and strangers (Leviticus 25:23) in the same manner that Abram was told that his offspring would be strangers in a land that was not their own (Genesis 15:13). From the biblical narrative we can adduce homiletically that even when homebound the Jew is homeless. In a similar vein, Taubes, paraphrasing Hegel, says that Abraham's status as a stranger, who stands in opposition to the world, was supported by a God estranged from the world.¹⁸⁹

This brings us back to the question of the historical connection between Judaism and Gnosticism. As we noted, one of the contributions that Susan Taubes made was to emphasize that Heidegger was influenced by a theological strand in the Christian tradition that may have originated in a gnostic Jewish heresy. The clearest articulation of a similar point was made more elaborately and emphatically years later by Jacob Taubes in "Der dogmatische Mythos der

187 It is of interest to consider in light of the critique of indigeneity the comment of Taubes, *The Political Theology*, 7: "Now I have no patience, neither with respect to Heidegger nor with respect to Buber, for this apotheosis of the early. Why the early should be better than the later I simply don't understand." The specific issue at hand is the relationship of apocalypticism and prophecy, but I think it is reasonable to apply Taubes's rebuff of privileging what is considered as early more broadly to a critique of the idea of the arche-logos.

188 Rosenzweig, *The Star*, 319; idem, *Der Stern*, 333.

189 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 17; idem, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 29. The passage paraphrased by Taubes is from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Theologische Jugendschriften nach den Handschriften der Kgl. Bibliothek in Berlin*, ed. Herman Nohl, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1907, 247; English rendering: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, trans. Thomas Malcolm Knox, with an Introduction, and Fragments trans. Richard Kroner, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948, 187. Prior to this passage, Hegel, much like Schelling, emphasized the peripatetic nature of Abraham's existence, wandering from place to place without becoming attached. To be worthy of divinity, Abraham had to be a stranger to both the soil and to other people. See Hegel, *Theologische Jugendschriften*, 246; idem, *Early Theological Writings*, 186.

Gnosis,” where his difference with the Heideggerian interpretation as it influenced Jonas and the Bultmann school is made explicitly:

Late ancient Gnosticism emerges in the immediate environment of early Judaism, and in pagan quarters only, if at all, in those reached by the missionizing propaganda of Hellenistic Judaism, where the doctrine of the creator-God started to take effect against the dominant polytheism. Gnostic myth marks a crisis in monotheistic religion of revelation itself. The mythic reaction to the doctrine of the monotheistic religions of revelation comes from the borderlands of early Judaism, from Samaria, Syria, Transjordan, and Alexandria. This circumstance, essential for a historical interpretation of Gnosticism, is not considered in the foundational work of Hans Jonas, which has dominated the entire field of the study of Gnosticism for decades. Even if his phenomenological analysis remains valid for Gnostic topoi, such as the alien, this world, and the world beyond, worlds and eons, light and darkness, anxiety, erring, homesickness, the noise of the world, the call from beyond, the alien man, and so on, they acquire a different matrix if the problem of Gnosticism is considered from the perspective of the history of the Jewish religion—precisely in that reaction against the boundary making of the monotheistic revelation and its interpretation in rabbinical exegesis.¹⁹⁰

Against the Bultmannian-Heideggerian interpretation of Gnosticism that informed the perspective of Jonas, Taubes emphasizes the connection between apocalypticism and Gnosticism, suggesting that the latter phenomenon—or its engendering myth—should be explained in terms of a theological crisis within Judaism. More specifically, the crisis relates to the sustainability of the monotheistic split between a transworldly creator-god and the creation brought on by the failure of the apocalyptic vision of the end to transpire in time. “Gnosticism reveals itself as one of the ways in which Jewish and Christian groups react to the deferral of *parousia*: the accent shifts from the cosmic and

190 Taubes, *From Cult to Culture*, 72–73. The Jewish roots of Gnosticism may also be implied in the praise for Moritz Friedländer in Taubes, *The Political Theology*, 24. In his book *Der vorchristliche jüdische Gnosticismus*, Friedländer argued that Gnosticism originated in antinomian Jewish circles in Alexandria. For a critical assessment of Friedländer’s hypothesis, see Birger A. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006, 10–28. Cf. Jacob’s letter to Susan from April 3, 1952, in Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §216, 170: “Auch die Gnosis ist ‘Produkt der römischen u. hellenistischen’ Zivilisation, Gnosis in Alexandria.”

historical *parousia* to the entry of the divine into the individual soul. With the decoding of subjectivity, the scene is prepared for Gnostic mythology.¹⁹¹ Gnosticism has its roots in Jewish apocalypticism but there is a crucial shift from salvation history to the redemption of the spirit.¹⁹² As an internal rebellion within Judaism itself, the locus of evil is identified as the transcendent creator and creation itself is hurled into disarray. The gnostic myth seeks to bridge the unbridgeable abyss according to which God is not worldly and the world is not godly.¹⁹³ As Susan wrote to Jacob in a letter from April 4, 1952:

If there is something to be healed, the brokenness is within the world. To ask for the eradication of brokenness as such is to wish the annihilation of the world. To heal the broken relations within the world, requires first that we acknowledge the reality of these relations (instead of fleeing into the imaginary) + then drawing from the tree of life, science, art, wisdom, cultivate + transform them. The powers of creation, of life are also the powers of destruction: every transformation passes through chaos.¹⁹⁴

This dark vision of gnosis—the spark of holiness that grows within the shadow—was likely an aspect of the magnetism that initially drew Susan and Jacob Taubes together just as it was likely to have been an aspect of the revulsion that eventually tore them apart. In a letter from December 28, 1950, Jacob wrote to Susan, “it is the greatest gift of God that I found in you the ‘way’ and the ‘abyss’ at the same time”¹⁹⁵—indeed, the way to the abyss that turned out to be the abyss of the way.

191 Taubes, *From Cult to Culture*, 73.

192 *Ibid.*, 73–74.

193 *Ibid.*, 74–75.

194 Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1952*, §217, 171–172. In the beginning of the letter, Susan engages the question of the *Kehre* in Heidegger’s thinking and the problem of ontologizing in light of the categories of *Sein und Zeit*.

195 Taubes, *Die Korrespondenz 1950–1951*, §68, 166.