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History beyond the Ken: Towards a Critical Historiography of Apocalyptic Politics with Jacob Taubes and Michel Foucault

Jacob Taubes, Founding Professor of Jewish Studies and the Sociology of Religion, but also Director of the Section for Hermeneutics at the Institute of Philosophy at Berlin's Free University from 1962 until his death in 1987, was one of the most influential and controversial theorist in humanities. Recently discovered documents from his literary estate reveal that he was among the first German thinkers to recognise Michel Foucault's brilliance as a lateral thinker. On two separate documented occasions, he attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to involve him in colloquia on epistemological research. This article examines the correspondences between Taubes' and Foucault's respective theories about Judeo-Christian apocalypticism and touches upon what could have been illuminating discussions between the two on "the use and abuse of history". After providing an overview of the apocalypse as a historical concept, the common characteristics of Foucault's theory of genealogy and Taubes' conception of eschatology are outlined. By highlighting the corresponding historiographical aspects of these two approaches, the focus shifts to the widely neglected "other", "gnostic", or "revolutionary" potential of apocalyptic notions. Beyond the history of representations, a non-representative "tradition of breaking with tradition" might be discovered, demonstrating the immanent political implications of eschatology and offering perspectives on historical struggles "from the bottom up".

1 Preface

The only attested meeting between Jacob Taubes and Michel Foucault took place as early as June 1964 at the Seventh International Philosophical Colloquium at Royaumont Abbey.[1] At an illustrious round table on Friedrich Nietzsche, including philosophers like Jean Beaufret, Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Gilles Deleuze, Pierre Klossowski, Karl Löwith, Gianni Vattimo and Jean Wahl, the

1 This article offers an extract of the theoretical and methodological approach provided in my dissertation: Zolles, *Die symbolische Macht der Apokalypse*. I am thankful to Harald Kluge Halvorsen for co-translating the text and for vivid discussions on its topic. The translation of the text was revised by Christina Pössel. Martin Treml kindly provided me with copies of the documents presented in the preface and in the closing remarks of this paper. They derive from the literary estate of Jacob Taubes held at the Leibniz-Center for Literary and Cultural Research (ZfL) in Berlin.

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37-year-old Professor at the University of Clermont-Ferrand, Michel Foucault, presented his seminal paper on "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx".[2]

Foreshadowing the epistemological disposition of *The Order of Things* (which was published two years later), in this paper Foucault called attention to the lack of analysis both of Western techniques of interpretation and of the tradition of "suspecting that language means something other than what it says",[3] and claimed that the hermeneutic system was re-founded in the nineteenth century. Scrutinised synchronically, the works of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud do not constitute simply an increase in knowledge, but rather a system of looking at phenomena, and Man, differently: "[Marx, Nietzsche and Freud] have not given a new meaning to things that had no meaning. They have in reality changed the nature of the sign and modified the fashion in which the sign can in general be interpreted."[4] The activity of continuously reflecting upon oneself and of exploring the concealed levels of human consciousness becomes central, but, Foucault argues, paradoxically reveals itself as an illusory profundity, reliant on misguided imaginings. Finding no anchorage, the signs come loose and become subject to interpretation without end.

> What is in question in the point of rupture of interpretation, in this convergence of interpretation on a point that renders it impossible, could well be something like the experience of madness. An experience against which Nietzsche fought and by which he was fascinated; an experience against which Freud himself struggled, not without anguish, all of his life. This experience of madness would be the sanction of a movement of interpretation that approaches its center at infinity and that collapses, charred.[5]

Foucault proceeds to claim that Marx's interpretation of relations of productions similarly – albeit less elaborately – follows a circular reasoning and proves to be an endless process. In modern hermeneutics, "interpretation finds itself with the obligation to interpret itself to infinity".[6] The supposed originator of interpretation shifts to the centre. In the modern *episteme*, reasoning is located somewhere between the conflicting fields of hermeneutics and semiology, somewhere between the belief in the truthfulness of signs and the endlessness of self-implicating languages.

Among those listening to Foucault's paper was the 41-year-old Jacob Taubes, learned rabbi, Jewish theologian, Professor of the History and Philosophy of Religion at Columbia University in New York, and a restless wandering academic. In the discussion following Foucault's paper, he posed the following question:

2 Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx," ed. Faubion.
3 Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx," ed. Faubion, 270.
4 Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx," ed. Faubion, 272.
5 Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx," ed. Faubion, 275.
6 Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx," ed. Faubion, 278.

> Isn't Foucault's analysis incomplete? He hasn't addressed the techniques of religious exegesis, which have played a crucial role. And he hasn't traced the true historical correlation. Despite what Foucault has just said, it seems to me that interpretation in the nineteenth century begins with Hegel.[7]

Foucault answered:

> I haven't spoken about religious interpretation, which indeed was of great importance, because in the very short history that I just outlined I focused on the signs and not the sense. The break that took place in the nineteenth century can certainly be linked to the name of Hegel. But in the history of signs in their broadest sense, the discovery of the Indo-European language, the disappearance of the general grammar, and the substitution of the concept of the organism for the concept of the character are no less 'important' than Hegel's philosophy. We shouldn't confuse the history of philosophy with the archaeology of thinking.[8]

In this short conversation, the positions of the two thinkers and their opposition are clearly indicated. Taubes emphasises the importance of the religious tradition in occidental philosophy, ingeniously incorporated into the historical discourse by Hegel, who had already played a crucial role as a follower of early Christian Gnosticism as Taubes argued in his dissertation on *Occidental Eschatology*, published in 1947.[9] Foucault, on the other hand, has in mind a historical methodology, which he elaborated more concretely in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969). There he again addresses why he does not consider topics like cosmology, mathematics, chemistry, physiology, or biblical exegesis in *The Order of Things*, arguing that the deliberately limited focus of his discourse analysis, the "region of interpositivity" provided in his studies, has nothing to do with an all-inclusive "Weltanschauung". On the contrary, he aims to destabilise such "totalisations":[10]

> The horizon of archaeology, therefore, is not *a* science, *a* rationality, *a* mentality, *a* culture; it is a tangle of interpositivities whose limits and points of intersection cannot be fixed in a single

7 The discussion, as yet missing from English versions of the text, is translated from: Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx," ed. Defer and Ewald, 575: "L'analyse de M. Foucault n'est-elle pas incomplète? Il n'a pas tenu compte des techniques de l'exégèse religieuse qui ont eu un rôle décisif. Et il n'a pas suivi l'articulation historique véritable. Malgré ce que vient de dire M. Foucault, il me semble que l'interprétation au XIX^{e} siècle commence avec Hegel." Cf. Lauermann, "Materialistische oder apokalyptische Geschichtsphilosophie?," 237–238.

8 Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx," ed. Defer and Ewald, 575: "Je n'ai pas parlé de l'interprétation religieuse qui en effet a eu une importance extrême, parce que dans la très brève histoire que j'ai retracée, je me suis placé du côté des signes et non du côté du sens. Quant à la coupure du XIX^{e} siècle, on peut bien la mettre sous le nom de Hegel. Mais dans l'histoire des signes, pris dans leur extension la plus grande, la découverte des langues indo-européennes, la disparition de la grammaire générale, la substitution du concept d'organisme à celui de caractère ne sont pas moins 'importants' que la philosophie hégélienne. Il ne faut pas confondre histoire de la philosophie et archéologie de la pensée."

9 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*.

10 Cf. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 175–176.

> operation. Archaeology is a comparative analysis that is not intended to reduce the diversity of discourses, and to outline the unity that must totalize them, but is intended to divide up their diversity into different figures. Archaeological comparison does not have a unifying, but a diversifying, effect.[11]

This quotation demonstrates that the two thinkers' perspectives were not diametrically opposed, but rather that they argued from different angles: from a "spiritual" (Hegelian) and from a "material" (discursive) point of view, respectively. Taubes, at least, does not seem to have abandoned the thought of further discussions. In a letter dated September 20, 1966, when he was already a professor at the Institute of Jewish Studies and director of the Section for Hermeneutics at Berlin's Free University, he recommended participants for an interdisciplinary colloquium on "Late Horizons of *mythos*" ("Späthorizonte des Mythos"), organised by the philosopher Hans Blumenberg and the prestigious research group "Poetics and Hermeneutics".[12] Beside Jean Bollack, Paul Ricœur ("probably the most important thinker in France"), Herbert Marcuse ("the sharpest and most honest thinker of the Frankfurt School"), Pierre Bourdieu ("he was in Berlin recently and impressed us all very much"), Karl Kerényi, Henry Corbin, and Emil Cioran ("the finest mind I have ever encountered"), he described Foucault as follows:

> Michel Foucault, I mention just with a question mark. His books *Histoire de la Folie*, *Les Mots et les choses* certainly belong to our topic, but Foucault doesn't speak German, and I don't know if we can expect him to participate in an intense German discussion for eight days. It would be a risk, but it would be worth it. He is highly intelligent and always brings a new, unexpected aspect to a discussion.[13]

The published proceedings of the "Poetics and Hermeneutics" circle's fourth meeting shows that, with the exception of Jean Bollack, none of the above-mentioned scholars participated in the discussions on "Terror and Play: Problems in the Reception of Myth" in 1968.[14] Although Taubes, and notably Peter Szondi until his tragic death in 1971, invited other seminal representatives of the "Frankfurt School" and "Reception Theory", as well as of "Deconstruction" and of "Poststructuralism", to their seminars at Berlin's Free University (where Jacques Derrida repeatedly lectured from 1968 onwards),[15] no further plans to collaborate with Foucault are

11 Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 177.

12 Taubes, "Letter to Hans Blumenberg." Cf. Amslinger, *Eine neue Form von Akademie*, 221–224.

13 Taubes, "Letter to Hans Blumenberg," 101: "Michel Foucault nenne ich nur mit Fragezeichen. Seine Bücher *Histoire de Folie*, *Les Mots et les choses* gehören sicherlich zu unserem Thema, aber Foucault spricht nicht Deutsch, und ich weiß nicht, ob man ihn für acht Tage einer intensiven deutschen Diskussion aussetzen kann. Es wäre ein Wagnis, aber es würde ich lohnen. Er ist blitzgescheit und bringt immer einen neuen unerwarteten Aspekt in die Diskussion."

14 Fuhrmann, *Terror und Spiel*.

15 Cf. Derrida, "Letter to Peter Szondi," 49: "Would you send my greetings and thanks to all who listened to me so generously, welcomed, and guided me? In particular to Samuel Weber – to whom I

attested for the next decade. Although his work was read intensively in Szondi's seminars,[16] the next opportunity to invite him to a plenary discussion on new historiographical perspectives in Germany was not taken: the fifth "Poetics and Hermeneutics" colloquium in 1970 on the subject "History: Event and Narrative",[17] conducted by one of the doyens of German *Begriffsgeschichte* ("History of Concepts"), Reinhart Koselleck, also took place without him.

2 The Apocalypse as a Historical Concept

The appearance and subsequent proliferation of spectacularly visualised cinematic doomsday scenarios, typically accompanied by romanticised images and plots, has caused the previously immanent political meaning of the apocalypse to be nearly completely forgotten. The apocalypse is inevitably linked to the predominant logic of mass representation, wherein the experience of its immanent power – revealing itself through natural catastrophes or terror attacks and becoming a matter of public concern only for an instant – is closely related to suffering a "trauma".[18] According to German cultural and literary scholar Hartmut Böhme, dealing with the apocalypse in modern times means to be essentially "anti-apocalyptic". The apocalypse always has to be seen as a product of the rational *sublime* combined with the suppressed horror hovering behind.[19] The biblical scholar Yvonne Sherwood, following

will write soon – and Prof. Taubes – I will not forget our joint projects." ("Voulez-vous saluer pour moi, et remercier tous ceux qui m'ont si généreusement écouté, accueilli, guidé? En particulier Samuel Weber – à qui j'écrirai bientôt – et le Prof Taubes – je n'oublie pas nos project communs.")

16 Cf. Samuel Weber, "Deckerinnerungen," 305: "On the one hand, he [Peter Szondi] highly appreciated Derrida's painstaking examination of textual details and his simultaneous ability to perceive wider correlations and implications. On the other hand, he considered it extremely dangerous to question the concept of history, and even of truth, in a radical way, because this also affected the concept of objectivity. For this reason, he tried to find an alternative by drawing on the hermeneutic tradition. Also in this respect he was influenced more by Foucault than by Derrida – although he, as previously mentioned, highly valued Derrida's occupation with language and literature, while Foucault had less to offer in this respect." ("Einerseits schätzte er [Peter Szondi] Derridas akribische Auseinandersetzung mit textuellen Details und seine gleichzeitige Fähigkeit, daraus größere Zusammenhänge und Implikationen herauszuspüren, sehr. Andererseits betrachtete er den Anspruch, den Begriff der Geschichte und sogar den der Wahrheit radikal in Frage zu stellen, als äußerst gefährlich, sofern er zugleich den Begriff der Objektivität nicht mehr unangetastet ließ. Deshalb suchte er durch Rückgang auf die hermeneutische Tradition eine Alternative zu finden. Er war auch in dieser Hinsicht eher von Foucault als von Derrida beeinflußt – obwohl Derridas Beschäftigung mit der Sprache und mit der Literatur ihm, wie gesagt, sehr zusprach, während Foucault in dieser Hinsicht weniger zu bieten hatte.")

17 Koselleck and Stempel, eds., *Geschichte – Ereignis und Erzählung*.

18 Cf. Daschke, "Apocalypse and Trauma."

19 Cf. Böhme, "Vergangenheit und Gegenwart der Apokalypse," 396.

Derrida, who in his linguistic-*wise* manner claimed to be the eschatologists' last follower, argues that:

> Apocalyptic is the bête-noire of the kinds of polities and epistemologies that we call (and call into being as) 'Western' and 'modern'. [...] Apocalyptic contains all that the Enlightenments hate: secrecy, whispers, sectarianism, fanaticism, fundamentalism, human and divine vengeance, sulphurous vengeful streams of apocalyptic hate.[20]

Retained below the surface, the deep strata of the apocalypse are intrinsically tied to the shifting of reasoning in "modernity". Foucault's discourse analysis and Koselleck's conceptual history provide two complementary approaches for investigating this shift. Both refrain from tracing the significant meaning of "modern" concepts etymologically to their origins, but whereas Foucault focuses on epistemic patterns and variable modes of speaking the truth, Koselleck seeks to find the definition of common essential words and their application across a wide range of sociopolitical contexts.

According to Koselleck – in this respect significantly influenced by Taubes' self-declared antagonist in "political theology", the Catholic theorist of constitutional law Carl Schmitt[21] – the apocalypse did indeed have an immanent political meaning until the religious conflicts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[22] It had been an integral part of the Christian conception of time, characterised by its temporal ambiguity: inherent in the powerful and visually stunning representations of doom and salvation at the End Times, the expectation of Jesus Christ's second coming and the Final Judgment were continually *realised and actualised*, and by this, in deferral of the *parousia*, *archived and preserved* over a long period. This eschatological time-structure at the core of Christian belief, this adherence to the utopian moment of *kairos*, also provided important possibilities of identification at the political level, demonstrated by its potential to mobilise and unite Christian powers against their internal and external enemies.

By the end of the Thirty Years' War it had become apparent, Koselleck asserts, that the common horizon of living in the End Times did no longer have an unifying but, on the contrary, a diversifying effect (as already evident in the reformers' identification of the pope as the Antichrist). The apocalypse, being far too extreme in its temporal indecisiveness, in its wavering between protesting and delaying, and in its exclusive political claim, could no longer remain an integral part of absolutist state politics. At that time, a political process began in which apocalyptic expectations would be separated from their former political function and replaced by calculations

20 Sherwood, "Napalm Falling like Prostitutes," 53–54. Cf. Derrida, "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy."

21 Schmitt's disagreements with Taubes will be discussed in more detail below. Cf. Missfelder, "Die Gegenkraft und ihre Geschichte," and also Müller, *A Dangerous Mind*, esp. 106–07.

22 Cf. Koselleck, "Modernity and the Planes of Historicity," 11–14.

of political prognostics.[23] As matters of time became assigned to the calendar and projects oriented towards the *future* increased, backward-looking conceptions of time were replaced by conceptions of ultimate progress. With the Enlightenment battling all forms of visionary enthusiasm, ideas about the end of the world were separated from human actions and became associated with the empirical science of natural history.

Against this backdrop, marginal religious groups, committed to the scriptural belief in the Final Judgment, became opposed to the new "social contract" and the formation of a public sphere. One significant effect of this was that puritan movements set out to find their "New Jerusalem" in the vastness and wilderness of overseas territories that offered the possibility of founding Christian communities of a new kind.[24] The tradition of biblical exegesis and prophecy would again become especially influential on public affairs in antebellum America, when numerous revivalist religious movements emerged that proclaimed the imminence of the Second Coming. One of the most prominent figures, the Baptist preacher William Miller, predicted that the world would end in the 1840s.[25] After his prophesied scenario did not come about and the so-called "Great Depression" set in, the "Millerites" dispersed into different sects like the "Advent Christians", the "Seventh-Day Adventists" and, later on, "Jehovah's Witnesses", all of which still exist today.

Independently of these premodern marginal groups' radical belief in the imminence of the end of the world, the apocalyptic narrative was also read in the broader context of revolution.[26] Koselleck argues that the absolutist governmental agenda to stabilise political conflicts and discourse by instilling a belief in progress was radically challenged by the Enlightenment's effort to establish a private sphere in opposition to official international state politics. The bourgeoisie sought to become the centre of moral authority, thereby providing the ideological foundations for a liberal society.[27] Collective singulars like "history", "state" or "spirit" were invested with new significance. The discourses of the period often allude to utopian fulfilment, with biblical visionary prophecies like the Book of Revelation being the most popular, providing the allegorical grid for the narrative of uprising and fulfilment. In revolutionary and reactionary representations, the apocalypse, in the singular, would become the epitome of revolution within history.

23 Cf. Koselleck, "Modernity and the Planes of Historicity," 15–21.

24 Cf. Rozario, *The Culture of Calamity*.

25 Cf. Rowe, *God's Strange Work*.

26 Cf. Koselleck, "Modernity and the Planes of Historicity," 22–25; and also Garrett, *Respectable Folly*; Vondung, *Die Apokalypse in Deutschland*, 152–175; Burdon, *The Apocalypse in England*.

27 Cf. Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis*. Koselleck's critical perspective on the formation of the modern public sphere was opposed by Jürgen Habermas in "Verrufener Fortschritt – verkanntes Jahrhundert," and, eventually, in *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

Enlightenment engagement with the Bible, however, largely remained the preoccupation of German Pietist scholars.[28] Protestant theology would become a scholarly discipline at universities and constituted a key element of the latter's success, albeit with the prescription that the predominant state programs of *scientisation*, *deconfessionalisation*, *professionalisation* and *nationalisation* were assimilated.[29] As Michael C. Legaspi argues:

> The point here is that it was in the eighteenth century that biblical scholars turned decisively to the *university* to recover not just an Enlightenment Bible or a cultural Bible but a *universal* or catholic Bible, one capable of fostering the unity once associated with the scriptural Bible. The civic, aesthetic, and philological bibles created by Enlightenment scholars were, to an important extent, initiatives of the university. To focus on the university is to see why – if religious strife had long exhausted the early modern, Western church – the moribund scriptural Bible was remade so influentially in the eighteenth century. For it was in this period that universities were created or remade expressly to serve the interests of the state.[30]

The Book of Revelation, considered the Bible's most challenging visionary prophecy, was gradually starting to be read within the context of a genuinely historical temporality, as demonstrated by notable commentaries such as that of the Lutheran pietist clergyman Johan Albrecht Bengel in 1740. According to Koselleck, this joining of historical experience and true knowledge already anticipated the outlines of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.[31] A strong tendency to historicise eschatological belief coincided with a new philological and poetological interest in the biblical scriptures, notably in the prophetic tradition, whose symbolistic aspects became the subject of strict textual criticism. This approach shed new light on the intertextualities of the Old and New Testaments and on the close relationship between late Judaism and early Christianity.[32]

Two approaches to the biblical scriptures in general, and to its prophecies in particular, can be described as typical of the period around 1800. In his new introductions to the Old and New Testaments, Johann Gottfried Eichhorn established a thorough historico-critical reading. He concluded that most of the Hebrew writings were the product of multiple authors, and that biblical descriptions of the supernatural

28 As late as 1893, Friedrich Engels claimed: "A science almost unknown in this country, except to a few liberalizing theologians who contrive to keep it as secret as they can, is the historical and linguistic criticism of the Bible, the inquiry into the age, origin, and historical value of the various writings comprising the Old and New Testament. This science is almost exclusively German. And, moreover, what little of it has penetrated beyond the limits of Germany is not exactly the best part of it [...]." Engels, "The Book of Revelation." Cf. further Boer, "Revelation and Revolution."

29 Cf. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies*, 29; and also Sherwood, "Napalm Falling like Prostitutes," 55–56.

30 Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies*, 32–33.

31 Cf. Koselleck, "Perspective and Temporality," 140.

32 Cf. (also for the following) Schmidt, *Jüdische Apokalyptik*; Koch, "Einleitung;" Baird, *History of New Testament Research*.

should be seen in their wider historical and mythological contexts. In this he agreed with Johann Gottfried Herder's notion that the Bible was a profane book among others, though it remained the "most human" and therefore the "most sacred" one.[33] Herder – anticipating the "secularisation" of the Bible based on aesthetic assumptions – had sought to shift the focus onto the literary, yet anagogic, dimensions of the Bible, stressing also how the historic national character of Hebraic poetry has to be taken into account. In pursuing this aim, the interpretation of the Book of Revelation's symbols proved to pose the greatest challenge in his search to arrive at a homologous understanding of the Bible's deeper universal spirit.[34]

Many romantic poets, above all Friedrich Hölderlin in his hymn *Patmos* (1803), attempted to reunify religious and lyrical experiences of language and time, in a manner akin to the ancient visionary prophets'. In contrast to such autonomous interpretations, the *scientisation* of the Bible and of apocalyptic literature was characterised by its *historisation* (as opposed to its *actualisation)* and its *philologisation* (as opposed to its *poetisation*). In accordance with these principles, and using the methodology of hermeneutics developed by his friend Friedrich Schleiermacher, the protestant theologian Friedrich Lücke established the historico-critical discipline of "Apocalypticism" in 1832.[35] His aim was to develop a hermeneutic theory for the analysis of the literary character of prophetic writings and their multiform historical interpretations. In retrospect, this can be described as the beginning of the study of apocalypticism as a literary genre, which proliferated as more and more apocryphal documents were discovered. Over time, the apocalypse became a fundamental historical concept characterising a whole variety of visionary and end-time narratives in Western history.[36]

The current – interdisciplinary – mainstream of research is still dominated by the assumption that its subject matter is a generic tradition that comprises mainly the Abrahamic religions and their "secularized" reception.[37] Yet it has so far been impossible to formulate a definition of apocalypticism as a genre, as a narrative about the end of the world, as a millenarian rhetoric, as a movement, or as an ideology. This has led scholars to doubt the usefulness of a discourse which subsumes

33 Cf. Weidner, "Scripture, and the Theory of Reading;" Weidner, *Bibel und Literatur*, esp. 110–122 and 273–284.

34 Cf. Fohrmann, "Apokalyptische Hermeneutik."

35 Cf. Christophersen, "Die Begründung der Apokalyptikforschung durch Friedrich Lücke."

36 Cf., as an overview, the contributions in Collins, McGinn, and Stein, eds., *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*.

37 Cf., amongst a diverse variety of publications, Cohen, *Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come*; O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse*; Amanat and Bernhardsson, eds., *Imagining the End*; Collins, McGinn, and Stein, eds., *The Continuum History of Apocalypticism*; Collins, ed., *Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*; Murphy and Schedtler, eds., *Apocalypses in Context*; Johnson, ed., *End of Days*.

all such variegated aspects of doom and salvation.[38] A historiographical perspective that stresses a fixed definition of "apocalypse" has to concede that it is likely to generate a history of continuity, of comparability, of certainty, and of identity. Such rigid conceptual framework will tend to neglect the essence of what "apocalyptic" signifies, by failing to acknowledge its inherent irrational and un-representable dimensions. The excluded, antagonistic, and intangible "other" of Western civilisation will thus probably always struggle to attain historical positivity.

3 Genealogical Apocalypticism according to Michel Foucault

Throughout his career, Michel Foucault challenged the historicising approach, which he considered a bourgeois identification with the past, loaded with limiting and excluding strategies. His occupation with the histories of madness, medical perception, punishment, sexuality, as well as with the institutions and practices of truth-telling and the enactment of power within these realms, was driven by an intention to reassess matters taken for granted within the Western tradition. Fundamental to this was the questioning of common concepts and notions, and of their tendency to contain appropriations and oversimplifications of historical events and developments, and to legitimate the application of modern categories by homogenising long periods of the past. As Foucault insisted in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*,

> we must rid ourselves of a whole mass of notions, each of which, in its own way, diversifies the theme of continuity. They may not have a very rigorous conceptual structure, but they have a very precise function. Take the notion of tradition: it is intended to give a special temporal status to a group of phenomena that are both successive and identical (or at least similar); it makes it possible to rethink the dispersion of history in the form of the same; it allows a reduction of the difference proper to every beginning, in order to pursue without discontinuity the endless search for the origin; tradition enables us to isolate the new against a background of permanence, and to transfer its merit to originality, to genius, to the decisions proper to individuals.[39]

Nietzsche's criticism of Christian traditionalism and of Historism, in particular as expressed in his 1887 book *On the Genealogy of Morality*, was what spurred Foucault's development of an alternative methodological approach to reveal a new "effective" history. He opposes the latter to a historiographical approach that, in giving to a group of phenomena "a special temporal status", adopts exclusively modern

38 Cf. Webb: "'Apocalyptic:' Observations;" Hellholm, "Methodological Reflections on the Problem of Definition of Generic Texts;" Sturm, "Defining the Word 'Apocalyptic'."
39 Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 23.

methods of teleological deduction, rational truth-telling, and the individual sublime – aspects that rather ought to be conceived of as compensational strategies for modern societies' fundamental lack of identity. The present age's paranoiac striving to understand and control all forms of knowledge and human behaviour, a new struggle for "universal" power exercised indirectly and deviously, is being projected into the past. Foucault compares this type of suprahistorical perspective to a *surveilling gaze*, retracing a history

> whose function is to compose the finally reduced diversity of time into a totality fully closed upon itself; a history that always encourages subjective recognitions and attributes a form of reconciliation to all the displacements of the past; a history whose perspective on all that precedes it implies the end of time, a completed development. The historian's history finds its support outside of time and pretends to base its judgments on an apocalyptic objectivity. This is only possible, however, because of its belief in eternal truth, the immortality of the soul, and the nature of consciousness as always identical to itself.[40]

The mention of "apocalyptic objectivity" and "immortality of the soul" already indicate that Foucault argues in regard to a *longue durée* of power dynamics that go back to a time when Christian doctrines were predominant, ascribing to the history of traditions also a "voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending".[41] In contrast to such a generic perspective that tries to establish an ideal continuity "as a theological movement or a natural process",[42] a *genealogical* perspective provides a history that knows that its complex system of distinct and multiple elements can neither be *synthesised* or *identified*, nor retraced to a *metaphysical origin*. As "knowledge is not made for understanding [but] for cutting",[43] the genealogist will push "the masquerade to its limits" and provide "a history in the form of a concerted carnival".[44] Thus identity should be systematically dissipated and the political dimension of the "will to knowledge" unmasked. A contingent history of the visible and expressible, and the manner in which they depend on contemporary interpretations, ideologies, and social structures, will be excavated:

> The role of genealogy is to record [the] history [of interpretations]: the history of morals, ideals, and metaphysical concepts, the history of the concept of liberty or of the ascetic life; as they stand for the emergence of different interpretations, they must be made to appear as events in the theatre of procedures.[45]

Although Foucault's historical studies reached far into the Western past but apparently never analysed the twentieth century's "dispositifs" in any detail, he consis-

40 Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 379.
41 Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 380.
42 Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 380.
43 Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 380.
44 Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 386.
45 Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 378–379.

tently asserted that it was necessary to approach subjects "both as present-day questions and as historical ones"[46] and that his efforts ought to be characterised as "writing the history of the present".[47] With this in mind, Foucault attempted to develop a cultural critique "as an analysis of the cultural facts characterising our culture. In that sense, it would be a question of something like an ethnology of the culture to which we belong."[48] His attempt "to place myself outside the culture to which we belong, to analyse its formal conditions" and thus "the very conditions of our rationality"[49] literally correlates the objects with the subjects (in Latin "the ones lying beneath") of investigation. As, paradoxically, "discursive formations do not have the same model of historicity as the flow of consciousness or the linearity of language",[50] a genealogist can identify the point where external forms of knowledge become integrated and "subjective". He also can discover the contingent relation of inner and outer temporality or, as Hans Blumenberg put it, the gap between "life-time" and "world-time".[51]

In *Madness and Civilisation* (1961), Foucault identified a fundamental shift in the occidental perception of time that occurred as early as the Renaissance. A new division had been introduced between tragic cosmic visions and moral criticism. Around 1500, "the derision of madness took over from the seriousness of death" and the "fear before the absolute limit of death becomes interiorised in a continual process of ironisation".[52] Living in the End Times became increasingly coupled to interpretations of the actual political conditions:

> Whereas previously the madness of men had been their incapacity to see that the end of life was always near, and it had therefore been necessary to call them back to the path of wisdom by means of the spectacle of death, now wisdom meant denouncing folly wherever it was to be found, and teaching men that they were already no more than the legions of the dead, and that if the end of life was approaching, it was merely a reminder that a universal madness would soon unite with death. [...] The terms of the argument were therefore now reversed. It was no longer the end of time and the end of the world that would demonstrate that it was madness not to have worried about such things. Rather, the rise of madness, its insidious, creeping presence showed that the final catastrophe was always near: the madness of men brought it nigh and made it a foregone conclusion.[53]

46 Foucault, "Politics and Ethics: An Interview," 376.

47 Foucault, "The Body of the Condemned," 178. Cf. Garland: "What is a 'History of the Present?'" and Roth, "Foucault's 'History of the Present'," quoting a motto from the *Order of Things*: "[...] a discourse attempting to be both empirical and critical cannot but be both positivist and eschatological."

48 Foucault, "'Who Are You, Professor Foucault?'," 91.

49 Foucault, "'Who Are You, Professor Foucault?'," 91.

50 Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 187.

51 Blumenberg, *Lebenszeit und Weltzeit*.

52 Foucault, *History of Madness*, 14.

53 Foucault, *History of Madness*, 15.

At the dawn of the Reformation, madness loses the primary attribute it had in the Middle Ages: that of detachment from the collective experience of the apocalypse. This was now displaced by the notion of madness as a product or a symptom of man's worldly activities, always on the verge of surfacing, whose remedy is attainable only in the beyond. Gradually, madness, and its polarity of excessive enthusiasm and melancholy, became a border experience; pure unreason came to be the opposite of self-reflective erudition. In other words, as principles of reasoning became more predominant, irrational experiences in "life-time" became increasingly detached from events in "world-time". As a result, a new realm could be defined where all forms of uncontrolled affects, including crude imaginings, wild protests and irrational hopes, which previously related to the Day of Judgment, were reduced to symptoms:

> And it was precisely there that psychology was born, not as the truth of madness, but as a sign that madness was now detached from its truth, which was unreason, and that from now on it would be a rudderless phenomenon, *insignificant*, on the indefinite surface of nature. An enigma with no truth other than the one that could reduce it. It is for that reason that we must do justice to Freud. [...] Psychoanalysis is not about psychology, but it is about an experience of unreason that psychology, in the modern world, was meant to disguise.[54]

Foucault later claimed that in focusing on the limits of human experience, his work had outlined "three modes of objectification that transform humans into subjects"[55] – as objects of the sciences, of dividing practices, and of self-recognition: "Thus, it is not power, but the subject, that is the general theme of my research."[56] To deepen our understanding of what it meant to be a "subject", his studies expanded beyond the Enlightenment era (which nevertheless was to remain the period most significant for his work).[57] According to Foucault, we need to explore "much more remote processes if we want to understand how we have been trapped in our own history".[58]

Foucault traced the emergence of specific disciplinary mechanisms, coupled to the development of Western reason, that were exercised through techniques of both *totalisation* and of *individualisation* already in Late Antiquity. Although the modern state system, having developed from the medieval "state of justice" and the "administrative state" of the fifteenth century, had indeed generated new forms of political sovereignty, its policies and "governmentality" are comparable to tendencies that

54 Foucault, *History of Madness*, 339.

55 Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 326.

56 Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 327.

57 Cf. Foucault, "Je suis un artificier," 95: "Basically, I only have a single object of historical investigation: the threshold to modernity." ("Au fond, je n'ai qu'un seul object d'étude historique, c'est le seuil de la modernité.")

58 Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 329.

can be retraced far back in history.[59] As the modern ensemble of "biopolitical" tactics has "the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument",[60] their all-encompassing claim resembles the earlier tactics of "pastoral power". After having transmuted the ancient conceptions of dominion into that of a radically new, ethical kind, the singular organisation of the Christian Church had given prominence to the figure of the servant pastor (as opposed to princes, magistrates, prophets, fortune-tellers, benefactors, or educationalists) as a special form of power.[61] According to Foucault, this was based on four principles: assuring individual salvation in the next world; preparing oneself to sacrifice; looking after every single individual; and revealing the innermost secrets of the souls.

> This form of power is salvation-oriented (as opposed to political power). It is oblative (as opposed to the principle of sovereignty); it is individualizing (as opposed to legal power); it is coextensive and continuous with life; it is linked with a production of truth – the truth of the individual himself.[62]

The Christian pastorate displays a religion of order that established a general system of "pure obedience".[63] It followed an "economy of souls" (*oikonomia psuchōn,* in the words of Gregory of Nazianzus)[64] in which the individual identified and recognised and to which he subjected himself.

> Analytical identification, subjection, and subjectivation (*subjectivation*) are the characteristic procedures of individualization that will in fact be implemented by the Christian pastorate and its institutions. What the history of the pastorate involves, therefore, is the entire history of procedures of human individualization in the West. Let's say also that it involves the history of the subject.[65]

However, in retracing the history of Western subjectification, it is also important to emphasise five modes of "counter-conducts".[66] Foucault described them as tactics of insubordination *against* the pastorate and the hierarchical sovereignty of the Church. Often perceived as rebellious and thoroughly non-Christian in their own time, these practices of resisting conduct nevertheless influenced church history significantly. Furthermore, in retrospect they tend to be identified as *typically* Christian: *asceticism* as a practice of total withdrawal and as an exercise of self on self;

59 Cf. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 144, and more precisely on the change of pastoral power between 1580 and 1660, 303–325.
60 Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 144.
61 Cf. Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 333.
62 Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 333.
63 Cf. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 230–236.
64 Cf. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 256–257.
65 Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 239.
66 Cf. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 259–283.

communities as a social utopian alternative to the priest's sacramental power; *mysticism*, leading to experiences not permitted under pastoral power; the personal *interpretation of Scripture* against the predominant discursive background and without any pastoral relay; and *eschatological beliefs* as a rebellion against the time monopoly of the pastorate.

Representing tactical battles at the limits of pastoral power, these counter-conducts also appear to be its consequence, demonstrating how all human utterances and acts can be understood as caused by specific organisations of power. This perspective offers a decidedly *materialistic* approach to *spiritual* struggles in Western history, analysing them not in connection with specified concepts, but rather as representative instances of political conflicts *of* and *with* their respective time.[67] It was eschatological beliefs that, combined with other counter-modes, most radically challenged the temporal order of the Church and its chronological and universal history. When reading the Book of Revelation, *everything* can *always* seem perilous. For this reason, with the increased institutionalisation of the Church, the relation of knowledge and power crystallised in the development of the appropriate interpretation of the Book of Revelation: the demarcation lines between the compliant and the non-compliant, the licit and the illicit, the ones who had a future and the ones who did not, the living and the dead, could always be drawn anew.

It is this *immanent temporal as political conflict* that needs to be recognised a key tension in Western history. Dealing with eschatological beliefs as a counter-conduct offers a genealogical perspective on apocalypticism that is independent of deductive definitions and instead focuses on power dynamics, oppression, and the resultant disobedient activities of critique, resistance, and liberation.

4 Political Eschatology according to Jacob Taubes

In one of his seminars, Jacob Taubes characterised the mentality of *apocalypticism* with the help of the following anecdote.[68] After the Hungarian Uprising of 1956, an emigrant comes to stay with friends in Vienna for a time, telling them that he is looking for a place of asylum. Attempting to locate one, he spins a globe, but no country proves suitable, and he mournfully exclaims: "Don't you have another globe?" According to Taubes, such an experience of total foreignness in the world, and of the futility of a nation's political and social structures, is essentially apocalyptic. A productive reading of both Jewish *and* Christian *eschatology* cannot be developed without considering this type of experience. An account of this kind of

67 For theoretical, yet less historico-methodological "counter-approaches" cf. Quinby, *Anti-Apocalypse*; Norris, "Versions of Apocalypse;" Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*; Bull, *Seeing Things Hidden;* Hall, *Apocalypse*.

68 Cf. Ebach, "Zeit als Frist," 79.

estrangement is provided by Taubes in his only monograph, his dissertation on *Occidental Eschatology* published in 1947.[69]

Influenced by contemporary modes of existentialist expressionism and cultural criticism (the first quote in the book is from Otto Weininger, the last one from Martin Heidegger), and the religious studies by Hans Jonas, Karl Löwith, Bruno Bauer, Otto Petras, and Hans Urs von Balthasar, Taubes re-examined the European history of ideas with a focus on its inherent "apocalyptic-gnostic" conflicts. He argues that as a consequence of the deferral of Christ's *parousia*, the Jewish experience of time as limited ("[t]he paramount question posed in the Apocalypse is *when*")[70] and of leading a life of self-alienation ("the present state of the world, in which the ego dwells, is exile")[71] was carried by Christians as an *internalised* spiritual experience. Deliverance, therefore, became attainable only in the *life hereafter*.[72] Various revolutionary thrusts would continue to occasionally challenge the established Christian institutions in their fundamental structures and attempt to alter their conception of time and open the way for fulfilment *in this life*. These conflicts resemble the opposition between Aristotelian and dialectical logic, or between what is linear, orientated towards present and future, rational, and what is spiral, historically-orientated, and apocalyptic-gnostic.

> Apocalypticism and Gnosis inaugurate a new form of thinking which, though submerged by Aristotelian and Scholastic logic, has been preserved into the present and was taken up and further developed by Hegel and Marx. [...] Dialectical logic is a logic of history, giving rise to the eschatological interpretation of the world. This logic is determined by the question of the power of the negative, as posed by apocalypticism and Gnosis.[73]

Taubes assesses the Western history of ideas through the lens of its spiritual struggles, which he characterises as constantly driven by a "gnostic" or "apocalyptic"[74] tendency to rebel against the predominant rationalistic manifestations. For him, the revolt of the Gnostics in the second and third century A.D. against the creator-God

69 Cf. generally on Taubes: Terpstra and Wit, 'No Spiritual Investment in the World as It Is'; Gold, "Jacob Taubes;" Assmann, Assmann, and Hartwich, "Introduction to the German Edition;" Treml, "Reinventing the Canonical;" Martin, "Liberalism and History after the Second World War."

70 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 32.

71 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 36.

72 The divergences between the views of Taubes and Gershom Scholem resulted from their different valuation of eschatology in Judaism and Christianity. For Taubes, the Jewish messianic heritage was 'prolonging its career' within Christianity. Scholem suspended this process, arguing that Jewish redemption takes place in public and within the community, whereas he saw Christian redemption as turning back from the world, privatised, and focused on an invisible spiritual realm. Cf. Taubes, "Price of Messianism;" and further Macho, "Intellectual Rift between Gershom Scholem and Jacob Taubes."

73 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 35–36.

74 For the problem of Taubes' conceptual equalisation of "Gnosis" and "Apocalypticism", see Colpe, "Jacob Taubes' Gnosisbild."

of the Old Testament, against the conception of the incomplete material creation of the demiurge, became paradigmatic for all further spiritual disputes, which would revolve around the idea of the release of divine *pneuma* within man as opposed to the dominance of a temporal *psyche*. Gnostic thought thus anticipated many notions expressed only much later, such as in Joachim of Fiore's preaching of the spiritual kingdom and Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. After Hegel had presented his solution to the problem of theodicy as consisting of both the overcoming of the power of the negative dialectically and historically and the depicting of the spiritual maximum of existence (the *higher realms*), "the disintegration of God and the world"[75] that set in in the nineteenth century lead to a returning to man's primordial alienation and minimal existence (the *lower realms*).[76]

According to Taubes, this modern rift between the higher and the lower dimensions of existence can only be mended through a decentralisation of subjectivity and a radical self-reflection, combined with a setting in motion of the original powers of "Messianism". He noted that a fundamentally new kind of imaginary had emerged out of St. Paul's efforts to give form to the enthusiasm of the early Christian communities:

> In contrast to the old, organic allegiances, the Christian community is an inorganic, subsequent (*nachträglich*) togetherness of individuals based on 'pneuma'. [1 Cor. 12:13] In the Christian community the man of late antiquity blots out his own ego in favour of the superego (*Über-Ich*), which, coming from beyond, descends to the people. The superego is one and the same in each member of the community, so that the community represents a collective of the spirit (*das pneumatische Wir*). The spiritual center of man is the superego of the beyond (*das jenseitige Über-Ich*): 'It is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me.' [Gal. 2:20]
> The superego of Christ is seen by the masses as opposing Caesar (*Anti-Cäsar*). It outshines and devalues the Caesarian superego (*cäsarisches Über-Ich*). The mankind of late antiquity, having been reduced to the existence of a colorless mass, begins for a while to revere its lost self in the divine emperor.[77]

For Taubes, the early Christian communities thus preserved the Christ imaginary within their *self*-consciousness, signalling the beginning of the experience of "individual eschatology". Assuming authority over this alternative "superego", the early Church was able to assert itself against the subversive and even anarchistic features of Gnosticism, which Taubes perceived as succeeding the forcefulness of Jewish apocalypticism, with Marcion as the "Arch-Heretic".[78] Such currents were later strongly opposed by the institutionalised Catholic canon, creed, and liturgy, and by

75 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 9.
76 Cf. Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 184–194.
77 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 64–65.
78 Cf. Taubes, "The Iron Cage and the Exodus from It."

the tendency of bishops to, in Foucault's words, "totalise" and "individualise", to "pastoralise" the members of the Christian communities.[79]

Although Taubes later tried to restrict access to *Occidental Eschatology* because of its numerous borrowings from other authors, particularly from Jonas and Löwith, the book's subject matter remained significant for him throughout his career. An untiring polemicist, he often placed himself in provocative opposition to the academic establishment and persisted in trying to restore and revitalise "a tradition of breaking with tradition, which sets on fire the cages of the world that are otherwise frozen in their immanence".[80] *Occidental Eschatology* also provided a comprehensive survey of the European history of ideas by assembling various key philosophical discourses of the Weimar Republic. These offer valuable insights into topics such as the debate on "political theology", a term strongly associated with the work of the controversial Catholic jurist, political theorist, and former National Socialist Party collaborator, Carl Schmitt.

For many years, Schmitt, whom Taubes called an "apocalyptic prophet of the counterrevolution",[81] remained Taubes' intellectual antipode, above all because of his idea of "time as a limit" and his adoption of a "secular" political orientation within a much broader religious tradition. As Taubes put it,

> Carl Schmitt thinks apocalyptically, but from above, from the powers that be; I think from the bottom up. Common to us both is the experience of time and history as delimited respite, a term or even a last respite. Originally that was also a Christian experience of history.[82]

Albeit fundamentally standing far apart – as a Jew, Taubes was an "abstract enemy" to the orthodox Catholic Schmitt – both shared the same universal perspective on "occidental" history, asserting that Christian eschatology remained the decisive force in Western political thought. Even after the transition to a modern state, historical theological concepts mostly retained their political significance, if in "secularized" guise.[83] To Taubes, history should be read for its "messianic" moments and movements of liberation "from the bottom up", and to recover the *longue durée* of rebellious struggles against established structures and representations. By contrast, Schmitt, looking "from above", considered an absolute sovereign as essential for

79 Cf. Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 72–77 (on the Revelation of John in this perspective, 70–72).
80 Assmann, Assmann, and Hartwich, "Introduction to the German Edition," xxiv.
81 Cf. Taubes, *To Carl Schmitt*, 1–18. In this article, Schmitt's historico-juridical conceptions are discussed only insofar as they were part of Taubes' intercourse with him.
82 Taubes, *To Carl Schmitt*, 13.
83 As famously phrased in Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 36: "All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are securalized theological concepts not only because of their historical development – in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver – but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts. The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology."

maintaining the political order, and the only way to preserve something like a memory of the "messianic". To Schmitt, the sovereign represents the ultimate secular authority, who guarantees order beyond the rule of law in a "state of exception" (*Ausnahmezustand*).[84] That is why the *katechon*, the "restrainer" of Antichrist and the guardian of temporal order, first mentioned in the apostle Paul's Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, ought to be a prominent figure of thought. According to Schmitt, "[t]he belief that a restrainer holds back the end of the world provides the only bridge between the eschatological paralysis of all human events and the tremendous historical power (*Geschichtsmächtigkeit*) of the Christian empire of the German kings."[85]

As is apparent, both Schmitt and Taubes saw modern liberal democracies and their fundamental crises as deeply rooted in the Western religious tradition, but their conceptions of the "apocalyptic" remained diametrically opposed. Where Taubes largely focused on provocative acts against the still predominant representative "superego of the beyond" which served to conciliate the masses, Schmitt sided with its sovereign "restrainer" who prevented man from becoming "wolf to man" in anarchic times of civil war. Therefore nothing less than the continued existence of the "occidental" structure of *totalisation* and *individualisation*, already mentioned above as a major topic in Foucault's work, was at the centre of the debate on "political theology". Taubes sought to overcome it, Schmitt to retain it under any circumstances, at the date of ultimate decision, in a "state of exception".

The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has recently contributed to the – once again prominent – theoretical debate on political "Messianism"[86] with an attempt to retrace the figure of *Homo sacer*, combining the theories of Foucault and Schmitt. It is important to note that Agamben's commentary on the letter of Paul the Apostle to the Romans includes a dedication to Taubes and substantially departs from Schmitt's ideas at key points.[87] Following Taubes' ideas in his last four lectures (held in Heidelberg in 1986) on *The Political Theology of Paul*,[88] as well as *Walter Benjamin's* interpretation of the "state of exception",[89] Agamben pleads for a revi-

84 Cf. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 5–15.

85 Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law*, 29.

86 Cf. Blanton and Vries, eds., *Paul and the Philosophers*; and for an overview Ferris, "Agamben and the Messianic;" Liska, "Messianic Language and the Idea of Prose."

87 Cf. Agamben, *Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, 1, and esp. 104–111, where Agamben identifies the incompatibility of Taubes' "messianic" and Schmitt's "katechontic" conception of lawlessness, of *katargēsis*, and of *anomia*.

88 Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, 76–96.

89 Cf. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 257: "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism."

sion of the conventional conceptions of eschatology, particularly its *temporal* implications:

> The most insidious misunderstanding of the messianic announcement does not consist in mistaking it for prophecy, which is turned toward the future, but for apocalypse, which contemplates the end of time. The apocalyptic is situated on the last day, the Day of Wrath. It sees the end fulfilled and describes what it sees. The time in which the apostle lives is, however, not the *eschaton*, it is not the end of time. [...] What interests the apostle is not the last day, it is not the instant in which time ends, but the time that contracts itself and begins to end [...], or if you prefer, the time that remains between time and its end.[90]

Agamben here aligns himself with Benjamin and Taubes, for whom Paulus had increasingly become a key figure of interpretation and identification. For Agamben, too, both *eschatology* and the *apocalyptic* concern events in chronological time and are dependent on the level of common representation. Yet in order to better comprehend the *messianic*, the particular *temporal* experience of the apostle – as opposed to that of a prophet or an apocalyptic visionary – should be reconsidered. It refers to the experience of facing imminent *parousia*, of living not at the *end of time*, but in the *time of the end*, when temporal progress and time become compressed and Man faces the ending both individually and jointly. Then, when moving beyond the *worldly* and *physical* experience, witnessing the rupture of the political tensions of common and individual identification, the "messianic" subversive power in Man might unfold.[91]

Thus, "political eschatology" fundamentally deals with the limits of civilisation and questions the machinations of politics and power, as well as the appropriation of the *apocalyptic* in representations for secular purposes.[92] It seeks to challenge how these representations traditionally emerge out of a negative perspective on the "spiritual-messianic" experience – demanding an absolute "profane-materialistic" methodology in order to become historically positive in the spirit of the Enlightenment.

5 Revisiting the Times of the Apocalypse and *parrhēsia*

Although challenging Western historiographical traditions from different angles, Foucault's theory of genealogy and Taubes' conception of eschatology to a large extent agree where their "profane-materialistic" and "spiritual-messianic" perspectives

90 Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 62.
91 Cf. Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 57.
92 On the concept of a political theology based on Hegel, Taubes and Malabou, see now Lynch, *Apocalyptic Political Theology*.

converge in dealing with the "last things", or the *eschaton*. Both approaches attempt to offer a historical view unaffected by predominant cultural dispositions and "state philosophies". They focus instead on analyses and interpretations of experiences of otherness and extremity in order to deconstruct representations of identity and reveal modes of oppression caused by various intrinsic power dynamics. Importantly, they fundamentally question all conventional perceptions of *chronological time*. Foucault argued that it is "[a]s if we were afraid to conceive of the *Other* in the time of our own thought",[93] and – using his method of genealogy – he tried to find "just below the temporality of historians"[94] a history that "constructs a countermemory – a transformation of history into a totally different form of time".[95] Taubes, for his part, consistently focused on the conditions of alienation in Western religious history, assuming them to convey the "messianic" potential to establish a new general order of different temporality: "The subject of inquiry is the essence of history", and "[h]istory only reveals its essence as eschatology".[96]

It might prove advantageous to scholars of apocalypticism faced with overly simplistic historical deductions and narrowing traditional patterns to concentrate more on the various contrasting temporal aspects inherent in the conceptual field of the apocalypse. This would enable established notions to be characterised not by their definite *meanings* but rather their concrete *functionality*, not in relation to a distinct "occidental" *conceptual category* but a distinct "occidental" *temporal structure*. Applying such a shift in focus to specific historical indices, "revelation" could then be considered as referring to the *individualised dimension of chronological time*, to the socio-political preconditions necessary for the individual to uncover language or culture at a certain time and confront an intuited absolute other (like "God", "nation", "nature", or "love"). The "apocalyptic" affects the *representative dimension of chronological time*, powerful narratives used to envision the Final Judgment, the end of the world, or some threatening other (like "The Whore of Babylon", "Gog and Magog", "the enemy", or "aliens"). "Apocalypticism" refers to the *historical dimension of chronological time*, a traditional reference to former expectations of the end, archived and actualised according to specifically defined parameters of commemoration. "Eschatology" should accordingly be considered in conjunction with the *finite dimension of chronological time*, the joint anticipation of the ending and fulfilment of chronological time, which strongly opposes the conventional belief in progress. The "Messianic", finally, points to an *operative dimension within chronological time*, a highly personal experience of the time of the now as the time of the end, which cannot be mediated or suspended, but in which all mediation is brought to its end – a life totally restarted in "the time which remains", perpetuating the

93 Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge*, 13.
94 Foucault, *History of Madness*, 355.
95 Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 385.
96 Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 3 and 12.

heritage of living *another* life, in joint actions, aside from the ever persistent absolute powers of totalisation and individualisation.

A historical methodology that takes into account these temporal aspects might lead to a more viable understanding of the "apocalypse" as a specific religious *and* political phenomenon in the Western tradition. Neglecting the narrative's inherent function – as a fundamental critique of and protest against the established order – would mean to lose sight of significant movements and figures of thought in the past, politically not imposed by gazes of surveillance "from above", but caused by the effects of oppression and emanating "from the bottom up". Even in times of "secularisation", a reflection on the persistence of this conflict should be considered vital, as the humanities, including modern historiography, have proven to be greatly influenced by related modes of thinking. As Foucault reasoned:

> That which eludes power is counterpower, which however is trapped in the same game. For this reason the problem of war, of confrontation, must be revisited. The tactical and strategical analyses must be revisited on an extraordinarily deep, minute, and ordinary level. The universal battle needs to be rethought by avoiding perspectives of the Apocalypse. Because from the 19th century on, we have lived in an apocalyptic economy of thinking. Hegel, Marx, or Nietzsche, or in another sense Heidegger, have promised us the tomorrow, the break of dawn, the dawn of day, the day which reveals, the evening, the night, and so forth. This simultaneously cyclic and binary temporality has dominated our political thinking and leaves us defenceless when we need to think differently.[97]

In contrast to such a Western "apocalyptic economy of thinking" and its temporal determination, Foucault sought to develop a historical method that is not only capable of taking the singular character of political struggles and counterstruggles into account, but puts it at the centre of analysis. If Foucault had been addressing this point to Taubes – a representative of the humanities' apocalyptic discourse in twentieth-century Germany – he likely would have suggested that Taubes prescind from ascribing *all* forms of rebellious acts and counter-conducts to "apocalyptic-gnostic" patterns. He might also have recommended that Taubes free himself of his intellectual intercourse with Carl Schmitt and his "katechontic" justification of "political theology", leave the level of the apocalyptic discourse and instead turn to "micro"-analyses at "an extraordinarily deep, minute, and ordinary level".

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97 Foucault, "Je suis un artificier," 130–131: "Ce qui échappe au pouvoir, c'est le contre-pouvoir, qui est pourtant pris lui aussi dans le même jeu. C'est pourquoi il faut reprendre le problème de la guerre, de l'affrontement. Il faut reprendre les analyses tactiques et stratégiques à un niveau extraordinairement bas, infime, quotidien. Il faut repenser l'universelle bataille en échappant aux perspectives de l'Apocalypse. En effet, on a vécu depuis le XIX^{e} siècle dans une économie de pensée qui était apocalyptique. Hegel, Marx ou Nietzsche, ou Heidegger dans un autre sens, nous ont promis le lendemain, l'aube, l'aurore, le jour qui pointe, le soir, la nuit, etc. Cette temporalité, à la fois cyclique et binaire, commandait notre pensée politique et nous laisse désarmés quand il s'agit de penser autrement."

Interestingly, Foucault's last lectures at the University of California at Berkeley and the Collège de France in the early 1980s, seems to circle around the very subject Taubes had pursued over a lifetime.[98] In his considerations on *critique* and *parrhēsia*, Foucault analysed the European tradition's various modes of telling truth as "practices of the self", describing them as forms of courageous "dramatics of true discourse"[99] (as opposed to American discourse pragmatics), which bind certain persons (like the prophet, the seer, the philosopher, the scientist) as subjects to the truth they assert. Pursuing a "genealogy of the critical attitude in Western philosophy",[100] he outlined a "matrix scene of *parrhēsia*"[101] as an occasional "limit-situation"[102] that could be found in various constellations of "veridiction" in the past. In many respects, its characterisation resembles Taubes' assumption of a "gnostic structure" that is *not* "a timeless eternal, archetypal idea that repeatedly comes into language without being ignited in a particular historical context".[103]

In the classical Greek and Hellenistic tradition, Foucault recognised an ethical and philosophical practice of speaking truth that was represented by certain noble people's "courage to say things which are useful for everyone".[104] In the Septuagint and the works of Philo of Alexandria, on the other hand, *parrhēsia* was conceived of as "speaking open-heartedly" to God. In a more general sense, to be blessed with *parrhēsia* was also recognised as a gift from God. In the New Testament, however, *parrhēsia* simply described "a mode of being, a mode of activity [...,] an attitude of the heart",[105] not necessarily manifesting itself in discourse or speech, but rather referring to a new "eschatological attitude":

> *Parrhēsia* is the confidence that God will hear those who are Christians and who, as such, having faith in Him, ask of Him nothing other than what is in accordance with His will. It is this parrhesiastic attitude which makes possible the eschatological confidence in the Day of Judgment, the day which one can await, which one must await with complete confidence (*meta parrhēsias*) because of God's love.[106]

In the context of the courage to preach the Gospel, however, this confidence in God's salvation would become "the apostolic virtue par excellence",[107] notably in the case of the apostle Paul. His assured way of expression resembles the Greek

98 Cf. Foucault, *Fearless Speech*; Foucault, *Government of Self and Others*; Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*; and esp. Taubes "Virtue and Faith".
99 Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 68.
100 Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 170–171.
101 Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 50.
102 Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 61. Cf. Folkers, "Foucault, Parrhesia and the Genealogy of Critique," esp. 7–10.
103 Taubes, "Notes on Surrealism," 109.
104 Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 326.
105 Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 329.
106 Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 330.
107 Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 330.

courage of addressing others and practicing frank speech. According to Foucault, this activity would transpose into ambiguous modes of individual asceticism due to "the increasing stress on obedience in Christian life".[108] Yet this prior moment of "freedom of speech, disorder and anarchy of everyone being able to say everything or anything"[109] can be considered as having significant traits in common with Taubes' conception of the "messianic" moment, which for a short time occurred as a Judaeo-Christian experience in the first and second century A.D., as, for instance, displayed in Marcionism.

> Gnosis, the Greek term for knowledge, achieves in late ancient Gnosticism a specific coloration: secret, revealed, knowledge necessary for redemption, a knowledge that is not naturally acquired, a knowledge that transforms the knower. [...] The act of knowledge is accomplished in the proclamation of Gnostic myth itself.[110]

This intersection between Foucault's genealogical assumptions on *parrhēsia* and Taubes' *Fragments towards a Critique of Historical Reason*[111] can be considered a fruitful foundation for examining historical encounters with eschatology. Shifting the focus onto the modes of "veridiction" and courageous acts of truth-telling, and their implications for heterochrony and otherness, could enable a re-evaluation of "eschatological counter-conducts", such as the Franciscan or Dominican movements.[112] Similarly, the role of the university and the function of critique in the era of the Enlightenment, gradually superseding practices of "wisdom", might prove a productive subject to which to apply these perspectives.[113]

In *Nietzsche, Freud, Marx* (1964), Foucault had claimed that "language means something other than what it says",[114] and that the main challenge was to scrutinise

108 Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 333.

109 Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 331.

110 Taubes, "The Dogmatic Myth of Gnosticism," 69.

111 The subtitle for Taubes, *From Cult to Culture*.

112 Cf. Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 29: "It seems to me that in medieval Christianity we see another type of grouping bringing together the prophetic and parrhesiastic modalities. The two modalities of telling the truth about the future (about what is hidden from men by virtue of their finitude and the structure of time, about what awaits men and the imminence of the still hidden event), and then telling the truth to men about what they are, were brought together in a number of particular [types] of discourses, and also institutions. I am thinking of preaching and preachers, and especially of those preachers, starting with the Franciscans and Dominicans, who played an absolutely major role across the Western world and through-out the Middle Ages in the perpetuation, but also renewal and transformation [of] the experience of threat for the medieval world. These great preachers played the role of both prophet and parrhesiast in that society. Those who speak of the threatening imminence of the future, of the Kingdom of the Last Day, of the Final Judgment, or of approaching death, at the same time tell men what they are, and tell them frankly, with complete *parrhēsia*, what their faults and crimes are, and in what respects and how they must change their mode of being."

113 Cf. Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 29–30, and also Taubes, "The Intellectuals and the University."

the functional order of the hermeneutic systems in Western tradition that directly related to the absence of "speaking truth". In the last year before his death in June 1984, he seems to have detected, beyond the discursive strategies of hermeneutics, a pragmatic attitude dependent on, but not reducible to its historical contexts. His thought therefore seems to have been converging with Taubes' thread in *Occidental Eschatology*, which, however, to a large extent lacked a historic-methodological support.

The last sentence of Foucault's lectures, though not spoken in public, emphasises his correspondence with Taubes. It insists on the importance to focus on Western counter-conducts, in order to attain a deeper understanding of the political dimension of the history of the humanities, and to return to the critical dimensions in philosophy, psychology, and economics. It states: "[T]here is no establishment of the truth without an essential position of otherness; the truth is never the same; there can be truth only in the form of the other world and the other life."[115] One can say that from the beginning to the end, in parallel developments, Taubes and Foucault pursued their liminal endeavours without ever suspending a certain provocative, subversive, conceivably even "messianic" impulse: that maybe one day in a utopian finale, in accordance with a history that focuses on the unconscious experiences of a "nonworldly ego",[116] spoken from beyond the ken, language will once again mean what it says: "Poetry is the only beyond, not because it bridges 'this world' (*Diesseits*) and the one 'beyond' (*Jenseits*), Above and Below. It is the beyond itself. The word does not bear testimony, rather it is itself transcendence."[117]

6 Closing Remarks

Jacob Taubes made one last effort to involve Michel Foucault in a research group on historiography in 1978. In a letter to Hermann Peter Altenstein, Jr. of the Berlin "Wissenschaftssenat" concerning the founding of an Institute of Advanced Study in Berlin, Taubes proposed a number of the workshops. One of these was to deal with "transitional periods in history":

> Amongst the most productive subjects seems to be the problem of transitions and turning points in history, or more precisely: in history itself there are no turning points, but several groups have a consciousness of the transitional symptom and the turning point of a period within the 'continuous' run of history. Here I am considering a small task group as a workshop, with Kosellick [sic!] (Bielefeld), Meier (Bochum), Foucault (Paris), Hübener (Berlin), Veyne (Paris), Bollack (Paris) and others (not more than eight!) participating. For this, a detailed,

114 Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx," ed. Faubion, 270.
115 Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 340, note.
116 Taubes, "Notes on Surrealism," 102.
117 Taubes, "Notes on Surrealism," 104.

> later to be defined, preliminary project report on the study of 'late' periods in occidental history (which usually are classified as periods of decline in the official historical sciences) would also be needed, potentially contributed by the Aspen Institute. In this field, the East-Berlin Academy and its department of Late Antiquity is active as well. Thus a visit to East Berlin could be added to the group's schedule.[118]

However, this proposal of Taubes also failed to materialise. What could have become an unconventional, risk-taking research institute located in the very centre of Berlin, thereby mirroring and calling attention to the "world-historic conflicts between East and West" and the "grim reality of the century",[119] instead developed into the foundation of the prestigious "Wissenschaftskolleg" in the outer Grunewald district, in Wallotstraße, in 1981. Initially, Taubes strongly opposed this new institution's "idyllic" and "elitist" status.[120]

The plan to invite Foucault to a workshop seems not to have been pursued further after this. Foucault's stay in Germany in January 1978, when he met representatives of the Berlin student movement at the Tunix Congress, remained his last. On this occasion, he encountered Peter Gente, a former student assistant of Taubes and one of the founders of the Merve Verlag, an underground collective publishing company, which excelled in bringing French philosophy to German readers in translation.[121] Eventually, Taubes would outlive Foucault by three years, albeit increasingly impaired by manic depression. In autumn 1986, he was diagnosed with cancer and died within a few months. He concluded his life-long preoccupation with "gnostic" or "apocalyptic" patterns and movements in occidental history with a final lecture on *The Political Theology of Paul* with "Exodus from Biblical Religion: Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud"[122] – to a significant extent still pursuing the discussion with Foucault on "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx".

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118 Taubes, *Letter to Hermann Peter Altenstein, Jr.*: "Eines der produktiven Themen scheint mir das Problem der Übergänge und Zaesuren in der Geschichte zu sein oder genauer: in der Geschichte selbst gibt es keine Zaesuren, aber verschiedene Gruppen haben ein Bewußtsein vom Übergangscharakter und Zaesur einer Periode innerhalb des 'kontinuierlichen' Laufes der Geschichte. Hier denke ich an eine kleine Arbeitsgruppe als workshop, in der Kosellick [sic!] (Bielefeld), Meier (Bochum), Foucault (Paris), Hübener (Berlin), Veyne (Paris), Bollack (Paris) und andere (nicht mehr als acht!) teilnehmen könnten. Auch hier wäre ein genau zu umschreibender Forschungsbericht über das Studium von 'Spät'perioden in der okzidentalen Geschichte (die gewöhnlich als Verfallsperioden von der offiziellen Geschichtswissenschaft normiert werden) als Vorarbeit nötig, die das Aspen-Institut beisteuern könnte. Auf diesem Gebiet ist auch Ostberlin in der Akademie in der Abteilung Spätantike tätig, so daß ein Besuch in Ostberlin mit ins Programm der Gruppe aufgenommen werden soll."

119 Taubes, *Letter to Hermann Peter Altenstein, Jr.*

120 Cf. Taubes, "Elite oder Avantgarde?;" Pörksen, *Camelot in Grunewald*, 77–78; Felsch, *Geschichte einer Revolte*, 209–210 and 216.

121 Cf. Felsch, *Der lange Sommer der Theorie*, 141–148.

122 Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, 76–96.

In the above-mentioned letter from 1978, Taubes had already suggested the future direction of an independent research institute:

> If the individual fellowships were not to be distributed pluralistically and blindly, but instead due thought were to be given to setting a longer-term course for the development of the Wallotstraße project, I would consider nothing more appropriate than the pursuit of the intentions of the Warburg Institute *at a new level of reflection* that has opened up in the post-war convergence of art history, semiotics, the theory of symbols and images.[123]

Taubes thought that this prospected institution – partially realised in 1996 with the foundation of the Leibniz-Center for Literary and Cultural Research in Berlin – would come to represent a convergence of the heritage of both the German and the Jewish philosophical tradition. In his late assessment of the role of the Enlightenment, Foucault similarly argued that the problems of modernity could only be addressed by thinking both Jewish and Christian philosophy together. In his essay *What is Enlightenment?*, part of his 1983 debate with Jürgen Habermas, he once again outlined the categorical necessity of focussing on the limits both of society and of the individual as they are defined by mechanics of power. Foucault reasons that this critical task originated as a German-Jewish dialogue at the beginning of the Enlightenment; Moses Mendelssohn's and Immanuel Kant's answers to the prize question "Was ist Aufklärung?" in 1783 reveal their common intellectual foundation:

> With the two texts published in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, the German *Aufklärung* and the Jewish *Haskala* recognize that they belong to the same history; they are seeking to identify the common processes from which they stem. And it is perhaps a way of announcing the acceptance of a common destiny – we know to what drama that was to lead.[124]

Even if it is unclear, as Foucault argues, "whether we will ever reach mature adulthood",[125] the task inherited from the *Lumières* remains crucial:[126] to lift the veils of apocalyptic discourses as well as of apocalyptic powers. Both Taubes and Foucault

123 Taubes, *Letter to Hermann Peter Altenstein, Jr.*: "Sollten die einzelnen fellowships nicht pluralistisch und blind gestreut werden, sondern überhaupt der Gedanke in Erwägung gezogen werden, langfristig einen Akzent mit den Arbeiten des Projekts Wallotstraße zu setzen, so schiene mir nichts würdiger als die Nachfolge der Intentionen des Warburg-Instituts *auf einem neuen Niveau der Reflexion*, wie es durch die Konvergenz von Kunstgeschichte, Semiotik, Theorie des Symbols und der Bilder, die nach dem Kriege sich herstellte, anzutreten."

124 Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," 304.

125 Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," 318.

126 Cf. Derrida, "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy," 22: "In the daylight of today we cannot not have become the heirs of these *Lumières*. We cannot and we must not – this is a law and a destiny – forgo the *Aufklärung*, in other words, what imposes itself as the enigmatic desire for vigilance, for the lucid vigil (*veille*), for elucidation, for critique and truth, but for a truth that at the same time keeps within itself some apocalyptic desire, this time as desire for clarity and revelation, in order to demystify or, if you prefer, to deconstruct apocalyptic discourse itself and with it

– both of whom themselves witnessed atrocities and experienced radical social exclusion – offer perspectives on historical struggles from "limit-experiences". At the core of eschatology as well as of genealogy, beyond the common historiographical occupation with events in chronological time, courageous "practices of freedom" are to be discovered,[127] which ought to remain important also in the future, through the pursuit of what Foucault called the "work on our limits, that is, a patient labor giving form to our impatience for liberty".[128]

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everything that speculates on vision, the imminence of the end, theophany, parousia, the last judgment."

127 Cf. Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self," 292: "[...] I refuse to reply to the question I am sometimes asked: 'But if power is everywhere, there is no freedom.' I answer that if there are relations of power in every social field, this is because there is freedom everywhere." And Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 5: "The essence of history is freedom."

128 Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," 319.

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