

# Longing for Reconciliation

Susan Neiman



Jacob Taubes and Margherita von Brentano, Berlin, circa 1972

**Professor of Apocalypse:  
The Many Lives of Jacob Taubes**  
by Jerry Z. Muller.  
Princeton University Press,  
637 pp., \$39.95

Charisma, like pornography, is easier to recognize than define. Max Weber's attempt borders on tautology:

A certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities.

Later social scientists did no better, though enterprises selling lessons in business leadership still attempt to break down charisma into parts that can be acquired. It's not a matter of intelligence (though intelligence helps) or competence (which often doesn't). It's essentially erotic, but need not involve sex. Its mystery led the early Greeks, who first named it, to view it as a gift of the gods: something that might be conferred but cannot be cultivated. Attempts to describe it inevitably fall back on metaphors of light: charismatic people are dazzling, or sparkling, or fiery.

Those who knew the philosopher and rabbi Jacob Taubes agree on one thing: he had it. Virtually every other claim about him provokes disagreement. Yet his charisma wasn't apparent when I met him in 1983 in the home of his wife, the philosopher Margherita von Brentano, whose interests in Kant, the Enlightenment, and critical theory were close to my own.<sup>1</sup> What I saw

<sup>1</sup>I was coeditor of her *Nachlass, Margherita von Brentano: Das Politische und das Persönliche* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010). For conversation and comments I am grateful to Ethan Taubes, and look forward to his book on his father.

was sweet Jewish melancholy in a man whom a series of mental and physical illnesses had left looking older than his fifty-nine years and considerably more harmless than the rumors that preceded him. "Demonic" was a word often used.

Some months later, ten minutes into his Nietzsche lectures at the Freie Universität Berlin, I got it. It wasn't his erudition or rhetorical brilliance, though he could shine in six languages. Taubes asked questions no one else dared. He loved Nietzsche profoundly, yet he could stand in a Berlin auditorium, quote Heinrich Himmler, read the most anti-Semitic passages of Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*, and ask what they had to do with the gas chambers. In between he told the best Jewish jokes I ever heard. Did he answer the questions he'd raised? Not in any form I remember. But his riffs on them were deep in a way that made the use of the word "deep" seem superficial, courageous in a way that revealed the timidity of most thinking.

It was a combination that could make a young philosopher dizzy. I was old enough to be grateful that Taubes was not the first charismatic teacher I'd had, so I could enjoy the experience without being overwhelmed by it. And since Berlin in the 1980s was not exactly overflowing with Jewish intellectuals, Taubes enjoyed the company of someone who got his jokes, and most of his allusions. It helped sustain the vision of a rebirth of German Jewish life that he never abandoned.

Whether in the classroom or his favorite Berlin haunt, the Paris Bar, Taubes could talk as well about Talmud as he could about Nietzsche, as well about the Frankfurt School as the Gospels, as well about the latest French literary theory as Kafka or Kabbalah. He could talk so well about anything, in fact, that two suspicious colleagues once invented a fictitious medieval philosopher to goad him into an ex-

planation of how this thinker bridged the gap between Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus. In *Professor of Apocalypse* Jerry Z. Muller records four different groups of colleagues as the ostensible source of the story, often cited as proof of the accusation that Taubes was a charlatan whose mastery of texts and knowledge of their authors was less than he claimed. There's no question that he often played fast and loose with the truth. Yet to the extent that he was a charlatan, the story reveals what sort: How gifted must one be to expostulate spontaneously on what would have been the views of a philosopher who formed a link between Thomist and Scotist thought?

Taubes, who was born in Vienna in 1923 and died in Berlin in 1987, came from a long line of Jewish scholars and had an extraordinary education in both religious and secular studies. His mother was an activist in the socialist Zionist youth group *Hapoel Hazair*, and his father was a rabbi who left Vienna for Zurich in 1936. This saved his immediate family, though many relatives were murdered during the Holocaust. Taubes completed his Ph.D. in philosophy at twenty-three with a dissertation on Occidental eschatology and was ordained as a rabbi at twenty-four. There were no professional prospects in Switzerland for a stateless Jewish intellectual, so in 1947 he went to New York, which, apart from a few years in Jerusalem, was his base until he settled in Berlin in 1966. He studied at the Jewish Theological Seminary and taught at Harvard and Princeton before becoming a professor at Columbia in 1956.

Praised from his earliest years as a wunderkind in two distinct realms of thought, Taubes prided himself on knowing everything, and particularly everyone, worth knowing. In an age when international intellectuals were

far less connected than today, that knowledge served to cross-pollinate separate traditions of thought, making him an invaluable consultant, editor of book series, and organizer of conferences and salons. Yet what, Muller asks, justifies a six-hundred-page biography of a charismatic man who in the end left little but unforgettable impressions? There were four small books: one a doctoral dissertation of questionable originality, the others short essays or lectures transcribed after his death. However interesting they are, they are more fragments than full works, and they would hardly be memorable without the impressions.

One answer to the puzzle is found in the names of those who were impressed. Between Zurich, New York, Cambridge, Berlin, Paris, and Jerusalem in the years between 1947 and 1987, this multilingual man met most of the Western intelligentsia. Theodor Adorno, Louis Althusser, Hannah Arendt, Daniel Bell, Hans Blumenberg, Pierre Bourdieu, Stanley Cavell, Paul Celan, Noam Chomsky, Emil Cioran, Jacques Derrida, Paul Feyerabend, Nathan Glazer, Jürgen Habermas, Eric Hobsbawm, Alexandre Kojève, Herbert Marcuse, Paul Ricoeur, Gershom Scholem, Carl Schmitt, Susan Sontag, and a host of lesser luminaries make appearances in Muller's biography. Taubes carried on long correspondences with most, bitter fights with some, love affairs with others. Muller writes that *Professor of Apocalypse* is as much a portrait of an age as a man.

The book would have been truer had it been a better portrait of the age. For all his erudition, Muller, a professor emeritus of intellectual history at the Catholic University of America, misses vital facts about postwar Germany, where Taubes spent most of the last twenty-six years of his life. Some may seem trivial outside academia: German professors leave much of their work to their *Assistenten*, who have little in common with American assistant professors except the absence of tenure. Even today some scholarly texts published under professors' names have been written by their assistants. German seminars are conducted through student presentations on which the presiding professor simply comments. By not mentioning those facts while meticulously documenting which assistant took over which of Taubes's tasks, Muller leaves the impression that he was lazy, crazy, or unscrupulous. Instead he was merely taking part in an educational system that American academics rightly find shocking.

Those of us who knew Taubes, as well as those who only knew tales about him, have eagerly awaited Muller's book, which was twenty years in the making. So many questions remained unanswered. After inviting him to Jerusalem as a cherished student, Scholem called him evil and sent him back to New York, but four different versions of the story were in circulation. Which one was correct? And why was a man who called himself an arch-Jew (*Erzjude*) drawn to the company of Nazi intellectuals? Was that part of the antinomianism that led him to disdain Reform and

Conservative Judaism, while breaking most of the 613 commandments of halakah? Was he flirting with Christianity or struggling with it? Even to those of us inclined to forgive a great deal, it was clear that Taubes lied, broke hearts, betrayed. He damaged and fascinated, often at the same time. Muller's book is subtitled "The Many Lives of Jacob Taubes," and there were hopes that it might weave the many lives into one—or at least answer some of the questions he left behind.

Instead Muller provides a compendium of answers, drawn from prodigious archival research and over a hundred interviews. He doesn't seek to weigh them; whether Taubes was an intellectual charlatan or a brilliant thinker is for the reader to judge. It's a strategy that aims at objectivity, but absent a point of view, with no guiding theme or thread, we are left with a bunch of stories about a complicated man. The reader who hoped for open windows on Taubes's lives lays down the heavy volume feeling faintly like a peeping Tom.

One question the book raises often: Why did Taubes fail to write more? This betrays an ignorance of twentieth-century philosophy, which keelhauls itself over whether it was possible to write philosophy at all. That question was equally anguished, though differently posed, on both sides of the Atlantic. If the problem that fired endless discussions in Harvard's philosophy department was *How is philosophy possible after Wittgenstein?*, the problem driving thinkers in Frankfurt and Berlin was *How is philosophy possible after Auschwitz?*

In 1969 Cavell wrote that "the figure of Socrates now haunts contemporary philosophical practice and conscience," a nod to influential Anglo-American philosophers who wrote next to nothing. Even Wittgenstein published only a dissertation he subsequently repudiated; his later work consists of a series of notes, most of them unanswered questions, that students compiled after his death. Perhaps, Cavell was suggesting, philosophers have no better model than Socrates' gadfly, stinging others out of complacency without offering a solution to the dilemmas we pose. Richard Rorty went further and declared that philosophy had reached a dead end.

In America and England, such debates burned inside philosophy departments. In Germany, they were discussed by politicians and regularly filled radio programs and the pages of *Der Spiegel* and other major media. Philosophers like Adorno and Horkheimer in Frankfurt and Brentano in Berlin believed philosophy must answer the question that historians of the day ignored: How was fascism possible?

It was a question that drove Taubes as much as any other, but he took a longer view: two world wars may have underlined the crisis in thinking, but its roots went back centuries. Many, like Rorty, saw its origins in the man whom Moses Mendelssohn had called "the all-destroying Kant." In 1781 Immanuel Kant showed that many traditional philosophical questions were unanswerable. No longer able to ascertain the nature of God or freedom, philosophy could henceforth concern itself only with understanding the

conditions of knowledge. I've argued elsewhere against those views, but Kant's work did lead to the separation of philosophical and theological questions.

By the time Nietzsche's struggle with religion led him to pronounce that God was dead, the split between the two fields was so complete that twentieth-century histories of philosophy simply ignored the wealth of religious ferment spilling from the pages of earlier thinkers. Even those who didn't subscribe to positivism upheld W.V. Quine's principle of charity, which suggested we should tactfully ignore ideas that no longer made sense to us, the way we turn a blind eye to the quaint musings of an aging great-aunt. For Taubes, however, the answer to the problem of fascism and the Holocaust lies in religion, and it took him all the way back to the Gospels. He saw Nazi attempts to ground anti-Semitism in racist pseudoscience as trivial; far more important was the anti-Judaism of early Christianity. Taubes wasn't the only philosopher on the Continent who rejected the split between religion, philosophy, and politics, but he suggested that theological concepts were prior to any others.

Though Taubes scorned disciplinary as well as other sorts of boundaries, he expressed at an early age the wish to be a theologian. Did he ever develop a theology? He had at least two, which led many to wonder if his religious preoccupations were merely the detritus of an Orthodox upbringing he could not overcome, his struggles with religious questions mere performance. It might sometimes look that way. He could hijack a *B'rit milah* (circumcision ceremony) by appearing unannounced at the head of an Orthodox minyan and driving out the liberal rabbi in order to underscore the importance of halakic ritual. Weeks later, in the same city, he could invite guests to a dinner party featuring a large lobster. ("I'm an *Orthodox* sinner," he would say with a grin.) The antinomianism thus implied has a history, not only in the practices of the seventeenth-century followers of the messianic Shabbatai Zevi but in the Apostle Paul, who argued that since the spirit was what mattered, Gentiles need not obey the law. It could be a genuine philosophical position as well as a cynical rationalization for self-indulgence. With Taubes, everything was overdetermined.

In 1945 Hannah Arendt wrote that "the problem of evil will be the fundamental question of postwar intellectual life in Europe." She was wrong. Apart from a handful of German philosophers—all Jewish except Brentano—philosophy ignored the questions the twentieth century had raised again. Non-Jewish philosophers, who had kept their chairs by keeping their heads down during the Third Reich, were hardly inclined to discuss such questions. In the English-speaking world, John Rawls once told me that the Holocaust "just is the moral problem of the twentieth century" but avowed that he understood it too poorly to tackle it.

"The events of 1933 are of too bloody seriousness to be filed away," Taubes wrote to a friend in 1958 of his indecision about going to Germany. "But where nowadays are there those who

are still concerned with the questions those events pose to us?" After quoting this letter Muller puzzlingly asks, "Was this an explanation or a rationalization?" A rationalization for what? Taubes had a permanent job and a place in the cultural life of New York City, but Anglo-American philosophy was barely conscious of the questions that moved him. A distinguished Oxford philosopher recently told me that German intellectuals' acceptance of fascism posed no more philosophical problems than a man who thought he was a teapot: "Both were simply mad."

Neither this nor the dismissal of Nazi intellectuals as swinish could satisfy Taubes. He thought the Holocaust raised anew the question of Gnosticism, the idea that the world is the product of a perpetual battle between good and evil forces. As the seventeenth-century philosopher Pierre Bayle had argued, it's the hypothesis that makes most sense. Surely it saved the appearances better than the Judeo-Christian idea of a Creator who was fundamentally benevolent and intended us to be so. Yet however Gnosticism seemed to resonate with the facts, Taubes was understandably torn. For one who came so close to the Holocaust, a world without redemption from the cycle of good and evil was intolerable. And if redemption had a meaning, people like Schmitt, and even Hitler, must be redeemable.

The longing for redemption led to Taubes's fascination with Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles who never quite rejected Judaism. At a time when most Jews were delighted that Pope John XXIII had tried to cleanse the Catholic Church of anti-Semitism, Taubes was arguing that anti-Semitism was inseparable from Christianity. According to Pauline theology, Jews' refusal to accept Jesus as the Messiah meant they had abandoned their role as the chosen people, which passed to the Christians, setting up a conflict that poisoned two millennia. "If we had accepted him, he would have been the Messiah," Taubes said on his deathbed.<sup>2</sup>

He spent his life torn between the desire to heal the split between Judaism and Christianity, particularly between Germans and Jews, and his doubts about the possibility of doing so. Muller records Taubes's early expression of the dilemma as a "gash in his own soul" but fails to see its centrality to his most important relationships. Muller describes in detail Scholem's rejection of Taubes in 1951, as well as Taubes's lifelong attempt to return to his mentor's good graces. But there was no chance of reconciliation once Taubes, after an excruciating period of hesitation, accepted a professorship in Jewish studies and hermeneutics at the Freie Universität. Scholem had staked his life on the idea that the fabled German-Jewish symbiosis had been a fraud: Jewish love for German culture was unrequited. Taubes staked his life on proving the opposite: history could be undone, Hitler would not have the last word. His repeated attempts to get Scholem to reconsider their relationship were surely fueled in part by the hope of receiving the master's blessing, or at

<sup>2</sup>See his *The Political Theology of Paul*, translated by Dana Hollander (Stanford University Press, 2004); reviewed in these pages by Mark Lilla, October 23, 2008.

least his pardon, for his decision to live in Germany with Brentano.

Born in 1922, Brentano was the brilliant and beautiful scion of a distinguished German family that included writers, philosophers, and diplomats. She was baptized by the future Pope Pius XII; her father was ambassador to the Vatican. But at a time when most West Germans, who viewed themselves as victims of the war, simply wanted to forget it, Brentano was a committed antifascist. (It is odd, to say the least, that Muller describes that commitment as "central to her self-image," as if it were a matter of narcissism.)

Brentano wrote a dissertation on Aristotle under Heidegger's supervision, but university jobs for women were virtually unknown, so she spent years working at Southwest Radio. Then as now, German radio stations were often staffed by Ph.D.s who created serious programming about politics and culture. Among other things, Brentano wrote and produced the first German radio programs about the Holocaust. She was then appointed assistant professor at the new Freie Universität Berlin, where she held the first seminars there on anti-Semitism. Decades later she would be a major figure in the creation of Berlin's Holocaust memorial.

At a time when Germany's consciousness of the Holocaust is so central to its identity that it may be in danger of oversaturation, it's hard to recall how radical Brentano's commitments were. Back then intellectuals were as inclined as everyone else to accept the consensus of the Adenauer era: *all that*—the Holocaust was seldom named—was awful, but war is always awful. Those responsible for it were dead or punished at Nuremberg; those remaining had been cogs in big wheels that couldn't be escaped without losing one's life. Misled by a handful of bad apples, the German people had no idea of what was going on in their name in the East.

*Forgive and forget* was the order of the day. Brentano refused to follow it. In 1967, when she and Taubes decided to wed after turbulent years of common-law marriage, he took her to Zurich to meet his family. After Shabbat services at the synagogue and lunch at the family table, Rabbi Zwi Taubes searched for a conversational connection to his daughter-in-law to be, so he complimented Adenauer. Brentano would have none of it; she called the longtime chancellor a hypocrite whose right-hand man was a prominent Nazi, like most members of the civil service, school system, police, and courts. Taubes once told me she was the only German he completely trusted.

Muller, however, misreads their relationship, which Taubes's son Ethan calls the axis of his father's later life. While acknowledging that they shared an "interest in philosophy and an interest in Marxism," he focuses on their differences in a stupendously banal list, from the fact that "she had a fashion sense that Jacob lacked" to the fact that she smoked cigarettes while he smoked pipes. Taubes's commitment to Brentano was the commitment of a Jew determined to reconcile with decent Germans, as well as of an inconstant man who admired her

incontestable integrity. For Taubes, to be sure, the commitment was compatible with any number of affairs, which had also destabilized his first marriage. Yet his relationship with Brentano was a key to his character, and despite repeated strife as well as a divorce, they usually lived in adjoining apartments until the day he died.

Is Muller's inability to understand Taubes's second marriage the result of ordinary sexism? The chapter introducing relationships Taubes formed in Berlin grants the men full names and thumbnail sketches of their accomplishments, while the segment entitled "Character and Creed: Taubes and His Women" merely refers to "Margherita," as in the first female philosophy professor at the Freie Universität, or "Ingeborg," as in Bachmann, who after studying philosophy became a major figure in Austrian letters. Muller writes that Taubes combined a "relentless erotic pursuit of women" with a "satisfaction in mentoring them, and energetic attention to their professional promotion," which "may seem in tension or irreconcilable." However, he concludes, to understand Taubes "one must embrace his contradictions." But this particular contradiction exists only for those who think erotic attractions to be nothing more than a matter of body parts.

While Taubes's pursuit of seduction certainly caused harm, not least to both his marriages, for him it was never a matter of conquering fresh flesh. He sought communion, body and soul. It's less accurate to say he crossed boundaries than to say he had no boundaries at all. This was clear in situations that weren't erotic; anyone he took to was immediately treated as part of the family, to whom nothing need be explained. That sort of behavior was weird but harmless. At other times he could turn paranoid and lash out at someone he had just favored. It's impossible to tell how much of this was due to mental illness. Taubes underwent various forms of treatment for a bipolar disorder that never vanished. But the pain caused by the weight of history was at least as real.

Sexism alone cannot explain Muller's disdain for Brentano, since his discussion of Taubes's first wife and mother of his children, Susan Taubes, is more respectful. He claims that no other woman was as important to Taubes, but not two years into their marriage their paths were so different that they were living on separate continents. Though Taubes had followed his family's urgings to marry a young woman from a good Jewish family, Susan's aversion to Judaism in any form was so strong that she refused to allow any sign of it in their home or to give their children, Ethan and Tania, the rudiments of a Jewish education. Muller sketches her intellectual development—she wrote a doctoral dissertation on Simone Weil, as well as a later surrealist novel about their divorce<sup>3</sup>—through the deterioration of their marriage, which was virtually over a decade after it began. Since

neither Jacob nor Susan was inclined to devote themselves to parenthood, the children were sent to a series of boarding schools until Susan's suicide in 1969, when Brentano and Taubes brought them to Berlin.

The main reason for Muller's antipathy toward Brentano becomes clear in his discussion of the political conflicts of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Taubes and Brentano were the leading figures in the Berlin turmoil that spilled out of the university and into the political realm. Both supported leftist positions, while trying to curb those students inclined to reject any book that was written in the past and any idea that had no immediate political consequences. In a moment reminiscent of our own, many students demanded a politically pure leftist university, which right-wing politicians used as an excuse to block left-wing appointments altogether. Taubes and Brentano worked to convince students to study positions with which they disagreed, and they fought to appoint the occasional socialist professor. They rarely succeeded at either, but their efforts took up the better part of a decade—one reason why neither produced much writing at the time.

Muller depicts Brentano as the steely Stalinist she never was and tries to separate her positions from those of Taubes. Anyone who ever saw them together could see a life full of intense but often fruitful intellectual disagreement, whether about Heidegger or the latest developments in the Berlin Senate.

Brentano was an Enlightenment thinker, while Taubes was drawn to ideas the Enlightenment sought to leave behind. Yet they shared an understanding of postwar Germany that eludes Muller. Both saw that the appeal of fascism went deeper than any proffered allegiance to democratic values. West Germany was in deep denial about its Nazi past. Adenauer's reparations and democratic assurances masked contempt for the Allies' brief attempts at denazification. West Germans viewed those as victor's justice, and when the cold war began in earnest, the Americans abandoned the efforts entirely. After all, who could better oppose the Communists than the Nazis who had fought them a few years

earlier on the eastern front? Across the Iron Curtain, by contrast, authoritarian East Germany was led by genuine antifascists who had spent the war in concentration camps or exile. Unlike their neighbors to the west, they were genuinely concerned with eliminating former Nazis from positions of power.<sup>4</sup>

You need not be a Stalinist to see the dilemma Muller misses. Taubes and Brentano were hardly unaware of the repressions in the East that led their friend the socialist philosopher Ernst Bloch to leave a chair in Leipzig for tiny Tübingen. They supported Agnes Heller financially when she could no longer teach in Budapest, as well as other Eastern European intellectuals subject to suppression. Yet they were also aware of the fascist currents that seethed beneath West German life, even—or especially—at the universities. Public expressions of anti-Semitism had grown rarer, but anticommunism, the other pillar of Nazi ideology, was never abandoned.<sup>5</sup>

Taubes's fascination with Schmitt, whom he visited and challenged, has caused much speculation. Why would the philosopher-rabbi engage with a thinker who refused to repudiate the Nazis even after the war? Schmitt, whom the Allies sentenced to prison, wrote that "what the Nazis did was beastly; what happened to me and thousands of honest Germans is devilish."

Yet the more one understands of postwar Germany in the years before Taubes's death, the less mysterious his fascination becomes. Even Heidegger opted for silence, saving his more outrageous musings for the privacy of his *Black Notebooks*. (In 1947 he wrote that the Allies' refusal to allow him to teach was "worse than any crime committed by the Nazis.") Schmitt said aloud

<sup>4</sup>See chapter 3 of my *Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).

<sup>5</sup>See, for example, Willi Winkler, *Das braune Netz: Wie die Bundesrepublik von früheren Nazis zum Erfolg geführt wurde* (The Brown Network: How the Federal Republic Was Led to Success by Former Nazis; Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2019).

## The Garden Between Days

after John Singer Sargent

The lilies above the girls in white look like girls in white, dancing. The girls hang paper lanterns in the garden, careful with the candles inside. They watch the small flames flicker, kept safe from the drifting wind by white and red paper. The sky is cooling; the gnats and flies have grown still among the flowers. The girls lower their faces toward the lanterns. Nothing else moves, although the dancing lilies pretend to. In the fading sunlight, every color appears bluish, like a universal shadow, but the pink roses are stubborn. The pink roses stay pink even in the dark.

—Zuyi Zhao

what most of the Federal Republic was thinking. Taubes, who wanted more than anything to understand how his beloved German culture had turned him into a mortal enemy, could not help but gravitate to him. Brentano, however, found Schmitt and his ilk so despicable that she was appalled by her husband's willingness to visit him.

The West German upheaval that began in the 1960s had violent and unhinged moments, including the terrorist acts committed by the Red Army Faction in the 1970s. Taubes and Brentano condemned what was called revolutionary violence, proposing instead the American civil rights movement's sit-ins as models of political action. Yet they understood the rage of the generation they were teaching. That rage was produced by the revelation that their parents and teachers and every other source of authority had been—at the very least—complicit in crimes that were swept under carpets for decades. It has been argued that the repression of Nazi crimes was necessary to establish a democratic order in the new Federal Republic.<sup>6</sup> Counterfactuals are notoriously immune to refutation, but even if that repression contributed to stability in the long run, it's easy to appreciate the fury of the generation that bore the brunt of it. Taubes and Brentano tried to navigate that fury, mentoring many of the student leaders while attempting to keep fanaticism at bay.

Muller misses all of this, presumably because he subscribes to the view that fascism and communism are variants of the same disorder, opposed to the conservative version of the liberalism he prefers. After reunification, Brentano dismissed such equivalences in an oft-quoted remark: "The Third Reich left behind mountains of corpses. East Germany left behind mountains of files." Muller, of course, has a right to any political position he chooses. But he can hardly understand Taubes, who he concludes "was a man of the left," without a deeper understanding of the conflicts that drove him. Muller's contempt for the left, most recently expressed in a *Foreign Affairs* piece titled "The Neosocialist Delusion," reveals an unwillingness to engage or understand it. The ridicule expressed there permeates his discussion of the political conflicts that enmeshed Taubes in the last two decades of his life. Taubes, who could even take seriously the views of those who murdered his own relatives, would not have been amused.

What of the question of German-Jewish reconciliation that shaped so much of his life? When I published *Learning from the Germans* in 2019, I was more sanguine than I am today. Germany is no longer filled with repressed apologists for Nazism, but three years of hysterical philo-Semitism and a foreign policy somewhere to the right of AIPAC have taken on McCarthyite tones and shown the limits of historical reckoning. In the name of remembering the Holocaust, Jews and Israelis in Germany have been attacked as anti-Semitic for criticizing Israeli policies. Jacob Taubes would have appreciated the irony; I wish we could meet at the Paris Bar to talk about it. ●

<sup>6</sup>See, for example, Christopher Browning's review in these pages of Harald Jähner, *Aftermath: Life in the Fallout of the Third Reich, 1945–1955* (Knopf, 2022), December 22, 2022.

<sup>3</sup>*Divorcing* (1969; New York Review Books, 2020); reviewed in these pages by Leslie Jamison, May 13, 2021. Her previously unpublished novel, *Lament for Julia*, will be published by New York Review Books in June.