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A University in Zion: Max Weber and Gershom Scholem on Jewish Eschatology and Academic Labor

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In his “Science as Vocation,” Weber equates rational academic conduct with Jewish ethics. For Weber, the Jewish tradition, which separates moral conduct from messianism, is emblematic of scientists’ strenuous distinction of empiricism from metaphysics. The emergence of a Zionist university in Jerusalem, an institute that was positioned as a part of a Jewish nation-building project, complicated this parallel. This article examines Gershom Scholem’s activist approach to Jewish studies as a fundamental revision of the Weberian model of scholarship with the significant role that this model destines to the Jewish tradition. Scholem’s vision of scholarship at the Zionist university constitutes Jewish eschatology as a pillar of a scholastic national tradition. Scholem’s portrayal of Jewish messianism as an insular tradition overturns Weber’s portrayal of Jewish ethics as a lesson for Western academia. Reading Scholem with Weber shows that the enterprise of founding a university in Jerusalem ran counter to European liberal conceptions of Judaism. Moreover, reading them together shows Scholem’s notion of academic labor to reinstitute a separatist theological ethos as a formative model for scholarship.

It remains fairly unknown that Max Weber, an eminent commentator on the echoes of religious traditions in modern politics, reflected on the Zionist appropriation of biblical narratives. A letter to E. J. Lesser from 1913 presents these deliberations.¹ Although Weber thought that Zionist colonization of Palestine was feasible, he doubted that Zionism could ever stand up to the theological vision fueling its nation-building project. Weber was skeptical that the mundane functions of state institutions could meet the ambitions at the core of the Zionist project. In his mind, the plan to establish a university in Jerusalem encapsulated this problem:

Judaism and especially Zionism rests on the presupposition of a highly concrete “promise.” Will a prosperous colony, an autonomous petty state with hospitals and good schools ever appear as the “fulfillment” rather than as a

¹Max Weber, letter to Ernst J. Lesser, 18 Aug. 1913, in *Max Weber: Gesamtausgabe 8, Briefe 1913–1914*, ed. Rainer M. Lepsius and Wolfgang J. Mommsen (Tübingen, 2019), 312–15. The letter and its translation are in Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, trans. and ed. Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale (New York, 1952), xv.

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critique of this grandiose promise? And even a university? For the meaning of the promise lies on a plane altogether different from the economic goal of colonialization. It would seem to lie in the following: Jewry's sense of dignity could feed on the existence and the spiritual possession of this ancient and holy place—just as the Jewish diaspora could build its dignity on the existence of the kingdom of the Maccabees after their war of independence against the empire of the Seleucids; as Germandom all over the world could build its dignity on the existence of the *Deutsche Reich*, and Islamism on the existence of the caliphate. Germany, however, is, or at least appears to be, a powerful *Reich*, the empire of the caliphs still covers a large territory—but what at best is the Jewish state nowadays? And what is a university which offers the same as others do? To be sure, it would not be irrelevant but it could hardly compare to the ancient Temple.²

Weber's account of the Zionist nation-building project unpacks his understanding of national myths. On this point, Weber distinguishes between two forms of national identification for Jews: Jewish diaspora and Zionism. Jewish diaspora builds on the ethos of Jews' perseverance as an independent religious tradition. The Zionist nation-building project, on the other hand, strives for national sovereignty that emulates the ancient vision of a centralized nation in which God resides.

In Weber's mind, the future university in the Jewish state was the emblem of this latter promise of fulfillment that the Zionists were propagating. The petty achievements of such a university would show the extent to which the Jewish state falls behind the theological vision at its center. Even if it were to enjoy relative academic success, the Zionist university would fall behind the mythical temple. Whereas other national enterprises parallel in volume the ethos on which they build, Zionism propagates far-reaching enterprises, but it merely displays the discrepancy between the worldly order and eschatology. With a university in the Jewish state, the theological promise of messianic fulfillment that is at the core of Zionism would be ridiculed rather than fulfilled.

While Weber formulated his critique of the Jewish university, an aspiring sixteen-year-old intellectual decided to dedicate his life to scholarship upon studying a single page of the Talmud. That young man would become a defining figure for Jewish studies in general and at the Hebrew University in particular. Gershom Scholem, an eminently influential professor, public intellectual, and university administrator, pursued an unusual specialization in Jewish mysticism—a field that had hardly been taken seriously as an object of academic research. Unlike Weber, Scholem worked on Jewish history from the inside. He took an active role in shaping this history via recounting it while accentuating his own Jewish identity. Scholem reinterpreted the prophetic promise extrapolated from Jewish sources. His work centered on a new prism to those sources: the nation-building project of which he was a part.

Scholem's strict separation of Jewish and Christian approaches to prophecy set in motion his conceptualization of academic labor through the historically specific case of Jewish scholars' study of the Jewish sources. Those scholars take part, he argued, in an insular tradition that correlates the study of the Jewish sources to a dynamic perception of messianism. In building on this argument, Scholem

²Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, xv.

presented the scholar as an able and active party in determining the historical valence of theology. This view is embedded in Scholem's integration of the study of Jewish esotericism in the secular realm of academia.

Scholem's enterprise shows that the establishment of a university in Jerusalem prompted a main Weberian idea: the view that academic institutions do not merely operate under the cultural influence of theological narratives but also intervene in the sociopolitical conditions for the reception of theology. Scholem has put into practice the notion that teaching and research shape theological visions. Accordingly, academics' attempts to base their scholarly ambitions on an eschatological image coexisted with attempts to revise that image. As I wish to show, for Scholem, constituting a scholarly agenda built on reflective rewriting of theological myth. The aspect of this reciprocity that went well beyond the Weberian paradigm was the appropriation of the rewriting of theology for a project that aligned scholarly methodology with separatist nationalism.

Weber on ancient Judaism

Weber's investigation of Judaism was part of an overarching project: the comparative examination of divergent religions in order to discern their influence on modern social norms, particularly on economic behavior. Through his inquiries into the history of theology in such regions as China and India, Weber opted to trace the roads not taken by Western theology that would have led, in his view, to inherently different systems of values. Judaism is a unique historical case within Weber's account of world religions. In Weber's mind, since antiquity, Judaism has had a distinct set of values that dictated its unique ethics. Weber's *Ancient Judaism* (*Das alte Judentum*, 1917) illustrates this view in attempting to scrutinize the historical circumstances that gave rise to Judaism's notion of morality. Significantly, ancient Judaism rejected magic as a practice of dealing with evil forces. Judaism thus brought about a revolution by leading its believers to a political and social system governed by God—a system that guided believers' everyday moral choices.

Because of this, Judaism plays an especially important role in world history. In Weber's mind, ancient Judaism subtracted the irrational means of seeking salvation from religious experience. According to the Jewish worldview, God would punish His people (and the individual believer) for immoral behavior; each believer is responsible for his or her conduct. At the same time, however, there is no guarantee that moral behavior will lead to future salvation. The realization of prophecy—or of messianic claims—remains entirely in divine hands.³ Weber believed that the tension embodied in the distinction of moral imperatives from messianic hope impregnated Judaism's social ethics.

To understand the liberal tendencies embedded in this approach to Judaism, one needs to consider the intellectual background with which Weber corresponded. Such scholars as Julius Wellhausen and Eduard Meyer worked at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth to distinguish the ancient

³See Hans Liebeschütz, *Das Judentum im deutschen Geschichtsbild von Hegel bis Max Weber* (Tübingen, 1967), 116.

Israelites' early rituals from later, more structured religious practices. These scholars' ostensibly favorable presentation of *early* Judaism supported the belief that Jesus inherited some ethical principles that he extended to humankind. In contrast, Weber approaches Judaism as a consistent tradition. For him, Judaism's ethical legacy stands on its own right; significantly, he distinguishes this legacy clearly from the reception of the Old Testament among various streams of Christianity. For Weber, the composition of the Old Testament was the seminal cultural legacy of the Jewish people and the core of their influence on the West.⁴

Judaism's long-lasting existence as a religious minority in the *Abendländern* (Occident) embodies the conundrum behind this religion's notion of prophecy. According to Weber, Judaism was a "pariah" among the nations: these people were guests living in a voluntary ghetto as a minority group.⁵ This condition was starkly opposed to the Jewish belief that a revolution would come and overturn the world's political order, making Jews rulers of Earth:

For the Jew ... the social order of the world was conceived to have been turned into the opposite of the one promised for the future, but in the future it was to be overturned so that Jews would be once again dominant. The world was conceived as neither eternal nor unchangeable, but rather as having been created. Its present structures were a product of man's activity, above all those of the Jews and of God's reaction to them. Hence the world was an historical product designed to give way again to the truly God-ordained order. The whole attitude toward life of ancient Jewry was determined by this conception of a future God-guided political and social revolution.⁶

This account stresses the tension between the Jewish adherence to a social moral system and their vision of the messianic end of days. This vision is radically opposed to their status as pariahs that characterizes their earthly lives. According to Weber, in the eyes of Jews, ethical conduct elicits God's endorsement. However, Jewish eschatology takes both the creation of the world and the end of days, the beginning and the end of history, to be engrained in the godly plan that is detached from human actions.

Biblical prophecy processed those tensions. The Hebrew prophets largely rejected the sacramental ways of dealing with the problem of theodicy. They replaced material practices of punishment and reward with an ethical order centering on the rejection of magic as a means toward salvation. As opposed to other nations, ancient Israel encouraged the existence of religious leaders as powerful tools of preventing despotism. According to Weber, the true prophets exercised spiritual authenticity manifested in their critique of kings. Ancient Judaism thus paralleled Protestantism's rejection of the Catholic adherence to religious rituals

⁴Thus, as Nirenberg notes, "according to Weber nothing of importance to the development of capitalism came from the long history of rabbinic Judaism lived among Christian nations." David Nirenberg, "The Birth of the Pariah: Jews, Christian Dualism, and Social Science," *Social Research* 70/1 (2003), 201–36, at 204.

⁵Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, 3.

⁶*Ibid.*, 4.

as that which determines piety.⁷ Religious asceticism, rituals originally aimed at salvation, gave way in modernity to emphasis on individual agency. Weber's reflections on the Jewish prophets shape his reflections about the hardships awaiting idealist individuals, such as scholars.⁸

Therefore, in important ways, *Ancient Judaism* is linked with wider-ranging reflections on religion and modern rationality found in Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (*Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, 1904–5). This work famously argued that the growth of capitalism was built on the spread of Calvinist and Puritan principles that made the individual aware of his or her moral behavior. The dissemination of those ideologies shaped anxious economic actors concerned with their fates. A major construct that Weber ascribes to the Reformation is at the center of this description: the conception of work in terms of a vocation. In his opinion, Calvinist values shaped this definition of professional life because they stress individualistic agency as determining one's fate.⁹

What is the role of Jewish ethics with regard to capitalism? An especially difficult challenge for Weber's thesis is the distinction between Jewish and Puritan industrious ethical conduct. According to Weber, Jews used biblical exegesis to determine the moral ways of gaining profit and assured individuals that God accepted their transactions. The Puritans built a similar dynamic of seeking God's approval for economic behavior. However, in their case, this scrutiny did not legitimize worldly activity, but made it dubious. Jews engaged in business largely with non-Jews and were hence spared feelings of dubious moral occupation related to one's economic activity within one's own community, such as guilt.¹⁰

Weber distinguishes, therefore, between the different intentions that impregnate believers' actions. As opposed to Christian believers who introduced Christianity to modernity, with Jews, "ethical formalism was never directed onwards, to the world at large."¹¹ Jews' stress on the commandments made them refrain from the ascetic conduct that Weber influentially associated with Puritanism and with its reception of the Old Testament.¹² For the Jews, economic activity was ethically permissible according to religious laws and did not provoke guilt. In contrast, financial transactions became the source of one's ethics for the Puritans: "the Puritan could

⁷According to Carroll, Weber saw this transformation as fundamental to the modern view of the world and of human agency: "since human thought could no longer actively contribute to salvation, then the way was now opened for both action and thought to be governed by the purposive or instrumental rationality and not according to metaphysical speculation, mystical contemplation and the religious asceticism of the Catholic tradition." Anthony J. Carroll, "Disenchantment, Rationality and the Modernity of Max Weber," *Forum Philosophicum* 16 (2011), 122.

⁸As Carroll writes, the prophet "becomes Weber's model for the 'man of vocation' ... The prophet represented the individual who stood against the compromises of the institution, the charismatically inspired man of conviction who felt called to speak the truth regardless of the consequences." *Ibid.*, 133.

⁹See Jack Barbalet, *Weber, Passion and Profit: "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" in Context* (Cambridge, 2008), 53.

¹⁰Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley, 1978), 615.

¹¹Gary A. Abraham, *Max Weber and the Jewish Question: A Study of the Social Outlook of His Sociology* (Urbana, 1992), 198.

¹²*Ibid.*, 198–9.

demonstrate his religious merit precisely in his economic activity. He acted in business with the best possible conscience, since through his rationalistic and legal behavior in his business activity he was factually objectifying the rational methodology of his total life pattern.”¹³ Jewish theology prepared the ground for modern economic activity by construing it as a communal engagement that was valorized ethically; but the Jewish community turned this engagement inwards, to the traditional community, and not outwards, to the world at large. Moreover, Jews largely abstained from diffusing into Christian communities. Therefore only with the turn to Puritan values would economic activity become an essential component of ethical participation in modern society.

This distinction exposes another facet of Weber’s liberal position on Judaism. Weber’s views contrast with those of his contemporary, sociologist Werner Sombart, who described Jews as avid adherents to materialism. Sombart’s *The Jews and Economic Life* (*Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben*, 1911) featured an anti-Semitic tone in describing Jewish rituals (such as atonement) as steeped in incessant occupation with material profit. According to Weber, on the other hand, while building on the Old Testament, Christian sectarianism is the immediate catalyst for the principal constructs of capitalism.

The factual validity of Weber’s historical account of the origins of capitalism has been put under scrutiny, as was the scholarly profile of his thesis overall; his contention that religious tendencies brought about an economic transformation cannot be proven or refuted.¹⁴ These critiques notwithstanding, Weber’s studies of world religions remain constitutive for the sociology of religion as a scientific discipline. His nonhierarchical presentation of religious principles, in both his comparative studies of religion and his writing on economy, is a dominant liberal presentation of Jewish history. Weber reiterated the trend of stressing the Jews’ contribution to Western civilization while exempting them from culpability for capitalist social structures and dispelling their antithetic view as conspirators in control of modern economy. The presentation of Jewish ethics is constitutive of a positive approach to Judaism, an approach that posits that Jews have contributed to Western civilization, but does not hold them responsible for concrete world affairs.

¹³Weber, *Economy and Society*, 616.

¹⁴Since its publication, scholars have confronted several aspects of Weber’s thesis in the *Ethics*. They have taken issue with Weber’s historical claims and presented his description of religion as inconsistent and groundless. Malcolm MacKinnon thus contends that Weber overlooks historical transformations in Calvinism that eliminated the anxiety surrounding salvation. See Malcolm H. MacKinnon, “Part I: Calvinism and the Infallible Assurance of Grace: The Weber Thesis Reconsidered,” *British Journal of Sociology* 39/2 (1988), 143–77. David Zaret criticizes MacKinnon’s account for approaching clerical authority as composing a coherent body of knowledge that represents evidence for the reception of Calvinist principles. See David Zaret, “Calvin, Covenant Theology, and the Weber Thesis,” *British Journal of Sociology* 43/3 (1992), 369–91. As Jack Barbalet notes, Weber is inconsistent about the nature of Calvinism: at times he presents it as individualistic—a presentation which is prevalent in his *Ethics*—while at other times describing it as sectarian and communal. Presenting the agent of economy as an anxious individual, the *Ethics* seeks to establish by way of comparison that capitalism centers on individuals’ economic efforts and interests. Barbalet points out that Weber ignores the communal driving forces behind capitalism, such as the economic motivations of familial structures. See Barbalet, *Weber, Passion and Profit*.

Jewish assimilation and the Zionist vision

The rise of the Zionist movement in Europe attracted Weber's attention to the Zionist attempt to unite different Jewish communities notwithstanding their diverging interpretations of religious laws. His *Economy and Society* contended that the Zionists' presentation of Jews as a unified community is exceptional in Jewish circles, which normally accentuate the diversity of the Jewish diaspora.¹⁵ He thus argued that "whether the Jews may be called a 'nation' is an old problem. Most of the time, the answer would be negative. At any rate, the answers of the Russian Jews, of the assimilating West-European and American Jews, and of the Zionists would vary in nature and extent."¹⁶ Since Jews themselves cannot agree on an answer, Weber views the Jewish collectivity as fundamentally diverse. The Zionist definition of Jews as unified thus transgresses not merely the national idiosyncrasy of the Jewish existence, but also the multitude of Jewish self-perceptions that derive from this idiosyncrasy. Moreover, witnessing the large waves of Jewish refugees to North America, Weber was aware of the incessant efforts of Jews to assimilate into their surroundings as well as of the far-reaching impact of the Jewish populations on local cultures.¹⁷ Consequently, he understood the Zionist project to be a viable attempt to mobilize refugees with the claim that Jews consist of a unified nation (even when this opinion represented only a fraction of the world's Jewish population).

Customarily, Jewish ritual law has been interpreted variously in different Jewish communities. Exegetical flexibility differs between Jews' places of residence. Weber describes the Zionists' efforts to interpret Jewish law in a coherent way that would facilitate the settlement project:

Even now, the Zionist colonization of Palestine has met with an absolute impediment in the form of the sabbatical year, a product of the theologians of later Judaism. To overcome this difficulty, the Eastern European rabbis, in contrast to the more doctrinaire leaders of German Jewish orthodoxy, have had to construe a special dispensation based on the notion that such colonizing is especially pleasing to God.¹⁸

In general, Weber views German Jewry as orthodox, and he associates what he sees as the relative lack of Jewish assimilation into German society with the rigidity of this community. *Economy and Society* compares Jewish assimilation in the United States and Germany and claims that these countries' diverging economic models correspond with the degrees of integration of Jews in society.¹⁹ By comparison, Jewish immigrants to the United States were more flexible; their adherence to

¹⁵Weber, *Society and Economy*, 42.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 923.

¹⁷Guenther Roth, "Transatlantic Connections: A Cosmopolitan Context for Max and Marianne Weber's New York Visit 1904," *Max Weber Studies* 5/1 (2005), 81–112.

¹⁸Weber, *Economy and Society*, 471.

¹⁹As Roth has shown, Weber is ambivalent about the social impact of assimilation in both countries. Overall, Weber takes the contemporary Jewish influence on society as positive, but he at times expresses concerns that mass Jewish immigration may jeopardize social homogeneity. In the United States, this would amount to a risk to the democratic tradition that Weber praises. See Guenther Roth, "Max

different streams of Judaism explains, in his opinion, their successful integration into society. At the core of this account is an eschatological portrayal of the Zionist nation-building project, an image that transcends religious difference between Jewish communities. Zionists' view of Palestine's colonization as a divine plan picks on diverse theological sources. This view relies on an eclectic approach to Jewish theology.

Zionism did not only seek to combat contemporary anti-Semitism by presenting Jews as a nation like all nations; this movement also opted to build on Judaism's unique characteristics in order to create an independent Jewish state. The Zionist movement thus highlighted a major characteristic that Weber sees as innate to the Jewish tradition since its birth: the persistent *expectation* of redemption. Zionists who present the nation-building project as a divine imperative opt to dispel the problem of fulfillment that Weber ascribed to Judaism, a problem that will become seminal to his description of modern science. Jewish eschatology advocates ethical human activity but ultimately separates human conduct from the metaphysical order.

“Science as Vocation”: theology and academic life

Max Weber's “Science as Vocation,” his most famous discussion of the scholarly profession, ends with an exegetical discussion that diverges from the essay's main themes.²⁰ The essay concludes with a discussion of academic labor in relation to Jewish prophecy. Its ending lines revisit the Hebrew prophets, referring to an obscure excerpt from Isaiah 21:11–12. In his discussion of those excerpts, Weber alludes to different ways of coping with the constant scrutiny of human moral valence in modernity: the return to religious faith. The churches are awaiting, in Weber's words, individuals who would succumb to enduring religious narratives that govern metaphysical truisms. Science is characterized by Weber through its opposition to religiosity: “Redemption from the rationalism and intellectualism of science is the fundamental presupposition of living in union with the divine.”²¹ Individuals who would return to the church's embrace would have to give up the claim to intellectualism.

At the core of Weber's discussion of more common strands in academia is his distinction between “academic prophecy” and intellectual integrity. In the modern age, claims Weber, science manifests tensions grounded in its origins: science cannot justify its own premises, including the conviction that scientific knowledge is worth knowing. This deficiency affects scientists' perception of their vocation.²² Therefore a return to the church is one option of a turn away from science's rationalism:

In my eyes, such religious return stands higher than the academic prophecy, which does not clearly realize that in the lecture-rooms of the university no

Weber's Views on Jewish Integration and Zionism: Some American, English and German Contexts,” *Max Weber Studies* 3/1 (2002), 56–73.

²⁰The title of Weber's essay can also be translated as “Science as Profession.” The German word *Wissenschaft* (science) pertains to all academic disciplines and is not exclusive to the natural sciences as is the case in English.

²¹Max Weber, “Science as Vocation,” *Daedalus* 87/1 (1958), 111–34, at 120.

²²*Ibid.*, 121–2.

other virtue holds but plain intellectual integrity. Integrity, however, compels us to state that for the many who today tarry for new prophets and saviors, the situation is the same as resounds in the beautiful Edomite watchman's song of the period of exile that has been included among Isaiah's oracles: He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come.

The people to whom this was said has enquired and tarried for more than two millennia, and we are shaken when we realize its fate. From this we want to draw the lesson that nothing is gained by yearning and tarrying alone, and we shall act differently.²³

Noticeably, the excerpt from Isaiah presents a prophecy that *rejects* an inherent component in the genre of prophecy. Instead of the declaration of a transformative event, this prophetic vision assures the audience—presumably the mass of Israelites awaiting a miracle—that the imminent occurrence will be delayed.²⁴ This scene captures, therefore, Weber's presentation of Judaism's inherent tension. Weber believed that, notwithstanding the eminence of messianic hope in Judaism, the Jews face a fissure between the divine plan and the temporality that governs everyday life. The prophet stresses this fissure, calling to the mass to adhere to ethical behavior regardless of the end of days. The discord between the two temporal realms sets "yearning and tarrying" as Jews' seminal characteristic.

Given his attention to Zionism, it appears peculiar that Weber concluded that stagnant anticipation characterizes Jewish fate and that this fate remained unchanged for "more than two millennia." One explanation for exclusion of the Zionist nation-building project from this account is Weber's juxtaposition of Jewish diaspora and the Zionist movement, the opposition he draws in his letter to Lesser. If the Zionist project echoes in the above passage, despite its ostensible absence, it may be viewed as a part of Judaism's current "fate" that is taken to shake the witnesses of Jewish history. The Zionists wish to end the pariah status of Jews by means other than assimilation. Their nation-building project could thus be said to parallel in this excerpt the efforts of scholars who try to bridge the inherent gap between metaphysics and science through "academic prophecy." Zionist activists break with the basic rules that have guided Jewish ethics for thousands of years: the view that human actions are distinct from the divine realm and the relegation of messianic hope to that latter sphere. Likewise, metaphysical pretensions contrast with the instrumental status of science that modern economy has destined for it. Rejecting both positions, the end of the passage proposes a different action. This is presumably a call for academic integrity that refrains from

²³Ibid., 134.

²⁴This gesture of the biblical passage is therefore at odds with Eisen's understanding of Weber's turn to this biblical citation as a description of the Jewish return to Zion in his times. Arnold M. Eisen, *Galut: Modern Jewish Reflection on Homelessness and Homecoming* (Bloomington, 1986), 190–91. Eisen juxtaposes what he sees as Weber's overall pessimistic description of his age against Scholem's depiction of the Zionist movement as a Jewish turn to vitality and as an escape from the Jews' long-lasting social estrangement from German society (ibid., 192). The following analysis opts to show the disparity between the two thinkers to lie in their respective notions of scholarship.

messianism altogether, a position that references a prophetic call for unconditional ethical behavior that sustains communal order.

As explicated in the first half of “Science as Vocation,” one’s vocation as an academic stands in tension with institutional constraints. By definition—in the German language and in German academia—to reach one’s calling (*Berufung*), one needs to first receive a *Ruf*—the call that offers one the possibility of becoming a professor at a certain university.²⁵ Aspiring scholars demonstrate individualistic economic motivations. At the same time, the system that they serve subjects individualistic aspirations to random and arbitrary decisions.

In modernity, scholarly work faces a dilemma regarding its purpose. Protestant and Puritan objectives that persist in our culture dictate that science’s goal is “to show the path to God.”²⁶ However, capitalist institutions subject modern scholarship to the specialization of professional knowledge. Capitalist society relegates science to the realm of instrumental knowledge, insisting that science be objective rather than based on personal experience. Theological currents that enforce assiduousness under the influence of Puritan ideology and the rejection of magic ritual also set constraints on scientific examination.

Weber assumes a breach between metaphysical presumptions and facts, between spiritual convictions and empirical knowledge.²⁷ This distinction faces a dilemma first staged in pietistic theology, which differs from medieval religiosity. This theological shift coined the notion that “God is hidden. His ways are not our ways, His thoughts are not our thoughts,” separating the exploration of God from the philosophers’ pursuits.²⁸ These tensions also shape the role of scientists as university teachers who advocate the recognition and importance of their profession, but find it difficult to persuade audiences to believe in their scientific disciplines.²⁹ This leads Weber to claim that “scientific pleading is meaningless in principle because the various value spheres of the world stand in irreconcilable conflict with each other.”³⁰

Everyday life shares with modern science the problem of disenchantment: both have lost their reliance on spiritual narratives. Accordingly, science justifies its values by honing its coherence: “Science today is a ‘vocation’ organized in special disciplines in the service of self-clarification and knowledge of interrelated facts. It is not the gift of grace of seers and prophets dispensing sacred values and

²⁵“Science as Vocation” describes the structure of German academia that emerged in the late nineteenth century. In this system, upon obtaining a doctorate, young academics must pursue another higher qualification: the *Habilitation*. Once the candidates obtain this qualification (which depends on agreement of the university’s faculty), they are granted the title *Privatdozent*, which is equivalent to a university lecturer. As Weber describes, even at this point the candidates lack job security. Their ability to be extended a professorship relies to a large extent on their popularity as lecturers and on drawing many students to their classes. Weber developed the view that professional vocation carries with it ethical commitment in his *The Protestant Ethics*. There, he contends that the Christian notion of neighborly love already exists in Luther’s idea of *Berufsarbeit* (vocational work).

²⁶Weber, “Science as Vocation,” 120.

²⁷Richard Jenkins, “Disenchantment, Enchantment and Re-enchantment: Max Weber at the Millennium,” *Max Weber Studies* 1/1 (2000), 11–32.

²⁸Weber, “Science as Vocation,” 120.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 125–6.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 126.

revelations, nor does it partake of the contemplation of sages and philosophers about the meaning of the universe.”³¹ The focus on the self-coherence of science adds an optimistic note to Weber’s analysis; against the background of disenchantment, academics may advocate intellectual integrity.

According to Wolfgang Hardtwig, Weber’s view that the scientific pursuit centers on research (*Forschung*) signals a break with a long tradition of historiographical work in Germany. According to Hardtwig’s reading of Weber, the use of this term endows the scholarly activity with a new meaning that regards the scholar’s vocational specialization and distances it from metaphysics. The term differentiates scholarship from “work” (*Arbeit*), a term that has a long reception in the Judeo-Christian tradition, where it is associated with all-human efforts.³² Does a Weberian designation of research to the realm of specialization disconnect historiography from metaphysics? As we shall see, Scholem’s idea of scholarship complicates this question. Scholem attaches scholarly activity to a scholastic tradition that is associated with esotericism and is affiliated with *particular* historical circumstances: the twists and turns of Jewish history. Therefore, equipped with a unique focus on mysticism, Scholem’s is a vision of academic integrity that renders theology inseparable from scholarly activity.

Scholem on university education

As Jewish history was reexamined in light of the Zionist nation-building project, some Zionists saw liberal accounts of Judaism as no less dangerous than anti-Semitic denunciations. This perspective sheds light on Weber’s comments on the foundation of a university in Jerusalem. This Zionist institute would upend both traditional Jewish ethics and the irreligiosity that is fundamental to modern science. Scholem’s historiography of Jewish eschatology overturns both of those values.

One reader of Weber, philosopher of religion Jacob Taubes, paid special attention to Weber’s portrayal of eschatology and examined this depiction in light of the Zionist retelling of Jewish history. He considered Weber’s notion of Jewish ethics “plebian” (*plebejisch*), a characterization which he developed through a comparison of Weber’s account of ancient Judaism to Nietzsche’s portrayal of Jewish morals.³³ This reading of Weber stresses the view that modern rationalism originated in Judaism’s rejection of magic ritual.³⁴ Taubes examined Weber’s account of the emergence of Judaism as a pariah through the prism of later history—the development of Zionism and the Holocaust. In connecting Weber’s account of Judaism with pressing political concerns of his own time, Taubes accentuates another

³¹Ibid., 131.

³²Wolfgang Hardtwig, “Geschichtsreligion – Wissenschaft als Arbeit – Objektivität: Der Historismus in neuer Sicht,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 252/1 (1991), 1–32, at 24–5.

³³Jacob Taubes, “Die Entstehung des jüdischen Pariavolkes: Ideologiekritische Noten zu Max Webers ‘Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie’, Bd. III, ‘Das antike Judentum’” in Karl Engisch, Bernhard Pfister and Johannes Winckelmann, eds., *Max Weber: Gedächtnisschrift der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München zur 100. Wiederkehr seines Geburtstages 1964* (Berlin, 1966), 185–94, at 188.

³⁴Ibid.

element of the Weberian depiction of Judaism: the persistence of messianic hope. He referred on that point to Weber's "Science as Vocation," which maintained, in his reading, that the messianic idea carried with it a heavy price for the Jewish tradition. Jewish messianic hope is an enduring force that fuels Jewish existence, but at the same time it weakens the veracity of this tradition's metaphysical claims.³⁵ Weber's insight remained forgotten, Taubes contended, until it was picked up by Gershom Scholem in his essay "Toward an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism" ("Zum Verständnis der messianischen Idee im Judentum," 1951). In Taubes's mind, Scholem shared the idea that the greatness of the messianic idea overlaps with the impossibility of its realization; the exilic Jewish existence cannot have the messianic idea realized in the realm of history.³⁶ Scholem writes that "the messianic idea is not only consultation and hope. Every attempt to realize it tears open the abysses which lead each of its manifestations *ad absurdum*."³⁷

Scholem's essay reiterates the Weberian idea that eschatology generates considerable tensions at the heart of the Jewish tradition. He differs from Weber in viewing those tensions as a regenerating force that can amend reality. "Toward an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism" ends with a discussion of the political potential of messianic hope during Scholem's lifetime: "Little wonder that overtones of Messianism have accomplished the modern Jewish readiness for irrevocable action in the concrete realm, when it set out on the utopian return to Zion."³⁸ Scholem presents the tension between eschatology and the exilic Jewish existence as a dynamic power that manifests itself in activism and that, consequently, may bring about the alteration of history. A persistent tradition present in an array of historical sources, Jewish eschatology could, in Scholem's mind, serve to build a new Jewish society, mobilize Jewish youth, and unite the members of the Zionist movement regardless of their degrees of religiosity:

If Zionism triumphed—at least on the level of historical decisions in the history of the Jews—it would owe this primarily to three factors shaping its character: all in all, it was a youth movement in which strong romantic moments played a role, and this could not have been otherwise; it was a movement of social protest that drew its inspiration as much from the ancient and living call of the prophets of Israel as from the slogans of European socialism; and it was ready to identify with the fate of the Jews in all, I say all, aspects, the religious and the secular alike.³⁹

³⁵Andreas Urs Sommer takes this aspect as the seminal point of Taubes's interpretation of Weber. See his "Pathos der Revolution' im 'stahlharten Gehäuse' des Verhängnisses": Marginalien zum Thema 'Max Weber bei Jacob Taubes'," in Richard Faber, Eveline Goodman-Thau and Thomas Macho, eds., *Abendländische Eschatologie: Ad Jacob Taubes* (Würzburg, 2001), 365–71.

³⁶Taubes, "Die Entstehung des jüdischen Pariavolkes," 193.

³⁷Gershom Scholem, "Towards an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism," in Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism: And Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York, 1971), 1–36, at 35.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Gershom Scholem, "Israel und die Diaspora," in Scholem, *Judaica*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main, 1987), 55–76, at 58–9 (translations are my own, if not mentioned otherwise): "Wenn der Zionismus besiegt hat—mindestens auf der Ebene historischer Entscheidungen in der Geschichte der Juden—so hat er das vor allem drei Faktoren zu verdanken, die seinen Charakter prägen: er war, alles in allem, eine Bewegung der Jugend, in der, wie es nicht anders sein konnte, auch starke romantische Momente mitspielten; er

In Weberian terms, the Zionist university is a kind of oxymoron—either it betrays the ideals of academic labor or it betrays the utopian vision offered in Zionism. As we shall see, Scholem turns this paradox from a problem into a constitutive model. His approach to scholarship maintains the view of academia as secular under the auspices of the Zionist equation of Jewish religiosity with national identity. Israel Kolatt defines succinctly the congruence of the ostensibly secular lifestyle that Zionism enables with traditional Judaism:

In and of itself the Zionist territorial and political solution to the Jewish question was not inimical to religion and could be implemented without impairing the religious way of life. Nonetheless, *de facto*, Zionism established a new national priority in Jewish life. Religion became secondary to national existence; at the same time, nationalism absorbed and transformed religious symbols. This shift permitted, or at least facilitated, maintenance of a Jewish identity that did not require an explicit commitment to the Jewish religion.⁴⁰

Scholem was never an avid religious believer.⁴¹ Declaring at times that he believed in God, Scholem nonetheless publicly refrained from a religious lifestyle. His religious identity as a secular Jew became a key element of his scholarly examinations. Scholem defined his scholarship, accordingly, not as religious nor as rational, but as *historical*: he presented his scholarly enterprise as loyal to the development of Judaism as a dynamic and living tradition. In doing so, Scholem's academic labor destabilizes Weber's notion of academic integrity and the norms of objectivity emanating from this notion. Weber described modern scholars as adamantly appealing to theology to reinstitute the influence of scholarship on reality. Scholem reclaimed the ability of scholars to utilize theological tropes to change reality—primarily by revising prophetic narratives.

As Taubes pointed out, Scholem shared with Weber the view of messianic hope as a constitutive element of the Jewish tradition. It is, on the one hand, a driving force of its communal and historical perseverance, yet it exposes, on the other hand, a breach between the spiritual and the historical essence of Judaism. Zionism was, in his view, an ideological movement that sought to change Jewish history by building on the historical tradition of eschatology. Scholem was often unclear on whether he viewed Zionism as a messianic movement, and on the spiritual valence of its political agendas. In an interview that reflected on his lifelong study of Jewish mysticism, he declared, "The grandeur of the Zionist movement

war eine Bewegung des sozialen Protestes, die ihre Inspiration ebenso sehr aus dem uralten und noch immer lebendigen Anruf der Propheten Israels wie aus den Losungen des europäischen Sozialismus schöpfte; und er war bereit, sich mit dem Schicksal der Juden in allen, ich sage allen Aspekten, den religiösen und den weltlichen gleichermaßen, zu identifizieren."

⁴⁰Israel Kolatt, "Religion, Society and State during the Period of the National Home," in Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz and Anita Shapira, eds., *Zionism and Religion* (Hanover and London, 1998), 274.

⁴¹Scholem's interests in Jewish sources and the Hebrew language surprised his family. His father, who used to work on the Jewish holidays (even on the Day of Atonement), asked him whether he planned to become a rabbi. The young Scholem did occasionally visit the synagogue, a habit that contrasted his upbringing in an assimilated Jewish home, but he did not show interest in adhering to an overall religious conduct. See his autobiography, *From Berlin to Jerusalem* (Tel Aviv, 1982), 16–44 (Hebrew).

lies in its historical responsibility, which strives to accept a yoke and self-responsibility in front of the other for our deeds, without a pretension to be messianic.” Notwithstanding this characterization, Scholem concludes that the messianic element of Zionism does exist, but has not been revealed just yet.⁴²

Scholem’s interest in Jewish mysticism led to a successful completion of his doctoral degree in Munich. Upon his graduation, Scholem declined a research position in favor of pursuing a political vision; in 1923 he immigrated to Mandatory Palestine, which remained his home for the rest of his life. Upon his arrival in Jerusalem, he preferred a position as the head of the Hebrew Department at the National Library in Jerusalem over teaching at a local high school. Scholem was soon appointed lecturer at the Hebrew University. At the debut of his academic career in Jerusalem, Scholem already seemed like the antithesis of the young German scholar discussed in “Science as Vocation.” He was everything but a passive citizen of the academic system who anxiously awaits approval from others. Indeed, Scholem’s academic success in Jerusalem was meteoric. His endorsement as a lecturer and public speaker contrasted the fact that the only major publication the young scholar had to date was a scientific bibliography of the *Book of Bahir*, one of the very first books of the Kabbalah, which stood at the center of his doctoral thesis.⁴³

Scholem’s achievements depended on a number of historical circumstances. Not least of these was a changing national context that welcomed academic work of a particular theological focus. Weber made the prophet figure a paragon for a modern scholar, the nonconformist independent researcher. In Zionist academia, by contrast, prophecy was a paragon of the hegemonic national ethos. Through his study and instruction of Jewish esoteric sources, Scholem articulated the notion that Jewish nationalism could retrieve theological narratives that had become marginal in the course of Jewish history but could still serve as the unifying ethos of an emerging state. As David Biale has written, in Scholem’s mind “Zionism had made it possible for Jews to explore the most heretical moments in Jewish history since it freed them from the need to justify themselves in the eyes of the non-Jewish world.”⁴⁴ The predominant moment of this exploration, as we shall now see, is the reinterpretation of messianic movements previously seen as heretical and disastrous to Judaism’s perseverance. Zionism and the Zionist university have given scholars the mandate to excavate moments of Jewish history that have been deemed marginal and embrace theological views that have been proclaimed heterodox. In so doing, Scholem contended, Zionist scholars can configure their own place in Jewish history.

⁴²The interview with Muki Zur is included in the collection *Devarim Bego* (Tel Aviv, 1976), 51 (Hebrew).

⁴³Yosef Dan has argued that Scholem might have owed his rapid success at the Hebrew University to his relationship with H. N. Bialik. Arguably the most prominent poet supporting Zionist ideology, Bialik held positions of power at the emerging university. In presenting his academic program to Bialik, Scholem was careful to ground his academic pursuit in the traditional canon of religious Jewish sources. See Dan, “The Beginning of Gershom Scholem’s way at the Hebrew University: Two Queries,” *Haaretz*, 31 March 2002 (Hebrew), at www.haaretz.co.il/misc/1.783870. While not holding Bialik’s poetics in high regard, Scholem did think of him as a great political leader. Scholem wrote a poem about Bialik very shortly after his death where he describes Bialik affectionately. Gershom Scholem, *The Fullness of Time: Poems*, trans. Richard Sieburth (Jerusalem, 2003), 106–7.

⁴⁴David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Master of the Kabbalah* (New Haven and London, 2018), 125.

Jewish scholarship as academic labor

Several new publications on Scholem have demonstrated that his presentation of theological narratives reflected his views on Zionism. Along these lines, Amir Engel has argued that Scholem was not a researcher of Jewish sources as much as he was a *narrator* of Jewish themes and motifs.⁴⁵ He presents Scholem as a public intellectual who reshaped his idea of Jewish history in his scholarly and non-scholarly writings and adapted them to pressing historical and political circumstances that Jews faced throughout the twentieth century. According to Engel, Scholem's remarkable influence on Israeli academia and its public sphere derives from the skillful and original visualization of Jewish history—past, present, and future—through theological images.

In his own scholarly work, Scholem reflectively adapted Jewish sources to contemporary history and particularly to the emergence of Zionism. Scholem's long-lasting occupation with messianism, particularly his extensive studies of the Sabbatean movement, was a crucial part of this effort. The Sabbateans believed in the spiritual powers of Sabbatai Zvi (1626–76), a rabbi who pronounced himself the Messiah. Born in Smyrna (Izmir), Zvi studied the Kabbalah and other mystic Jewish texts and took on ascetic practices. In 1648 he experienced a spiritual revelation after which he traveled across the Ottoman Empire performing rituals that subverted traditional Jewish conduct. Particularly famous examples include his marriage to a Torah scroll and a concurrent public celebration of the Three Pilgrimage Festivals. His pronouncement as a spiritual authority became widespread after he met Nathan of Gaza, a theologian and mystic. Because of the vast impact of Sabbateanism on Jewish history, Zvi and Nathan of Gaza have been compared to Christ and the apostle Paul.⁴⁶ Under pressure from the authorities, Zvi eventually converted to Islam. Scholem's interpretation of these events reflected his commitment to the Zionist project. In an especially provocative statement, Scholem hints that Zionist perception of history stimulates retelling the rise of Sabbateanism:

It has come increasingly to be realized that a true understanding of the rise of Sabbateanism will never be possible as long as scholars continue to appraise it by inappropriate standards, whether these be the conventional beliefs of their age or the values of traditional Judaism itself. Today indeed one rarely encounters the baseless assumptions of “charlatanry” and “imposture” which occupy so prominent a place in earlier historical literature on the subject. On the contrary: in these times of Jewish national rebirth it is only natural that the deep though ultimately tragic yearning for national redemption to which the initial stages of Sabbateanism gave expression should meet with greater comprehension than in the past.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Amir Engel, *Gershom Scholem: An Intellectual Biography* (Chicago, 2017).

⁴⁶ See Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, ed. Aleida Assman and Jan Assman, trans. Dana Hollander (Stanford, 2004), 125.

⁴⁷ Gershom Scholem, “Redemption through Sin,” in Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 78–141, at 78.

Scholem saw Zvi's conversion to Islam as a turning point in Jewish history. Because some Jews continued to believe in Zvi's divine powers, the conversion created a fragmentation within Judaism, as shown in the subsequent emergence of different sects and streams.⁴⁸ The Sabbatean movement represents how "belief in the unruly, converted and later dead Messiah had proved more durable than many other systems of thought precisely because it was based on an elaborate fiction, because it was a figment of desperate imagination."⁴⁹ As Engel demonstrates, Scholem viewed mysticism as a window into individuals' consciousness. When believers face crises or revolutions, the fictional understanding of their situation in life becomes a more fecund scholarly source for the understanding of their historical position. Scholem's own participation in the Zionist political revolution further shapes the fiction of these mystic sources: he construes a genealogy of the historical and intellectual currents in the life of the Jewish nation that perpetuate its spirit and lead to its eventual foundation of an independent political collective.

Scholem's understanding of Jewish eschatology as a potentially regenerating force shaped, therefore, his activist approach to scholarship. Scholem conceptualized the role of the historian of theology in his essay "The Science of Judaism Past and Present" (*Wissenschaft vom Judentum einst und jetzt*, 1960). The essay takes issue with nineteenth-century German Jewish scholars who, in his opinion, subjected their objects of study, Jewish theological sources, to their assimilatory aspirations.⁵⁰ In his opinion, the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement depicted Jewish sources as lofty, idealized objects of study. Scholem accuses Jewish theologians, who opted to make Jewish sources available to Christian scholars, of adopting a vocabulary that eliminates the vitality of Jewish sources and their coherence as a part of an ongoing, dynamic tradition.

This critique hints at Scholem's own motivations in establishing the curriculum at the Hebrew University.⁵¹ Against the harmful influence of nineteenth-century Jewish scholarship, he argues, Zionism rescues the essence of Judaism as a living tradition. Zionism does so without subscribing to rabbinic constraints; it considers Judaism a historical entity that can be studied by secular scholars.⁵² Located at a

⁴⁸As Biale writes in his analysis of "Redemption through Sin," for Scholem "Sabbateanism ... had a paradoxical career: it was a movement within Jewish mysticism, but it produced the secular rejection of traditional religion." Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Master of the Kabbalah*, 126–7.

⁴⁹Engel, *Gershom Scholem: An Intellectual Biography*, 127.

⁵⁰Wiese interprets Scholem's description of the theological vapidity of nineteenth-century German Jewish theologians as an extension of his famous statement that Jews have persistently tried to hold a dialogue with Germans but failed to do so. Christian Wiese, *Challenging Colonial Discourse: Jewish Studies and Protestant Theology in Wilhelmine Germany* (Leiden and Boston, 2005), 427–30.

⁵¹As Daniel Weidner writes, Scholem's polemics against the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* elucidate his own position regarding the study of Jewish sources. Scholem's critique of nineteenth-century Jewish scholarship centers, as Weidner notes, on an opposition to what Scholem describes as the impact of the Romantic movement on theology, which yields falsified presentations of Jewish sources. Weidner argues that, all in all, Scholem's essay fails at providing a solid program for his own ventures, not least because his writings take on Kabbalistic sources as explicating a religious history and thus breaks with these sources' genre and motivations. Daniel Weidner, "Gershom Scholem, die Wissenschaft des Judentums und der 'Ort' des Historikers," *Aschkenas: Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur der Juden* 11/2 (2001), 435–64, at 461.

⁵²Gershom Scholem, "Wissenschaft des Judentums einst und jetzt," in Scholem, *Judaica*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt am Main, 1963), 58.

national center in Jerusalem, the infrastructure of scholarship provides the conditions for considering Jewish sources as a unified historical entity.

Scholem held that scholars who understand Judaism as a dynamic, ever-changing tradition grant their findings new spiritual meanings. Scholarly examination thus wears new forms with the progression of Jewish history: "The new approach to Jewish history affects not only the elucidation of historical facts in the narrower sense of the word; it equally changes the interpretation of the spiritual elements which have directly influenced those facts, namely the development of Jewish thought and faith, philosophy and religious history."⁵³ An overarching concern that Scholem addressed is the problem of prophetic promise. For Scholem, the university in Jerusalem is not built in the shadow of the ancient temple. Rather, Zionist research ultimately *rewrites* the theological narratives that gave rise to Judaism as a national tradition. Scholem's essay "Israel and the Diaspora" can be said to explicate the paradoxical temporality embodied in this effort: "Zionism was and is the utopic withdrawal of the Jews towards their own history and is thus undoubtedly a paradox, one that is fecund and open to both the future and the past to an equal degree."⁵⁴

The provocative nature of such statements with regard to the academic decorum and to the nationalist impact on scholarship did not go unnoticed by Scholem's critics. Taubes, who took issue with Scholem's notion of Jewish historiography, also alerted to the political implications of his scholarly vision. A former student of Scholem's, Taubes grew to be his nemesis. In letters, publications, and lectures, he questioned the strict separation of Jewish and Christian messianism that fueled Scholem's visualization of a Zionist outlook on Jewish history. Taubes's lecture delivered at the World Congress of Jewish Studies in 1980 drew scholarly attention to this critique.⁵⁵ On that occasion, Taubes stressed that, for Scholem, Jewish messianism strives for a change in the public realm affecting the collective of believers. In contrast, Christian messianism is focused on an internal change within the believer. Taubes confronted what he defined as Scholem's selective reading of historical sources, a reading that does not discern the porousness of theological credos. In Taubes's mind, public and interior messianisms exist in both the Jewish and Christian traditions: traditions that hold interreligious exchange concerning eschatology. As we have seen, the view that Jewish messianism has a constitutive Christian reception was essential to Weber's description of Judaism's legacy. Weber's account of academia presumes that the Jewish striving for the political realization of prophecy echoes in Western cultures. Even while Weber and Scholem share a notion of Jewish tradition as relying on a conflicted expectation of redemption, they represent contrasting views concerning the impact of this anticipation on universal values, and, correspondingly, on the purpose of academic labor.

Taubes's manuscript "Messianism Zionist or Marxist?" ("Messianismus zionistisch oder marxistisch?"), which set the basis for his lecture in Jerusalem, discerned

⁵³Gershom Scholem, "Kabbala at the Hebrew University," *The Reconstructionist*, 3 (1937), 8–12, at 8.

⁵⁴Scholem, "Israel and die Diaspora," 73–4: "Der Zionismus war und ist der utopische Rückzug der Juden in ihre eigene Geschichte und damit freilich eine fruchtbare und nach Vergangenheit und Zukunft gleichermaßen geöffnete Paradoxie."

⁵⁵Published as Jacob Taubes, "The Price of Messianism," *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies*, 8 (1981), 99–104.

the methodological presumptions behind Scholem's views on Jewish messianism.⁵⁶ Taubes contended that Scholem builds on a destabilization of the rational–irrational dichotomy. Scholem claimed that his scholarly analysis is “merely historic but not rational,” as if his writing of history, Taubes wrote, could stand beyond the poles of “rational” and “irrational.”⁵⁷ Taubes contended that the poles of rational and irrational become even sharper in Israeli culture, a culture that accentuates the stakes of the political potential of Jewish theology. According to Taubes, also in that debate Scholem puts himself outside the binary opposition of “holy” and “secular.” Scholem declared himself as someone who believes in God, but he did not take Jewish Halachic laws as binding.

This choice makes Taubes characterize Scholem as a religious anarchist. Importantly, Scholem appealed to Jewish mystics to counter the rabbinic tradition. However, in which God did he believe? Taubes took the answer to be the God who declared Jews the holy people through His commandments. This reliance on the view of Jews as the holy people, Taubes claimed, instills theocracy in the modern state of Israel as its political model. According to Taubes's admonition, Scholem's paradigm for the study of Jewish history—a paradigm that blurs subjective historiography and rational scholarship—appeals to a “utopic withdrawal” not only from world history and from common scholarly accounts of Jewish theology, but also from the decorum of modern academia altogether.

Indeed, Scholem promoted a new approach to scholarship that was facilitated by his separatist approach to Judaism, his embracing of theological sources as a national canon and his view of historiography as linked to scholars' national and religious affiliations. His investigations into the Jewish sources characterized the credo of his scholarly work: he conceived Jewish theological sources not as meta-physical *grounds* for the nation-building project, but as tools that affirm and fix its ideological roots. Therefore Scholem's discussion of prophecy not only presents, but also performs, a new way to narrate history through the prism of eschatology as a dynamic political force. In claiming that his approach to the Jewish sources was historical, Scholem overturned the Weberian ideal of academic integrity by reiterating, at the Zionist university, the paradox of Jewish messianic hope.

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⁵⁶Jacob Taubes, “Messianismus zionistisch oder marxistisch?,” 20 Aug. 1977, German Literature Archive Marbach (DLA), SUA: Suhrkamp, 01 Verlagsleitung, Autorenkonvolute, Taubes, Jacob.

⁵⁷Ibid., 1.