Religion, the Axial Age, and Secular Modernity in Bellah’s Theory of Religious Evolution

José Casanova

In this essay I propose to bring together into critical reflection Robert Bellah’s theory of religious evolution, debates concerning the Axial Age, and the most recent debates concerning our modern “secular age,” in order to examine some of the ambiguities, equivocal meanings, and aporetic tensions built into our modern category of “religion.” I will proceed in three steps. First, I want to examine some of the difficulties built into any theory of religious evolution that needs to function with some unitary, transhistorical, and transcultural, indeed universally “human” category of “religion” that somehow cuts across pre-Axial, Axial, and modern secular contexts. The difficulties in matching or fitting together the three very different binary classificatory schemes, “sacred-profane,” “transcendent-mundane,” and “religious-secular” may serve as a telling indication. The pre-Axial sacred, the Axial transcendent, and the modern religious are not necessarily synonymous concepts, much less do they point to some identical conception of reality. In fact, they need to be understood in terms of their corresponding binary opposites—profane, mundane, and secular—which point also to very different structures of meaning and phenomenological conceptions of “worldly” reality.

Secondly, I want to interrogate the meaning of “axiality” within theories of the Axial Age, particularly within Bellah’s theory of religious evolution. What is so “Axial” about the Axial Age? How is an epochal theory of Axial emergence in world history congruent with a developmental theory of multiple
stages of religious evolution, both pre-Axial and post-Axial? Is the place and role of “religion” in the multiple Axial breakthroughs equivalent? Is “transcendence” necessarily “religious” and are all Axial “theoretic” breakthroughs grounded equally in “religion”?

Finally, I want to briefly examine the relation between theories of the Axial Age and theories of secular modernity, with respect to our modern “religious-secular” system of classification. Is our modern global secular age the teleological unfolding of potentials implicit in the Axial breakthroughs, namely the full crystallization of Axial “theoretic” culture? Or does modernity constitute a post-Axial secular breakthrough of its own? How is the singularity of the development of secular modernity in the Christian West and its globalization through Western colonial expansion and American imperial projects congruent with evolutionary frameworks of human development?

Bellah himself has offered somewhat ambiguous responses to some of these questions, seemingly abandoning or at least significantly revising some of the most modernist, progressive, and teleological evolutionary premises of his two seminal essays of the 1960s, “Religious Evolution” and “Civil Religion in America.” In the process he has adopted a much more critical attitude toward one-sided and exaggerated crystallizations of post-Axial theoretic culture and immanentist modern secular trends. The new critical, more reflexively “prophetic,” attitude is normatively anchored in a conception of the Axial Age and of human evolution that wants not only to reaffirm Axial transcendence but also to rehabilitate “myth” and “ritual” as constitutive elements of the human condition, and as constitutive “religious” elements of any viable human society and human culture.

Ambiguities in the Category and the Phenomenon of “Religion”

Bellah’s theory of religious evolution takes for granted that “religion,” both as an evolving sociocultural phenomenon and as an object of study, is historically constituted. As a student of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Bellah also takes for granted that “in its modern usage, the term ‘religion’ is only about two hundred years old.” The original Latin term, *religio*, is of course more than two thousand years old, but its usage also changed dramatically from Varro’s tripartite division of religion into *theologia naturalis*, *civiles*, and *mythica*, to Augustine’s *De vera religione*, which incorporates what Jan Assmann has called “the Mosaic distinction,” to the elevation of the “religious” life of the ascetic monk in medieval Christendom as the paradigmatic form of religion. It is well known that most non-Western cultures did not have terms into which the modern Western category of “religion” could be easily translated and had to invent neologisms, such as *shukyo* in Japanese or *zongjiao* in Chinese, to designate what was viewed as a novel foreign phenomenon. Even in ancient Greek there was no single word equivalent to the Latin *religio*. Indeed, as pointed out by Guy Stroumsa, “it is notoriously difficult to define religion in the Greek world.” Tellingly, there is also no native word for religion in Byzantine or Slavic Orthodox Christianity, and all Orthodox cultures eventually borrowed the Latin word. But all these examples only prove that religion is indeed historically and culturally constituted and that one must avoid reducing religion or its study to its modern secular, to its Axial Christian, or to its ancient Latin meanings.

But this only sharpens the question of which kind of phenomena are to be designated as “religious” and thus to be included in any theory of religious evolution. In his 1964 essay “Religious Evolution,” Bellah defined religion most abstractly as “a set of symbolic forms and acts that relate man to the ultimate conditions of his existence.” For Bellah, neither man who in the broadest sense is and will remain *homo religiosus*, nor the structure of man’s ultimate conditions of existence evolve. Leaving aside the ambiguity in the definition of the unit of analysis, which leaves unspecified whether “man” refers to individual humans, to particular societies, or to the human species, the definition presupposes that the ultimate conditions of human existence remain structurally unchanged and that humans and/or human societies cannot but relate somehow to those ultimate conditions. It is the way in which humans and/or societies relate to those ultimate conditions that, according to Bellah, evolves historically. “Neither religious man nor the structure of man’s ultimate religious situation evolves then, but rather religion as symbol system.” Without assuming that evolution is “inevitable, irreversible, or must follow any single particular course,” Bellah claims that one may speak of religious evolution insofar as the pattern of change of the religious symbol system appears to be one from “compact” to more “complex” and “differentiated” religious symbolization.

However, Bellah also recognizes that one could “look at a few of the massive facts of human religious history” in strictly historical terms, as emer-
gent historical phenomena, without necessarily framing these historical changes in terms of a scheme of religious evolution. Following Max Weber's scheme of religious rationalization, Bellah clearly refers to the emergence of the Axial Age and the emergence of modernity as the two crucial or axial turning points in human religious history:

The first of these facts is the emergence in the first millennium B.C. across the Old World, at least in centers of high culture, of the phenomenon of religious rejection of the world characterized by an extremely negative evaluation of man and society and the exaltation of another realm of reality as alone true and infinitely valuable. This theme emerges in Greece through a long development into Plato's classic formulation in the *Phaedo* that the body is but a tomb or prison of the soul. . . . A very different formulation is found in Israel, but there too the world is profoundly devalued in the face of the transcendent God. . . . In India we find perhaps the most radical of all versions of world rejection, culminating in the great image of the Buddha. . . . In China, Taoist ascetics urged the transvaluation of all the accepted values and withdrawal from human society. . . .

Nor was this a brief or passing phenomenon. For over two thousand years great pulses of world rejection spread over the civilized world. . . . I want to insist on this fact because I want to contrast it with an equally striking fact, namely the virtual absence of world rejection in primitive religions, in religion prior to the first millennium B.C., and in the modern world. . . .

Although Bellah acknowledges that one could account for "this sequence of presence and absence of world rejection" without ever raising the issue of religious evolution, by simply describing or explaining the transformation from pre-Axial, to Axial, to modern systems of religious symbolization, he chooses to frame these transformations within an evolutionary scheme composed of a series of five stages that he calls "primitive, archaic, historic, early modern, and modern." . . .

Bellah is careful to disclaim that religious evolution needs to imply "religious progress" in an ethical sense, pointing out that "a complex and differentiated religious symbolization is not therefore a better or a truer or a more beautiful one than a compact religious symbolization." . . . Yet following the evolutionary dynamic of the five stages in the 1964 essay, it is hard to avoid the impression that human religious evolution, at least for the time being, finds its telological culmination in the religious symbol system one finds in the American society of the 1960s. Uniquely striking about Bellah's evolutionary scheme is the fact that he can simultaneously and without evident tension (a) affirm with Mircea Eliade that "primitive man is as fully religious as man at any stage of existence," but, Bellah adds, countering Eliade, not necessarily more religious than man in modern secular society; (b) affirm with Émile Durkheim against Lucien Lévy-Bruhl that the paradigmatic "mythical" and "ritual" compact symbol systems of Australian "primitives," despite the apparent absence of any "religious" differentiation from "the social," should not be viewed as a form of "prereligion" but rather as "the elementary form of religious life," which somehow already contains within itself or "foreshadows" every posterior religious development; (c) affirm with Durkheim that religion is the symbolic self-interpretation of human cultures and the symbolic self-representation of society and that in this respect every society, every collectivity, every social group needs to have some religious dimension, some form of "religious" symbolic self-representation. Following Weber, he can (d) conceptualize the evolutionary dynamics of religious development as a process of religious rationalization that entails increasing demythologization and deritualization culminating in the disenchanted modern secular order; (e) affirm with Weber that the Protestant Reformation was the single paradigmatic expression of "early modern religion" and therefore the privileged carrier of the world-historical process of religious rationalization that culminates in secular modernity; (f) affirm against Weber that this process of radical *Entzauberung der Welt* does not necessarily entail "a collapse of meaning and a failure of moral standards." Instead of interpreting modern religious trends as evidence of "indifference and secularization," Bellah prefers to see in them "the increasing acceptance of the notion that each individual must work out his own ultimate solutions," arguing that "the search for adequate standards of action, which is at the same time a search for personal maturity and social relevance, is in itself the heart of the modern quest for salvation." . . . Bellah can (g) affirm with Durkheim that this radical individualism is an expression of the social secularization of the individual and constitutes the "religion" of modernity;
and (h) affirm with Talcott Parsons that American society represents a particular form of institutionalization of Christian Protestant values and that therefore the process of modern secularization does not entail so much religious decline as the transformation and relocation of religious symbols and practices into secular forms. By means of such a semantic relocation of the religious symbolization of the “ultimate conditions of existence” the sacred evolves or mutates from the “social collectivity” to divine “transcendence” to the modern secular individual, without apparently losing its religious identity or diminishing its force in the process.

Briefly summarizing the key characteristics of the five stages of religious evolution, one may say that primitive religions are oriented to a single cosmos, are concerned with the maintenance of personal, social, and cosmic harmony, pursue mainly worldly goods, and express no need for salvation. Following W. E. H. Stanner, Bellah characterizes primitive religion as the “one possibility thing,” which gives practically no leverage from which to change the world. Its very “fluidity and flexibility” is a barrier to radical innovation.

Religious differentiation proper begins with archaic religion. Its characteristic feature is the emergence of true cult with the complex of gods, priests, worship, sacrifice, and in some cases divine or priestly kingship. The myth and ritual complex continues and the basic worldview remains monistic. There is still a single cosmos in which the gods, humans, society, and nature are all interrelated, without clear differentiation of the natural, social, and moral orders.

Historic religions break through the cosmological monism of the previous two stages and proclaim a new, higher, and transcendent realm of universal reality. Despite the significant differences in their symbol systems, all historic religions are “dualistic” and “universalistic.” They offer new paths of individual salvation, which make possible for the first time a clearly structured conception of the self and the self-conception of man as such. The religious concern is relocated from the mundane, which now becomes devalued, to a superior transcendent realm. Differentiated religious collectivities and new elites of religious virtuosos and literati differentiated from the laity emerge for the first time. The single religio-political hierarchy of archaic society also tends to split into two partially autonomous hierarchies. This differentiation and the transcendent standards promoted by the new religious elites bring a new level of tension and a possibility of conflict and change. “Religion” begins to provide “the ideology and social cohesion for many rebellions and reform movements,” although it continues to play its traditional function of legitimation and reinforcement of the social order.

The ideal-typical construction of early modern religion, unlike the previous general ideal types, which were based on a variety of cases, derives from a single historical development, the Protestant Reformation. Bellah points out that rather than a distinct evolutionary stage, it could be viewed as just a transitional phase between “Axial” and “modern” religion. Defining characteristics of early modern religion are the collapse of the hierarchical structuring of both this and the other world, the relocation of the quest for salvation into worldly “callings,” the dissolution of the mediated system of salvation through sacramental rituals and religious virtuosos, which gives way to direct relation between the individual and transcendent reality. Bellah reasserts the Weberian thesis of the importance of the Protestant Reformation, especially in its Calvinist wing, for modern developments in economics, science, politics, education, and law. But following Parsons, he stresses that “for the first time pressures to social change in the direction of greater realization of religious values are actually institutionalized as part of the structure of society itself.” Supposedly, religious orientations now become mediated through secular institutions “in which religious values have been expressed.”

Modern religion represents in Bellah’s view a radicalization and the culmination of processes initiated by the Protestant Reformation. It marks the final collapse of the dualism of the historic religions. But it should not be interpreted as a return to “primitive monism.” Bellah is not sure whether one can still speak of a modern religious symbol system in our post-Kantian and postmetaphysical condition, when the very nature of symbolization is open to increasing reflexive critical analysis and when religion becomes necessarily grounded not only in ethical life but “in the structure of the human situation itself.” For Bellah, using a postmodern-sounding discourse avant la lettre, an infinitely multiplex world has replaced the simple duplex structure and life “has become an infinite possibility thing.” “The symbolization of man’s relation to the ultimate conditions of his existence” is “no longer the monopoly of any groups explicitly labeled religious... every fixed position has become open to question... the fundamental symbolization of modern man and his situation is that of a dynamic multidimensional self
the evolutionary development of human consciousness and culture: from primate episodic to mimetic, to mythic, and to theoretic. This allows Bellah to reconstruct the crucial role of "religious" ritual and myth in the long process of hominization of the species, culminating in the full linguification of homo sapiens. Religious developments now become embedded within a theory of human cultural evolution, which itself becomes embedded within a theory of human biological evolution.

According to Donald,

around 100,000 years ago, Mousterian culture emerged, and toolmaking became gradually more refined, until it was revolutionized in the Mesolithic and Neolithic cultures. The correlation with brain size breaks down during this period; cultural change, once it began to accelerate, proceeded without any further change in brain size or, as far as can be determined, brain structure. Whereas change had been agonizingly slow during the period of Homo erectus, it now became an increasingly visible characteristic of human society. Ritual, art, myth, and social organizations developed and flourished in rapid succession. A new cognitive factor had obviously been introduced into the equation. The human capacity for continuous innovation and cultural change became our most prominent characteristic.

The second major revision is the reconceptualization of the Axial Age as the passage from narrative mythic to theoretic culture. Axiality, now defined as "instances of the radical reformulation of myth in the light of theoretic criticism," becomes much more central in Bellah's scheme of religious evolution and, paradoxically, attains a new critical normative relevance vis-à-vis the misguided theoretic self-understanding of the modern rationalist Enlightenment project.

Finally, the revaluation of ritual as the embodiment of mimetic culture and of myth as the expression of narrative culture leads Bellah to revise his over-reliance on Weber's theory of religious rationalization as demagization and demythologization and to revise significantly his Protestant modernist evaluation of modern religious trends. Embedding his revised theory of religious evolution within a history of the human species that incorporates "the entire human biosociocultural experience" leads Bellah to "critically reappropriate
its mimetic and mythic dimensions in a constant dialectic with the theoretic.”26 “We are,” Bellah insists again and again, “embodied, storytelling animals, and it is a ‘myth’ in the pejorative sense to imagine otherwise.”27

Those are undoubtedly critically important contributions, but I have the sense that Bellah’s reformulation of religious evolution is still overburdened by an overly broad and almost protean or, as Bellah himself recognizes, “pervasive” concept of religion which preserves most of the ambiguities and equivocal meanings already indicated concerning the apparently homologous character of the three different binary systems of classification, sacred/profane, transcendent-mundane, and religious-secular, which in my view correspond to the pre-Axial, Axial, and modern-secular phases.28 The model has now the additional burden of having to offer some credible criteria in order to be able to distinguish in concrete historical settings, but also transhistorically and transculturally, “religious” ritual from nonreligious one, “religious” myth from nonreligious one, and “religious” Axial theoretic breakthroughs from nonreligious ones, since to define every ritual, every myth, and every theoretic breakthrough (theoria) as “religious” would only make the categorical qualifier “religious” analytically meaningless.

Even if one grants some of the basic premises of Bellah’s theoretic reconstruction of the processes of human sociocultural evolution, such as “everything starts with religion,” “ritual is the key to understanding mimetic culture,” and “ritual is the phenomenological basis of all religion,” one will still need some criteria for distinguishing between “religious” and “nonreligious” ritual.29 This will be even more necessary if one holds the view, as Bellah does, following Erving Goffman and Randall Collins, that even now in our secular societies daily life consists in endless “interaction ritual chains.”30 Either one begins with the premise that “once upon a time” all ritual was “religious” and then the task is to develop some kind of interpretation of the process of “desecralization” of ritual through which “sacred” and “profane” or “religious” and “secular” rituals become differentiated. Or, alternatively, one assumes that all societies have made some kind of distinction between ordinary daily profane interaction rituals and extraordinary “sacred rituals” or “ritual culture” proper and then, given a modern “secular” consciousness, one has the double task of explaining in the first place, as Durkheim did, the origins or the social sources of the sacred.

Having accomplished that, one has then the additional task of developing some kind of theory of the differentiation of spheres of nonreligious ritual culture, such as the arts, science, education, politics, law, and so on, from the core or compact sacred ritual culture of primitive and archaic societies. Concomitantly, one has to explain how a separate and differentiated sphere of “religious” ritual, which also differs somewhat from archaic sacred ritual, becomes constituted. Weber’s theory of religious rationalization or disenchantment from magical to ethical religion, as well as his theory of differentiation of the various spheres (economic, political, intellectual-scientific, aesthetic, erotic, and so on), and Habermas’s theory of “linguistication of the sacred” constitute two such paradigmatic attempts.31 While drawing upon both theories critically, Bellah evidently considers some crucial aspects of both theories either insufficient or misguided. One can therefore view Bellah’s ambitious project of religious evolution as an attempt to offer a better version of both theories.32

In the remaining space I would like to interrogate some of these interrelated issues with respect to Bellah’s revised theory of axiology and his critical reevaluation of modernity.

What Is Religiously Axial about the Axial Age?

In Religion in Human Evolution, Bellah offers extremely rich, detailed, and illuminating narrative reconstructions of what he considers to be the paradigmatic Axial Breakthroughs in the four settings of ancient Israel (Axial Age I), ancient Greece (Axial Age II), China in the first millennium BCE (Axial Age III), and ancient India (Axial Age IV).33 In this respect, Bellah begins where any comparative-historical sociological study of the Axial Age should begin, that is, with serious historization of each of the cases.34 The chapters stand as parallel stories that, while following similar related themes, present radically diverse variations in the four different contexts. They are also devoid of the kind of comparative analysis that would try to draw out some of the basic similarities and differences between the cases. In this respect, Bellah’s analysis avoids premature analytical theorization that would tend to blend all the cases into versions of the same process. Each story, at least to a reader like me, who can claim no expertise in any of the cases, appears
extremely suggestive and compelling and seems to be well grounded in the best scholarly and most up-to-date secondary literature.

Nevertheless, even after granting that each of the stories is basically right and narratively compelling, the theoretic, comparative-analytical task of answering the central question “What is Axial about the Axial Age?” still remains. Bellah, in my view, offers a persuasive answer to the more general and, one could say, more relevant question from the perspective of human cultural evolution, namely “What made the axial age axial?” But the more specific and narrow question, yet the one which is more pertinent from the particular perspective of this essay, namely “What is so Axially ‘religious’ about the Axial Age?” finds a less satisfactory answer.

Bellah’s basic claim is that in all four cases an (evolutionarily) new form of “theoretic” culture was applied to the reformulation of some of the basic cultural premises that had been grounded so far in archaic sacred “ritual” and “myth.” Though “mimetic” and “narrative” traditions that had been central in older civilizations continued to be significant, they now became reformulated in the light of the new theological understandings. The claim therefore is not that theoretic culture triumphed over and superseded “ritual” and “myth,” but rather that a new sphere of theoretic culture emerged and that this led to various reformulations of mimetic and narrative culture. Most significantly, Bellah insists that the four cases are far from homogeneous and the cultural transformations “by no means uniform,” so that he seems to accept the notion of “multiple axialities” along with “multiple modernities.”

It is at this point that Bellah’s ambitious research project on religious evolution encounters Shmuel Eisenstadt’s no less ambitious research project on the Axial Age, Axial Age civilizations, and multiple modernities. I will not revisit here the central debates concerning the Axial Age and Axial civilizations and must restrict myself to raising some critical issues concerning the “religious” aspects of the Axial transformations. In any case, Bellah’s own reference to “multiple axialities” highlights the need to distinguish, as stressed repeatedly by Johann P. Arnason, between (a) those aspects of the transformations that are “culturally unique,” (b) those aspects that are “specifically Axial,” and (c) those that appear to be more “universal or evolutionary.”

Culturally unique would be those “civilizational” aspects that are specifically “Greek,” “Chinese,” “Indic,” “Judaic,” and so on, which therefore must be understood and interpreted within their concrete hermeneutic sociocultural contexts and unique historical trajectories and/or cultural memories, histories which always precede the Axial Age and may have some continuous development well beyond the Axial Age. The entire problematic of “Axial civilizations” and “civilizational” analysis and the extent to which one may speak of Axial and non-Axial civilizations is related to those issues.

Specifically “Axial” would be those aspects that are “epochal,” that emerge simultaneously by some still not fully clarified “mysterious synchronicity” roughly at the middle of the first millennium BCE at those four particular civilizational settings, but not in others (Egypt, Mesopotamia, or Phoenicia), and that allow us to speak meaningfully of a world-historical “age” (in Karl Jaspers’ sense of the term). Axial here, as a “global” epochal category, has to mean something more than simply interesting parallel “types” of transformations one may find happening simultaneously, and apparently unrelatedly, across various civilizations, so that we may speak of typical “Axial” or “classical” ages within each of these civilizations. Axial here has to mean that each of these “ages” is not only “classical” or “Axial” for each of these civilizations but is somehow also of unique significance and relevance for world history and for all of humanity. Obviously, such “significance” or “relevance” is one that emerges only from “the present,” that is, from the particular hermeneutic horizon of “our” present global age. For that very reason, it is not possible to separate “evaluations” and “understandings,” that is, “the meaning of the Axial Age,” from our own “modern” self-understandings.

Finally, “universal” or “evolutionary” aspects would be those aspects of the Axial transformations that are connected with what today we would consider as generally and distinctly “human” characteristics that distinguish *homo sapiens* as an animal species, but that appear to have found various manifest cultural crystallizations first during the Axial Age. One may speak most specifically, following Yehuda Elkana, of “second-order thinking,” more broadly, as does Bellah, of “theoretic culture,” or most broadly, as does Björn Wittrock, of enhanced “reflexivity,” “historicity,” and “agentiality.” This is the sense in which Assmann talks of “axiality” as a cultural development that should not be circumscribed chronologically to the Axial Age, even if it may have found in this epoch its first full historical manifestation and crystallization.

In fact, Assmann’s own work has shown magistrally some of the preliminary and preparatory, one could even say anticipatory, manifestations of
axiality (or at least of protoaxiality) in ancient Egypt, a supposedly non-
Axial civilization. Similarly, “axiality” or “theoretic culture,” as Bellah
himself recognizes, may have found further development in later crystalli-
zations, let’s say in late antiquity or in the first centuries of the second
millennium CE, and “full” institutionalization only in modernity. But once we
talk of different epochal crystallizations of “axiality,” in various periods of
global history, then the unique meaning of the Axial Age for global history
and the very category of “axiality” loses some of its symbolic power and
significance.

Bellah’s evolutionary approach, and his claim that the Axial Age can be
best conceptualized as the first historical emergence of phenomena that
now, from our present standpoint, can be identified as prototypical mani-
festations of “theoretic culture,” does not need to circumscribe the break-
through from mythic to theoretic culture within one single historical age or
within some kind of synchronous development. The multiple independent
emergence of similar yet very diverse phenomena in different civilizational
contexts, all indicating some “breakthrough” to theoretic culture, is more
central for an evolutionary approach than its synchronicity or simultaneity.

Such an evolutionary approach also does not need to deny the impor-
tance of intermediate, preparatory, and anticipatory steps already present in
archaic civilizations or the fact that, as Donald has pointed out, Bellah’s
ideas about a theoretic revolution during the Axial Age simply address
“some of the earliest events in the long, painful, bloody (and still unfinished)
transition from the governance of Mythic culture to that of Theoretic
culture.”43 Thus an evolutionary approach could easily accommodate and
stretch chronologically the conditions for the emergence of elements of “ax-
iality” back into the second millennium BCE and forward into modernity,
for as Bellah himself indicates, “theoretic culture purged of mythic content
did not appear until the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century.”44

Addressing finally the role of “religion” in the Axial Age’s beginning tran-
sition to “theoretic culture,” one can accept as a starting point the premise
suggested by Donald, namely that in the cognitive evolutionary scenario he
describes, “one must view religious thinking, and especially the religious in-
novations of the Axial Age, as the absolute cutting edge of human experience
at that time.”45 Yet, in my view, one should distinguish the broader question
concerning the role of “religious thinking,” whatever this may mean, in the
general cognitive evolutionary transition from “mythic” to “theoretic” cul-
ture, from the narrower question of “religious evolution” per se. Namely,
does the transition to “theoretic culture” necessarily entail the concomitant
transition from “archaic” to “Axial” religion, and if so, which would be the
specifically “Axial religious innovations” that are characteristic of “Axial”
religion? Furthermore, how do we distinguish those “religious innovations”
that may be said to be culturally unique for each of the four civilizational set-
tings, from those that are specifically “Axial”? Are all the transformations
similarly “religious” in nature and are the outcomes everywhere equally “re-
ligious,” or is the diversity of those multiple Axial transformations such that
some of them appear more “secular” or “mundane” or “this-worldly” in char-
acter than others? Bellah acknowledges that in the cases of China and an-
cient Greece critics have raised valid questions concerning Eisenstadt’s em-
phasis on the distinction between “transcendental” and “mundane” orders as
the most fundamental characteristic of “axiality.”46

Finally, is “religious axiality,” like theoretic culture, something that finds
its first clear historical manifestations during the Axial Age but only reaches
fuller development and institutionalization in late antiquity or even in mod-
ernity, so that “early modern” and “modern religions” could be understood
as more developed and differentiated forms of “religious axiality,” which
seems to be Bellah’s earlier position? Or does Axial religion truly represent
the paradigmatic form of religious axiality, so that all attempts to construct
a modern theoretic religion “within the bounds of reason alone” or modern
individual “invisible” forms are eventually revealed as misguided attempts
that misunderstand the structure of man’s ultimate conditions, not only as
homo religiosus but as a symbolic sociocultural animal? There could be a
third alternative, which I will sketch briefly in the final section of my essay,
suggesting that our modern secular age creates the social conditions for the
synchronous and nonhierarchic, that is, “free and equal” coexistence of all
forms of “religion” (pre-Axial, Axial, and post-Axial) and that our modern
“religious-secular” binary classification is markedly different from any kind
of ontological classification we may define as “Axial” or “pre-Axial.”

The distinction between “uniquely civilizational,” “specifically Axial,”
and more “universal normative” assumptions about the kind of religion that
we assume is compatible with further developments in theoretic culture is
important if we want to avoid the two traps that, as Wittrock has pointed
out, are almost inherent to Axial Age theorizing. The first, the ethnocentric trap, would be the tendency to elevate one particular form of religion, which will inevitably be “our” Western form of “Axial religion,” either Judeo-Christian or Greek or some combination of the two, into the paradigmatic form of “axiality,” so that other non-Western forms appear as somewhat deficient and not fully “Axial.” The second trap, the teleological modernist one, would be the tendency to characterize as “Axial” those phenomena that appear to be conducive to our own modernity. As Assmann has so eloquently pointed out, the relevant question appears to be not so much about the “Axial past” per se, “but about the roots of modernity,” an impulse that he identifies as the typical mythical question of origins.

There is a relative scholarly consensus concerning the fact that pre-Axial religions, both tribal as well as archaic, can be characterized as manifestations of ontological monism or, in Bellah’s new formulation, as “cosmological,” “in that supernatural, nature, and society were all fused in a single cosmos.” There appears to be also some relative consensus that the passage to axiality represents some break in this ontological monism. But there is much less agreement about the kind of dualism, or the kind of multiple and competing ontological visions, that are supposed to be characteristic of the Axial Age. Particularly disputed is the assertion that the new ontological dualism is grounded in every Axial case on a radical gap between a higher “transcendent” order of reality and a devalued order of “mundane” reality. Such analytical characterization appears certainly appropriate for the Israeli path of Axial development, and partially so for the Buddhist challenge to archaic Vedic religion, but much less appropriate for the Greek philosophical-political path of development or for the Sinic universal-inclusive path.

Even assuming that every Axial path implies some transformation of pre-Axial ontological monism into some kind of new ontological dualist distinction between a higher ultimate and a more derivative order of reality, the question is whether this necessarily implies the emergence of some notion of “transcendence.” Moreover, even if one accepts the premise that every Axial path implies some notion of transcendence in the sense that transcendence constitutes the very condition of possibility to gain some reflexive distance from “the world,” it does not follow that “transcendence” is always and necessarily “religious” by definition or that the “world” is therefore devalued as “mundane.” Following Durkheim, one may conceptualize “sacred” and “profane” as a general dichotomous classificatory system of reality, characteristic of pre-Axial sociocultural systems, that encompasses within one single, that is, monistic, ontological order various realms which later will be differentiated into different cosmic, earthly, social, and moral orders. All reality, gods and spirits, nature and cosmic forces, humans and other animal species, and the kinship, political, social, and moral orders are integrated into a single order of things precisely according to the dichotomous classificatory system of sacred and profane. The entire system, moreover, is an immanent “this-worldly” one, if one is allowed to use anachronistically another dichotomous category that will only emerge with the Axial breakthroughs, since the very idea of “world,” as Rémi Brague has shown, is an Axial one.

Indeed one may postulate that every Axial breakthrough entails some kind of redrawing of the boundaries between sacred and profane, which may be interpreted as a form of semantic relocation of the sacred, which may imply simultaneous processes of desacralization of some aspects of reality and the potential resacralization of other aspects. In the case of ancient Israel, “the Mosaic distinction” entails first a radical exclusive monolatric sacralization of YHWH as the God of the covenant, and eventually in the prophetic age its elevation to the one and only transcendent Holy God, creator of heaven and earth, universal lawgiver, God of history and Lord of all peoples. Such a sacralization of transcendence entails, indeed, an equally radical desacralization of all creatures and of all cosmic and natural forces and, most of all, the demotion of all gods and supernatural beings into “false” idols and evil demonic forces. But in and of itself, all of creation, as God’s work, is intrinsically “good” and not profane. Mundane immanent reality, in this respect, is devalued only in relation to God, and it becomes “profane” and “evil” insofar as it refuses to recognize the transcendent sovereignty of God.

Surely the Axial breakthrough in ancient Greece from the Homeric age to the classical age of Athenian democracy entails an equally radical redrawing of the boundaries between sacred and profane, breaking through the archaic ontological monism. But the dynamics of desacralization, the redrawing of the boundaries between various ontological realms and the radical reformulation of myth in the light of theoretical criticism evince significantly different dynamics, dimensions, and directions, which in my view it
would be problematic to characterize as “religious” even if the initial dynamics had “sacred” or “divine” dimensions. The very tripartite theological differentiation of archaic divine reality into mythike (or the mythical world of the gods), physike (or the cosmic order of nature), and politike (the conventional nomoi of the democratic polis) entails certainly a radical desacralization, but its dynamic is not necessarily a “religious” one, and its crystallization is hardly one of a single ontological dualism between “transcendent” kosmos and devalued “mundane” reality. Moreover, this desacralization does not lead to “religious” rationalization per se or to any form of resacralization. Indeed, the Greek archaic public religio-political cultic system of worship and sacrifice is somewhat transformed but not radically altered, despite the radical Axial theoretic breakthroughs in other spheres. Only with Plato does one find the combination of radical theoretic deconstruction of mythic culture and the conscious attempt to construct a new myth of radical ontological dualism. But this model of Axial Platonic theoria, which occupies such a central role in Bellah’s analysis, only emerges after the crisis of Athenian democracy when theoretic breakthroughs of second-order thinking in cosmological, physical, logical, mathematical, ethical, and political ideas had already been accomplished.

One observes therefore two radically different Axial breakthroughs. Both entail processes of desacralization that undermine the archaic monist sacred-profane order. But the dynamics are very different. The Israeli dynamic is “religious” through and through in that, by means of the Mosaic distinction, it invents a new Axial type of “religion.” But in fact this new Axial form of “religion” will only find full crystallization in late antiquity with the transformation of Second Temple Judaism into Talmudic Judaism after the destruction of the temple and the end of sacrifice, and the emergence of the two “daughter religious,” Christianity and Islam. By contrast, the Greek process of desacralization can hardly be depicted as a process of religious rationalization. Of course, Greek philosophia had strong “religious” elements of theoretic divination that entailed the search of spiritual paths of self-realization, at times approximating transcendent “religious” paths “beyond human flourishing.” In this respect, it would also be anachronistic to speak of the Greek Axial path as being more “secular,” a modern category that has its origins in a radically different Christian theological system than the Greek one. Some of these philosophic paths, Platonic and Stoic, will clearly merge with and enrich more characteristically “religious” Christian paths of otherworldly salvation. But this will happen much later beyond the Axial Age proper.

One could draw similar contrasts between the two radically different Asian Axial paths, the Indic and the Sinic. Buddhism represents a more clearly Axial dynamic of “religious semantic” relocation of the sacred through a radical transvaluation of the Vedic sacro-cosmic-sacrificial ritual order, which much later, beyond the Axial Age proper, was eventually transformed into a different type of Axial “religion” with the institutionalization of Mahayana Buddhism. The various competing Sinic paths of desacralization are less clearly “religious,” both in their dynamics and in their outcomes.

Bellah’s reliance on Donald’s conceptual formulation of “theoretic culture” allows him to reformulate his theory of axiality in such a broad and general way that the central argument is “that the axial breakthrough was essentially the breakthrough of theoretic culture in dialogue with mythic culture as a means for the comprehensive modeling of the entire human universe.” But unless one assumes that every “comprehensive modeling of the entire human universe” is per se “religious,” then one should be able to differentiate between those comprehensive worldviews that should be properly called “religious,” those that appear to be more humanist ethicophilosophical without apparent reliance on some form of “supraempirical transcendence,” and those that appear to be more “protoscientific,” thus anticipating modern scientific theoretic culture. In this respect, the relation between these diverse Axial theoretic breakthroughs and later “religious” historical developments, particularly the emergence of the historic “world religions,” still remains unclear.

Bellah conjoins Arnaldo Momigliano’s notion of “an age of criticism,” Elkana’s “second-order thinking,” Eisenstadt’s idea of “transcendence,” and Eric Voegelin’s concept of “mythospeculation” in an attempt to offer a more precise formulation of the kind of comprehensive modeling he views as characteristically “Axial.” What all Axial breakthroughs have in common, according to Bellah, is some kind of “second-order thinking about cosmology, which for societies just emerging from the archaic age meant thinking about the religio-political premises of society itself. It is second-order thinking in this central area of culture, previously filled by myth, that gave rise to the idea of transcendence, so often associated with the axial age.”
But Bellah qualifies Elkana’s conception of “scientific theorizing” and argues that “because transcendental realms are not subject to disproof the way scientific theories are, they require a new form of narrative, that is, a new form of myth,” which, following Voegelin, he calls “mythospeculation.” "The transcendental breakthrough," Bellah concludes, “involved a radicalization of mythospeculation, but not an abandonment of it.”56 One needs to ask, however, whether all Axial mythospeculations, in all four Axial cases, ought to be characterized as “religious.” One could argue that the most “theoretic” Axial mythospeculations appear to be the least “religious,” while the most religious ones appear to be the least “theoretic.”57 Again and again one faces the same terminological difficulty, the moment one tries to use the category of “religion,” anachronistically as it were, in order to analyze and compare the diverse Axial cultural transformations. Such a difficulty is inherent in the fact that the very category of “religion” itself emerged out of one of the particular Axial transformations, though eventually it crystallized into the modern Western “religious-secular” system of classification, which has now become globalized.

One can postulate that the Axial breakthroughs certainly prepared the ground and the conditions for the later institutionalization of the “historic” world religions. But that which, following Weber, could be called the dynamics of “religious” rationalization proper were carried by radically new types of distinct religious communities, which offered some form of salvation to the individual qua individual and were in this respect radically different from the “community cults,” which had been characteristic of the religio-political archaic order.58 In fact, as Bellah himself acknowledges, the so-called world religions are “successor faiths” which only emerge after the Axial Age, after all the competing Axial ontological visions failed to establish any long-term institutionalization. Even Talmudic synagogy rabbinic Judaism was a new form of religious community radically different from the religio-political community cult of ancient Israel addressed by the biblical prophets. Under Hellenism, Greek culture underwent a process of archaic resacralization. Confucius was equally unsuccessful in establishing his ethical humanist vision. Confucianism only became established as an official state orthodoxy now linked with the sacro-magical religio-political imperial cult under the Han dynasty.59 But as Bellah emphasizes, following Donald, it is precisely the evolutionary cognitive advantage of theoretic breakthroughs that they become a form of external memory, which can be reappropriated again and again, as happened repeatedly to all Axial theoretic breakthroughs. In fact, Bellah would argue, they are precisely Axial insofar as they constitute a cultural memory that is still alive today and is the patrimony of all of humanity.

But, as Stroumsa has shown so convincingly, in terms of the dynamics of “religious development” in the strict sense of the term and in terms of world-historical relevance, the truly religious “Axial” transformations happened in late antiquity from the second century CE, with the interlinked coemergence of Talmudic Judaism, Christianity, and Manicheism, to the seventh century, with the later explosive eruption of Islam.60 This era, Stroumsa asserts, “also has a claim to this title of ‘Axial age,’ an epoch in which the very frameworks of a civilization are transformed in a radical way . . . one may follow from Jesus to Muhammad, the transformation of the very concept of religion . . . the Christianization of the empire permitted the establishment of a new sort of religion that was unknown in the ancient world.”61

The new type of religion was based on five interrelated transformations, which were shared by Judaism, Christianity, Manicheism, and many other religious movements of the late Roman Empire, although after the Constantinian establishment of Christian hegemony, those characteristics would appear as paradigmatically “Christian.” Stroumsa depicts those five transformations as (a) “a new care of the self,” (b) “the rise of the religions of the book,” facilitated by the media revolution in the transmission of cultural memory effected by the invention of the codex, (c) “the end of sacrifice” and the radical transformations of mimetic ritual culture associated with such a development, (d) the passage “from civic religion to community religion” with the equally radical cultic transformation from the public open religio-political ceremonies of the outdoor temple to the private closed congregational indoor gathering of the religious community, and (e) the transformation in the model of paideia “from wisdom teacher to spiritual master.”62

But strictly speaking, those were particular historical religious developments that it would not be appropriate to conceptualize in human evolutionary terms. With the institutionalization of Buddhism, another different type of “Axial” religion became institutionalized across Asia, introducing new religious dynamics everywhere, including in China, where it entered a creative interactive relation with Confucianism and Taoism. Eventually this
interactive dynamic crystallized in the syncretistic Chinese religious system of "the three teachings" (San Jiao).

Following Stroumsa, one could perhaps attribute "Axial" relevance to the historical religious transformations of late antiquity only in the sense that they formed the basis for the European religious system of medieval Christendom, out of which emerged the modern process of secularization, which in turn culminated in our global secular age. But this is a particular historical development with world-historical consequences, not a universal or evolutionary process of human development.

The Modern "Secular-Religious" System of Classification

The modern "secular-religious" system of classification, which emerged out of the transformation of Western Christianity, has now become globalized, entering in dynamic transformative interaction with all non-Western systems of classification, pre-Axial as well as Axial. All the religio-cultural systems, Christian and non-Christian, Western and non-Western, have been transformed through these global interactive dynamics. As I have stressed throughout my work, one can trace the modern process of secularization, or the crystallization of the modern secular age, by following the semantic transformations in the Latin word saeculum.63

Originally, the term saeculum, as in per saecula saeculorum, only meant an indefinite period of time, with a connotation similar to the Greek term aeon. But Augustine turned it into a Christian theological category when he used the term to refer to a temporal space between the present and the eschatological parousia, the Second Coming of Christ, in which both Christians and pagans could come together to pursue their common interests as a civil community.64 In this sense, the Augustinian use of "secular" is very similar to the modern meaning of a secular political sphere, that of the constitutional democratic state and of a democratic public sphere, which is supposedly "neutral" with respect to all worldviews, religious as well as nonreligious. Such a theological conception of the secular does not equate it with the "profane," as the other of the "sacred," nor is the secular the other of the "religious." It is precisely a neutral intermediate space, between Christian "sacred" and pagan "profane," which can be shared by all who live in a not religiously homogeneous or in a multicultural society, which by definition will have different and most likely competing conceptions of what is "sacred" and what is "profane."65

Eventually, however, with the consolidation of Western medieval Christendom and the hegemonic triumph of the Christian church, the secular became one of the terms of a dyad, religious/secular, which served to structure the entire spatial and temporal reality of medieval Christendom into a binary system of classification separating two worlds, the religious-spiritual-sacred world of salvation and the secular-temporal-profane world. It is from this new theological perspective of medieval Christendom that the modern meaning of "secularization" emerges. This historical process can best be understood as an attempt to bridge, eliminate, or transcend the dualism between the religious and the secular world.

Even in the West, however, this process of secularization follows two different dynamics. One is the dynamic of internal Christian secularization, which aims to spiritualize the temporal and to bring the religious life of perfection out of the monasteries into the secular world. It tends to transcend the dualism by blurring the boundaries between the religious and the secular, by making the religious secular and the secular religious through mutual reciprocal infusion.

The other, almost opposite dynamic of secularization takes the form of laicization. It aims to emancipate all secular spheres from clerical-ecclesiastical control, and in this respect it is marked by a laic-clerical antagonism. Here the boundaries between the religious and the secular are rigidly maintained, but those boundaries are pushed into the margins, aiming to contain, privatize, and marginalize everything religious, while excluding religion from any visible presence in the secular public sphere, now defined as the realm of laïcité, freed from religion.

With many variations these are the two main dynamics of secularization which culminate in our secular age. In different ways both paths lead to an overcoming of the medieval Christian dualism through a positive affirmation and revaluation of the saeculum, that is, of the secular age and the secular world, imbuing the immanent secular world with a quasi-transcendent meaning as the place for human flourishing.

The function of secularism as a philosophy of history, and thus as ideology, is to turn the particular Western Christian historical process of secularization into a universal teleological process of human development from
belief to unbeliever, from primitive irrational or metaphysical religion to modern rational postmetaphysical secular consciousness. Even when the particular role of internal Christian developments in the general process of secularization is acknowledged, it is not in order to stress the particular contingent nature of the process, but rather to stress the universal significance of the uniqueness of Christianity as, in Marcel Gauchet’s expressive formulation, “the religion to exit from religion.”

I would like to propose that this secularist stadal consciousness is a crucial factor in the widespread secularization that has accompanied the modernization of Western European societies. It is, in my view, the presence or absence of this secularist historical stadal consciousness that explains when and where processes of modernization are accompanied by radical secularization. In places where such secularist historical stadal consciousness is absent or less dominant, as in the United States or in most non-Western postcolonial societies, processes of modernization are unlikely to be accompanied by processes of religious decline. On the contrary, they may be accompanied by processes of religious revival.

In fact, the particular Western Christian dynamic of secularization became globalized through the process of Western colonial expansion, entering, however, into dynamic tension with the many different ways in which other civilizations had drawn boundaries between “sacred” and “profane,” “transcendent” and “immanent,” “religious” and “secular.” I would like to reiterate that we should not think of these dyadic pairs of terms as being synonymous. The sacred tends to be immanent in pre-Axial cultures. The transcendent is not necessarily “religious” in some Axial civilizations. The secular is by no means profane in our secular age.

In a certain sense, not only the so-called secular societies of the West but the entire globe is becoming increasingly more secular and “disenchanted” in the sense that the cosmic order is increasingly defined by modern science and technology; the social order is increasingly defined by the interlocking of “democratic” states, market economies, and mediatic public spheres; and the moral order is increasingly defined by the calculations of rights-bearing individual agents, claiming human dignity, liberty, equality, and the pursuit of happiness. Yet comparisons of secular Europe and religious America and the evidence of religious revivals around the world make clear that within the same secular immanent frame one can encounter very diverse religious dynamics. In this respect, the disenchantment of the world does not necessarily entail the disenchantment of consciousness, the decline of religion, or the end of magic. On the contrary, it is compatible with all forms of reenchantment. What characterizes the contemporary global moment is precisely the fact that all forms of human religion, past and present, from the most “primitive” to the most “modern,” are available for individual and collective appropriation and tend to coexist increasingly side by side in today’s global cities.

We now find ourselves within a global secular/religious system of classification in which the category of religion has to do extra work and serve to articulate and encompass all kinds of different “religious” experiences, individual and collective; all kinds of magical, ritual, and sacramental practices; all kinds of communal, ecclesiastical, and institutional arrangements; and all kinds of processes of sacralization of the social, be it in the form of religious nationalism, secular civil religions, or the global sacralization of human rights. We, as well as Bellah, tend to use the same qualifier, “religious,” to characterize all these diverse phenomena in a way that can only be mind-boggling for a “secular” as well as for a “religious” mind-set. Yet despite the futile calls by so many scholars of “religion” to drop the concept altogether because it has become meaningless, there is no point in bemoaning this fact, since the global secular-religious system of classification of reality is here to stay. It has now been adopted by basically every state in the world system. Simultaneously, drawing the proper boundaries between “the religious” and “the secular” has become a source of contestation in every society in the world.

In his most recent work, Bellah has revised his older evolutionary narrative according to which a historic or Axial stage of religious evolution was followed by an early modern and a modern stage. As he acknowledges:

In my original essay on religious evolution, I made the point that the “stages” were not discrete, that nothing is ever lost. I argued that even aspects of tribal and archaic religion survive among us. What I did not recognize clearly enough is that the axial age remains as determinative for us as ever, that we have not left it behind, that what I called
the early modern and modern were only phases of working out its implications...

Neither the Enlightenment nor any of the great ideological movements of the twentieth century have supplanted the axial heritage; often they have acted it out in parody even as they imagined themselves rejecting it.68

In response to Habermas’s project of the “linguisticification of the sacred,” Bellah now writes: “If I am right that not only religious but also ethical and political thought can never be simply theoretic but are always also indelibly mythic and mimetic, then it is not only ‘opaque features’ and ‘bizarre expressions of alien cultures’ that we need to understand, but our own modern, partially disguised, mythic and mimetic practice.”69 As to his older rather sanguine analysis of American “civil religion” as the immanent institutionalization of transcendent values, Bellah has also become a “prophetic” harsh “denouncer of America’s delusive self-conception of “immaculate exceptionalism,” of being “A City upon a Hill” and the realization of the Kingdom of God on earth. With resigned irony he concludes, “perhaps we are just one more tired example of Augustine’s city of man.”70

Notes

1. In this essay I only want to interrogate some problems in Bellah’s usage of the category of religion. I cannot offer here a more systematic analysis of Robert N. Bellah, Religion in Human Evolution: From the Palaeolithic to the Axial Age (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).


8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., 22.

11. Ibid., 22–23.

12. Ibid., 24.

13. Ibid., 22.


15. Ibid., 21–22.

16. Ibid., 43–44.

17. Bellah will later adopt the less pejorative term “tribal religion.”

18. Bellah, Beyond Belief, 23 and 29.

19. Ibid., 29 and 31.

20. Ibid., 32–36.


22. Ibid., 42.


26. Ibid., 17.

27. Ibid., 11.

28. Bellah’s “pervasive” conception of religion is illustrated in his depiction of the folk religion of southern Italian peasants, the official Roman Catholicism, Croce’s liberalism, Gramsci’s socialism, and Mussolini’s fascism as “the five religions of modern Italy.” These only enumerate five collective social forms. If one was to add the private individual forms, from the idiosyncratic “cosmos” of Menciochio, the sixteenth-century heretic miller made famous by Carlo Ginzburg, to the many contemporary Italian forms of “Sheilasm,” as Bellah and his collaborators depicted the “private faith” of Sheila Larson in Habits of the Heart, the number of religions in Italy or in any other society become myriad. See Robert N.


43. Donald, “An Evolutionary Approach.”


45. Donald, “An Evolutionary Approach.”


47. Wittrock, “The Meaning of the Axial Age.”


50. I am using here the typology developed by Wittrock in “The Meaning of the Axial Age,” 73–76.


52. Brague’s insightful comparative analysis of Greek, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim conceptions of the kosmos and “world,” physis and creation, divine law (nomos) and the law of God, and so on offers a fruitful model of how to unpack the overly compact and undifferentiated categories of Axial “cosmological transcendent visions” and “mundane reality” in particular civilization contexts. See Rémi Brague, The Law of God: The Philosophical History of an Idea (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); and Wisdom of the World.
55. Ibid., 81.
56. Ibid.
57. Bellah himself points to this difficulty when he writes: “Formal theoretic developments seem virtually absent in ancient Israel. Compared to the other three cases, Israel approaches theoretic culture only asymptotically, yet it was there, perhaps, that the revolution in mythosculation was most profound.” “What Is Axial?,” 89.
58. For a critical analysis of this crucial Weberian distinction between undifferentiated “community cult” (Gemeinschaftskult) and differentiated “religious community” (religiöse Gemeinschaft), see José Casanova, “Welche Religion braucht der Mensch? Theorien religiösen Wandels im globalen Zeitalter der Kontingenz,” in Bettina Hollstein, Matthias Jung, and Wolfgang Knöbl, eds., Handlung und Erfahrung: Das Erbe von Historismus und Pragmatismus und die Zukunft der Sozialtheorie (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2011), 169–189.
59. Tu Wei-ming, “The Structure and Function of the Confucian Intellectual in Ancient China,” in Arnason, Eisenstadt, and Wittrock, ed., Axial Civilizations, 360–373. Unique about the Chinese case, in comparison to the other Axial Age cases, is the historical continuity between ancient and modern China, notwithstanding the radical modern break that accompanied the abolition of the imperial cult and the disestablishment of Confucianism as state orthodoxy.
61. Ibid., 6.
62. Ibid.
64. Robert A. Markus, Christianity and the Secular (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).