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Reflections on Axiality
Evolutionary Legacy or Historical Consciousness?

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Abstract: Eugene Halton's book makes a significant contribution to scholarship on the Axial Age. Halton provides a summary of the alternative formulations of the Axial Age thesis by John S. Stuart-Glennie, Lewis Mumford, and D. H. Lawrence that considerably corrects the current Jaspers-centric bias of scholarship. Halton's consideration of Stuart-Glennie's articulation of panzooinism opens up a more nuanced and differentiated appreciation of the human evolutionary legacy that precedes the Axial Age. However it is unclear how this evolutionary legacy is effectively active within historical consciousness. Further, in conceptualizing this legacy Halton overlooks the degree of violence of hunter-gatherer tribalism, and overestimates the viability of their life-style as modeling sustainability. Insofar as the world religions overvalue the Axial Age, Halton's laudable goal of contributing to a sustainability revolution will prove ineffectual by comparison to Jaspers' thesis, the difference between them turning on the question of evolutionary legacy vis-à-vis effective historical consciousness..

Keywords: Halton, Eugene; Jaspers, Karl; Axial Age; evolution; world history; sustainability; ecology; panzooinism; effective historical consciousness.

Eugene Halton: Critical Contributions to Axial Age Scholarship

Halton's book *From the Axial Age to the Moral Revolution* does a real service to scholarship on the Axial Age, providing a significant critical corrective to Karl Jaspers' articulation of this concept.[1] First of all, Halton makes a major contribution in bringing attention primarily to John Stuart Stuart-Glennie, and secondarily to Lewis Mumford and D. H. Lawrence as three significant, but either unknown or overlooked, predecessors or alternatives to Jaspers in articulating the Axial Age. He is entirely correct that Jaspers' version of the Axial Age thesis has dominated the scholarly field, and that this is ultimately to the detriment of a full treatment of the thesis. At the present moment, this is an especially noteworthy critical contribution to the Axial Age scholarship, as Daniel Mullins and others accurately note, "recent high-profile discussions surrounding the Axial Age have put this alluring notion back on the agenda in disciplines across the social sciences."[2]

[1] Eugene Halton, *From the Axial Age to the Moral Revolution: John Stuart-Glennie, Karl Jaspers, and a New Understanding of the Idea*, London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. [Henceforth cited as *AMR*]

[2] Daniel A. Mullins, Daniel Hoyer, Christina Collins, Thomas Currie, Kevin Feeney, Pieter François, Patrick E. Savage, Harvey Whitehouse, Peter Turchin, "A Systematic Assessment of 'Axial Age' Proposals Using Global Comparative Historical Evidence," *American Sociological Review* 83/3 (June 2018), 596-626, here p. 597.

Secondly, in presenting Stuart-Glennie's theory of the Moral Revolution, Halton recuperates a fascinating and forgotten viewpoint that is worthy in its own right. Such a viewpoint is also worthwhile in providing an important corrective to the mistaken notion of Jaspers as being the first systematic proposer of the thesis as well as providing a corrective to the Jaspers-centric view of the Axial Age that currently dominates scholarship. Thirdly, in linking Stuart-Glennie's argument for panzooinism to contemporary scholarship in hominid evolution and human prehistory, Halton addresses one of the major lacunae in Axial Age scholarship, namely the one of providing a better and more nuanced appreciation of the importance and diversity of pre-Axial cultures. In doing so, Halton rejoins evolutionary considerations raised by Robert Bellah in his lengthy, final opus, *Religion in Human Evolution*,[3] which relies heavily on Merlin Donald's account of the human mind as evolving from an episodic basis through mimetic and mythic stages to a theoretic level.[4] However, in appealing to Stuart-Glennie, Halton is approaching the question of human "evolutionary legacy" (Halton's phrase) from a very different orientation. I suspect Halton's approach and considerations, if systematically applied and developed, would prove a more original and more insightful premise than Bellah's Jaspers-centric perspective for re-thinking and critically advancing the Axial Age thesis. My criticisms in this essay focus on precisely this aspect.

A fourth positive contribution Halton's book brings to the field is found in the concluding chapter. His interest is not exclusively in advancing scholarship (although he indeed accomplishes this), but like for many Axial Age theorists the scholarship is premise to address the pressing task of our lifetime that consists in facing the crises of our contemporary world. In Halton's words, this pressing task lies for humanity in having, "to come to terms with itself as a neotenous primate requiring self-controlling, sustainable limits to its civilization at all levels of institutions and beliefs, toward the purpose of a sustainable, proliferating planet of life" (*AMR* 126). Hear, hear! This agreement and support acknowledged, what motivates my critical rejoinders to Halton's conception is a difference in understanding how the Axial Age can and should be carefully utilized as a resource to inform this pressing task, as well as a difference in understanding how human evolutionary legacy plays a role (or can be "tapped," to cite one of Halton's turns of phrases) in doing the same.

Critical Rejoinders: Is Evolutionary Legacy Effective in Human Consciousness?

My positive appraisal of Halton's work sets the context in which to situate my negative criticisms. All of them share one feature: they push back on the notion that Jaspers overvalued the importance of the Axial Age. The criticisms center on the book's final pages (*AMR* 124-6) where Halton lays out the central consequences of his appeal to "Stuart-Glennie and company." Halton calls on the potential of "our 2-million-year long-term evolutionary legacy," in which the "depth of our Pleistocene panzooinist legacy, still vitally alive in our genome and bodies, psyches and brains and bio-social needs," contains "long-term tempered needs and capacities that can be tapped" as "deeply embedded resources," will provide us with the means to counter and subordinate our more recent history. He contends that more recent history has contracted the human mind from its original animate configuration, of hunter-gatherers alive to the wild intelligence of the earth, into first an anthropocentric mind (of which the Axial Age presents a thorough articulation) and secondly and more recently into a mechanico-centric mind, articulated through science, technology, and industry over the last centuries. Halton suggests the way to counter this recent history and its destructive effects is through finding the "moral equivalent" in "contemporary form" of those deep resources and primal needs of our evolutionary legacy. This, according to Halton, has already been accomplished in parenting and diet, and he argues for its extension to (1) habitat relation, (2) developing real limits to human ecological destruction, and (3) real promotion of the biosphere as a sacred trust.

How is this evolutionary legacy effectively present in our lives today? Halton uses words and phrases such as "deeply embedded," "resources," "capacities," "primal needs," "heritage," "long-term legacy," all of which point in fact to human evolutionary history. And it certainly manifests clearly for his assumed comparative category: parenting and diet. I concur with Halton that the positive consequences for mental and physical health

[3] Robert N. Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age*, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2011.

[4] See, for example, Merlin Donald, *Origins of the Modern Mind: Three Stages in the Evolution of Culture and Cognition*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.

of parenting approaches and diet regimes that are more analogous to our long-term evolutionary legacy is sufficiently evidenced. And the adequacy of the explanation for these consequences in biological terms (developmentally and physiologically, respectively) seems to me equally sufficient. In extending this line of argument to "habitat relation," to "developing real limits to human ecological destruction," and to "real promotion of the biosphere as a sacred trust," however, Halton moves from biological terms into human consciousness terms. Relations, recognition of limits, and the promotion of trust, are in each case constituted within a space of conscious meaning, and as such expressed in cultural and historical terms rather than biological. This begs the vexed and difficult question of how the human evolutionary legacy is effectively active within human consciousness. If anything, these are ideological terms, which remove hominids far from the evolutionary past and put them squarely into the midst of history, specifically into Axial Age history as the era when according to Johann Arnason and others ideology in the broad sense was invented.[5]

How the long-term legacy of the human evolutionary past manifests, not in biology, but in consciousness, in ideas, in ideological terms, is a huge question and not a given. Can these effectively be made active in our lives? Are these still-relevant potentials that can be mobilized or activated? Are these indeed a living potential, or do they belong to the past? At one point Halton uses the word "tapped," which fits well with the various metaphors of resource and heritage and so on; but, beyond this rhetorical match, it is not a metaphor that phenomenologically describes the effective working of human consciousness. I do not know of a better account of the latter than Hans-Georg Gadamer's notion of "effective historical consciousness" (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*),[6] as in large part of what makes Gadamer's account so powerful is the central role of history for the effectiveness of the workings of consciousness. The historical background sets the horizon for a context of meaning from, against, and within which individual conscious awareness manifests and situates itself, to the extent as individual consciousness and historical context are constituted within a semantic space of symbolic meaning. Evolutionary legacy and biology are clearly operative at a different level, what Terrence Deacon would aptly characterize as below "the symbolic threshold."[7]

Gadamer and Jaspers, both twentieth-century German philosophers working existentially-phenomenologically obviously share their outlook in how they conceive of consciousness and its limitations as well as its central significance for how to conceptualize human agency, as well as in much of their vocabulary and concerns. According to Jaspers, how the Axial Age can be noticed within our contemporary consciousness is along the lines of Gadamer's notion of effective historical consciousness. Jaspers claims that the Axial Age broke through the pre-Axial horizon of meaning and thought, a spiritualization of consciousness that recasts the previous horizon into expanded terms of universality and transcendence. These horizons set the limits to thinking within their respective civilizations until the present. In this sense the Axial Age is effectively active across historical time to constitute present-day consciousness for members of those world civilizations (or, world religions, insofar as the two ambiguously overlap). On such an existential philosophical-cum-hermeneutic basis Jaspers can make such dramatic claims as "Man, as we know him today, came into being";[8] "our present-day historical consciousness, as well as our consciousness of our present situation, is determined…by the conception of the Axial Period" (*OGH* 21); or, the "world history of humanity derives its structure from this period" (*OGH* 262). Without an existential philosophy license, such claims by Jaspers would have to be rated as being overstated, if not absurd and false. However, if such license is granted to him, these passages make (existential philosophical) sense. Yet, this license and its claims are ultimately warranted through their emphasis on limited, historically-situated human consciousness that is centrally constitutive of the phenomenon—in the case in question, the phenomenon is world history as such. Still to date, Gadamer's

[5] Johann P. Arnason, Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, and Björn Wittrock, (2005). "General Introduction," in *Axial Civilizations and World History*, eds. Johann P. Arnason, Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, and Björn Wittrock, Leiden: Brill, pp. 1-12, here p. 2.

[6] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, transl. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, New York, NY: Crossroad, 1989.

[7] Terrence W. Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-evolution of Language and the Brain*, New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997.

[8] Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, transl. Michael Bullock, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1953, p. 1. [Henceforth cited as *OGH*]

account of history as being effectively present is lacking in human evolutionary legacy, and Halton does not provide any such comparable account either. There is no clear evidence as to how human evolutionary past, as resource, embodied within us, not biologically, but ideologically informs how we think, relate, conceive of limits, or promote trust. There is no understanding of the means or mechanisms that bring it out into effective consciousness. The gap between evolutionary legacy and effective-historical consciousness is considerable.

There are a couple of ironies here. One is in Halton's seeking these deep-rooted needs of that legacy to be articulated into their contemporary moral equivalents—which is to say, regardless of whether one follows Stuart-Glennie's or Jaspers' version of the Axial Age, an Axial breakthrough of these needs should be performed by reflexively raising them into moral significance. This is indeed an ironic demand in the context of arguing against the Axial Age as being overvalued! The second irony is that it is due to precisely the distinctively evolved human characteristic of prolonged neoteny—which Halton discusses and uses at length—that the power of the wild environment can be, and has been, displaced from having the kind of constitutive necessity that Halton ascribes to it. Two contemporary examples make a *prima facie* counter-argument. The first is simply the fact that the majority of humans now live in urban environments. A second example is the comfortable familiarity of digital natives with virtual environments. Whether considering urban or virtual environments, either one stands in an extremely complex relation to the human evolutionary legacy. Each one is a cultural adaptation based on a long history and on a technologically enabled transcendence of the natural and the biological realm. Within this history it is of decisive importance to understand how transcendence has been conceptualized and hence, to understand how the Axial Age contributes transcendence to history. In order to understand these kinds of developments, let alone to effectively address them and critically counter them as part of the pressing task of fomenting a sustainability revolution, I perceive the need to robustly conceive effective historical consciousness as significantly formed by Axial Age developments, and not to bypass this by making a direct appeal to the human evolutionary legacy as if it were in some mysterious way more relevant and more effective. This is not a minor critique, as after all the central critical thrust of Halton's book contra Jaspers' version of the Axial Age is that Jaspers overvalues the latter to the detriment of a pre-Axial evolutionary legacy. On my reading, Halton is overvaluing the evolutionary legacy.

Objections to Idealizing the Primal as Being Nonviolent

Halton is admirably self-aware that in arguing for the power of our evolutionary legacy his proposals could be misread as "invoking some nostalgic idea of a naïve 'noble savage'" (*AMR* 124), or as suggesting "that people should nostalgically revert to hunter-gatherer ways" (*AMR* 125). He is clearly on his guard regarding any conception of his proposal being about some nostalgic return to the past. Nevertheless, I do see a problem in how Halton is idealizing indigenous ways of life, the hunter-gatherer, the forager, or formulated with an umbrella term, the primal (see especially *AMR* 62-5). I consider the idealization lacking in two respects, one in terms of Axial ethics, the other in terms of how to interpret the evolutionary emergence of civilization vis-à-vis hunter-gatherer society as being exemplary of sustainability.

Firstly, in terms of Axial ethics: Halton ascribes to the hunter-gatherer a "panzooinist revering of all life" (*AMR* 125). This is not substantiated, for there was one form of life they did not revere or respect: the lives of other humans, namely the ones of other tribes. Hunter-gatherer tribes did not live in happy harmony with other tribes; at best they traded peaceably with each other but the evidence does not support the existence of nonviolent relations. Other tribes are competitors or enemies, to be feared or avoided or conquered: a source for slaves, for women or for heroic feats like daring thievery, vengeful murder or kidnapping to perform ritual torture. This point can be made without invoking extreme practices such as headhunting or cannibalism, nor are we in need of the other extreme, think for example of Steven Pinker's argument that humans are by and large becoming more peaceful and nonviolent through civilizational progress.[9] On this point Halton disagrees with Pinker (*AMR* 71n11), rightly I think, however he does this in the same breath in which he shows a reliance on what I perceive as being far too rosy a picture of pre-agricultural societies as basically non-violent, and an overly spiritualized

[9] Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, New York, NY: Penguin, 2012.

reading of Paul Shepard's sacred game.[10] With Karen Armstrong, I concur that the Axial ethic is one of universal compassion toward all life (albeit, as Halton accurately points out, such an ethic must overtly and anthropocentrically be emphasizing all of human life).[11] Love of one's neighbor regardless of ethnicity or tribal identity as arguably the Axial ideal is most pointedly contrary to the evolutionary heritage of us *versus* them, or the in-group *versus* out-group dynamics, of stereotyping and prejudice and xenophobia and racism, and all forms of psychological violence vis-à-vis the so-called other. These forms of psychological violence are the mental corollary to actual physical violence.

Note here that, recalling my first criticism, I am invoking an evolutionary past at work in social and cognitive psychology, for which there is an abundance of empirical and experimental evidence. Unlike the evolutionary background of an animate mind or a deep ecological sensitivity, the evolutionary psychology of primal tribalism is clearly and obviously enacted in many of those automatic cognition patterns. If our pre-Axial evolutionary heritage profoundly trumps our more recent Axial heritage as Halton argues, then this claim makes sense of the contemporary tribalism of nationalism, xenophobia, racism, discrimination, and so on, evident in much contemporary social and cognitive psychological research. Yet, on the one hand it begs the question of why this heritage does not manifest itself in ecological sensitivity, while on the other hand it raises the issue of how to invoke that heritage in order to realize ecological wisdom, yet counter the deep conflicts and violence that mark our human group relations. Halton, in his strong focus on the anthropocentric emphasis of the Axial Age as a fallacy vis-à-vis the more ecologically-healthy focus of the animate mind of the primal, overlooks that the positive side of the anthropocentric focus of the Axial Age is a universalist nonviolent ethics that pre-Axial societies lacked. This is an ethics that our violent world needs, and an ethics that seems to me part and parcel of any sustainability revolution, as ecological health and human practices of consumption and pollution are inseparable from economics and politics and the procurement of natural resources, energy sources, and so on; ecological concerns are inseparable from economic and political concerns, and social justice is inextricably intertwined with environmental justice. To truly realize a revering of all life which includes all human life (not just that of one's own tribe), is a question that is as much, if not more, about the ethics and, *pace* Stuart-Glennie's interpretation, the morally revolutionary aspects of the Axial Age, than it is about pre-Axial models of ecological sustainability. Advancing an argument in favor of the ecological sensitivity of the hunter-gatherer that overlooks the problem of tribal violence and its related social and cognitive psychology, and thus ignores the importance of the Axial argument for a universal ethic of compassion, peace, and nonviolence, seems to me seriously flawed.

Objections to Idealizing the Primal as Exemplary of Sustainability

The second aspect to Halton's questionable idealizing of the hunter-gatherer (corresponding to my third criticism) is tied to the issue of how one is to read the significance of the emergence of civilization. Given the vastness of this thematic, I can only gesture at it. The problem with ascribing sustainable practices and ecological wisdom to hunter-gatherers relates to finding true test cases on a realistic scale, which would need to be a macro-evolutionary scale. Insightful in this regard is Jared Diamond's research, where he examines cases on a micro-evolutionary scale by seeking out societies that for reasons of geographic circumscription or isolation, such as islands like Easter Island, Iceland, or Greenland, afford testing of whether their way of life proves sustainable.[12] Invariably, Diamond suggests that the great majority of these peoples do not live a sustainable lifestyle, but that their practices of consumption and waste exceed and destroy the natural limits and resources provided by their environment, leading to their eventual collapse.

In order to effectively test societies that are not geographically circumscribed—that is they hunt and gather and forage in regions that are subsystems of far larger ecological systems and thus they can always move when they have exceeded the region's natural limits—one needs to view these on a macro-evolutionary time scale. However, such a test case is nothing else but the evolutionary history of humans

[10] Paul Shepard, *The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game*, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998.

[11] Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of our Religious Traditions*, New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.

[12] Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, New York, NY: Viking Penguin, 2005.

inhabiting the large continents of the earth to date. Certainly relevant here is the ubiquitous pattern of the extinction of mega-fauna in regions where humans initially move into. In the longer term, it is precisely known where patterns of human migration and the expansion-by-fissioning of primal societies has led: not to perpetually sustainable hunter-gatherer societies, but to slow population increase within an eventual world-system that manifests itself, at some critical juncture presumably related to sufficient population density that limits societal mobility, in the emergence of sedentary civilizations (something that happens multiply and independently in both the Old and New Worlds). This is just as evolutionary an outcome as the sacred game, albeit a more recent outcome (as well as, when viewed with hindsight, a far more destructive outcome in terms of ecology). Agriculture and civilization support extensive human populations, which in turn leads to greater destructiveness, and becomes the history that leads to the present familiar circumstances.

Unless I am reading Halton wrongly, he seems to suggest that for ecological sustainability reasons agriculture and civilization was a mistaken route to take, and that there are hunter-gatherer societies that opt against it. While the evaluative judgment of this route as being misguided in terms of ecological sustainability might very well be accurate (and I believe that it is), nonetheless it must not be conflated with an empirical assessment of the fact that the emergence of civilization is indeed an evolutionary outcome, to the same extent as was also the lifestyle of hunter-gatherers. Scholarly research suggests that factors of climate and geography relative to the East-West axis of Eurasia interact with the slow processes of growth, movement, and proliferation of hunter-gatherer societies, and combine to form a world-system within which agriculture and sedentary civilizations emerge.[13] Of course some of these societies could be accused along this axis for being abnormal in choosing agriculture and civilization, but obviously the point here is not to blame those in the past but to understand the emergence of agriculture and civilization as a genuine result of the evolutionary process and not as a choice, just as those hunter-gatherers at the peripheries of centers and beyond did not choose to remain hunter-gatherers.[14] Agriculture and civilization are as much an evolutionary legacy as the sacred game, albeit a more recent adaptation as well as one more obviously salient to consciousness in contemporary civilizations. A further consequence of this perspective is that rather than being any pre-civilizational society it is precisely the conscious and critical response to civilization by those who lived within it—namely the revolutionary visions of transcendence as critique of civilizational practice of the Axial Age—that should be of more relevance to the contemporary world. A critical question arises with regard to Halton's idealizing of hunter-gatherers as exemplars of sustainability: Are the practices of pre-Axial societies largely inapplicable to civilization insofar as they lack proper appreciation of the scale and dynamics ushered in by civilization?

The Value of the Axial Age for a Successful Sustainability Revolution

This brings me to my fourth critical rejoinder, which like all the above pushes back against Halton's criticism of Jaspers' overvaluation of the Axial Age. Presumably much of the basis for this criticism consists in Jaspers' claim that the Axial Age structures world history—a claim that ignores and downplays evolutionary prehistory. Even if we grant Halton this point (which I think we should: Jaspers does downplay evolutionary prehistory, and the diversity of pre-Axial cultures), what is being left out is the other side to Jaspers' claim namely "the Axial Age, too, ended in failure. History went on" (*OGH* 20). It is a curious paradox in Jaspers' presentation that he seems to accord the Axial Age the greatest significance (in constituting the dividing line upon which the structure of world history pivots) while at the same time also claiming that it fails. Scholarship has not picked up on this curiosity in Jaspers' presentation, although I think proper appreciation of its import would significantly reorient interpretations—and reorient Halton's critique of Jaspers' overvaluation. In short, Jaspers' claim about the structure of world history is descriptively accurate in existential-philosophical terms vis-à-vis the mid-first

[13] See, for example, William H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West, A History of the Human Community, With a Retrospective Essay*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

[14] Although Michael Mann suggests that hunter-gatherer life was in part a conscious rejection of hierarchical power consequences of living in larger sedentary societies of civilization. See Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power: Volume 1, A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760*, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press 2012, p. 38.

millennium BCE: in terms of systems of thought and belief, it draws a dividing line between a great diversity before, and an aftermath in which merely several ever-growing systems amalgamate others and reduce that diversity, and (crucially on Jaspers' formulation) an aftermath in which people still continue to think and believe. These systems include Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Ancient Greek thought, and the Abrahamic monotheistic religions.

Regardless of the intellectual breakthroughs of the Axial Age, they should not be mistaken as causally responsible for post-Axial history. When viewed from a long-term trajectory of evolution in history, Axial Age visions of transcendence that had become so important for historically later systems of thought, merely benefitted from a newly found trajectory of growth and amalgamation of systems that displaced the previous long-term evolutionary-historical development of proliferation and diversity of societies. These visions do not change the trajectory of history. What they do is inject important elements into the historical trajectory of those ever-growing civilizations and systems of thought. What drives the trajectory of that history is the long arc of ever-increasing complexities of civilizations. Relative to what the Axial Age visionaries wished to accomplish, their visions merely being attached to this trajectory without diverting its direction amounts to their being a failure. What they wished to accomplish was a radical rejection of power, embodied in counter-cultural forms of life practiced in small communities, with a focus on individual piety aiming toward a profound transformation of the person relative to transcendent ideals. Taken collectively, success would look like many such small counter-cultural communities, spreading in a non-coercive manner through appealing to increasing numbers of peoples, until the trajectory of civilizational growth was redirected away from seeking worldly power toward a life of spirit.

Halton acknowledges this by noting: "though it offered a genuine counter-culture to centralized civilization, axialism eventually became problematically incorporated as rationalizing civilization" (*AMR* 69). Success for the Axial Age philosophers, prophets, holy men, and sages, would have meant a redirecting of that civilizational arc and prevention of its own "problematic incorporation" and "rationalization." It is this arc that consolidates the deep anthropocentrism (which the Axial Age visionaries only provisionally endorsed but ultimately rejected), and that later leads to what Halton appropriately calls "mechanico-centrism" to discuss how post-Axial developments have manifested in the present. This inhuman and unspiritual conception of mechanico-centrism and its ecologically destructive consequences are the antithesis to small hunter-gatherer societies that participate in the sacred game and who are profoundly mindful of their ecological surround; they are also the antithesis of the spirit and intent of the Axial Age visionaries. In focusing on the Axial Age as failure, there might prove to be more in common between those Axial visions and the animate mind than Halton seems willing to acknowledge. One exception to this last claim is Halton's own recognition of Buddhist mindfulness and Taoist nature practices as "ways of being deeply aware in the present" (*AMR* 124), save it is not clear why this recognition is not extended to include the full range of Axial spiritual practices,[15] whether Confucian disciplines of self-cultivation, Indian yoga, Greek exercises of contemplation, Old Testament prophets training for ecstasy or crying in the wilderness, or for that matter a Jesus who, it is said in various places in the New Testament, would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.

An appeal to the Axial Age visionaries certainly stands a far greater chance of bringing about a great transformation in the world religions they ostensibly founded, than do the players of the sacred game. Much of the possibility of Halton's pressing task for humanity to successfully accomplish a sustainability revolution hinges on a critical transformation of world religions toward an ecologically caring movement capable of critiquing civilizations as well as practicing self-critique. Halton's hopes appear ultimately pinned onto world religions being able to acknowledge the destructiveness of a civilizational trajectory to which these religions greatly contributed despite so many of the injunctions within their traditions and scriptures, as well as the lived example of their founding figures being contrary to this trajectory. Here I differ from Halton as I am pessimistic about the degree of rationality in religious believers. They certainly overvalue the Axial heritage with far less philosophical sophistication than Jaspers does.

I am convinced that these believers will need to be mobilized and motivated precisely in Axial terms that speak to their means of understanding. To the same

[15] This argument is further developed in Christopher Peet, *Practicing Transcendence: Axial Age Spiritualities for a World in Crisis*, New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019.

degree that the Axial Age had failed, also religious believers could be accused of being hypocritical and unfaithful to the founding visions of their world religions as intended by Confucius or Socrates, the Old Testament prophets or the Upanishads, Jesus or Muhammad. If they were capable to embrace the founding visions, it might well impel them to join and support the sustainability revolution, as I perceive little to nothing contrary to this revolution in these founding visions and certainly none of the founders themselves would have endorsed a mechanico-centrism or justified "entrenched maximizing materialism" (*AMR* 126). In wanting to counter the latter and its ecologically destructive effects, as well as in supporting the pressing task of a sustainability revolution, I am in full agreement with Halton. For this to be effective within the historically conditioned consciousness of the believers in world religions, I unfortunately perceive that Halton's appeal to the animate mind of human evolutionary heritage will fall on uncomprehending and unreceptive ears. In this respect, it seems to me that the failed Axial Age visions have more to say to the "effective historical consciousness" of members of world religions about current world crises than the impact of hunter-gatherer ancestors or evolutionary legacy.

If Halton can help open up the Axial Age thesis to an appropriately deep and rich engagement with the evolutionary legacy that precedes the history, he will have done an indispensable service to scholarship in the field. However, I do not think that this can be accomplished through undervaluing the depth of the effective historical consciousness at work in civilizations as a result of the Axial Age, nor can it be accomplished through an idealizing the prehistory to the Axial Age that underestimates the violence of that prehistory or which overestimates the latter's viability as a model for sustainability.