

## 'AXIAL' BREAKTHROUGHS AND SEMANTIC 'RELOCATIONS' IN ANCIENT EGYPT AND ISRAEL

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In the following contribution, I address the question whether and in what sense the 'Axial Age' led to a reformulation of the relation between politics and religion. The Axial Age theory was first formulated as early as the late eighteenth century by Anquetil DuPerron, a scholar of Zoroastrianism, who postulated that a "grande révolution du genre humain" took place around 500 BCE, when in East and West great individuals arose such as Confucius and Laotse, Buddha, Zoroaster, the prophets in Israel and the early philosophers in Greece who founded new religions and philosophical systems.<sup>1</sup> However, the term 'Axial Age' was only taken up and elaborated again after a more than 150 year period of latency by three thinkers: the sociologist Alfred Weber, whose *Kultursoziologie* appeared in 1935, the philosopher Karl Jaspers, whose *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* followed in 1949, and the political philosopher Eric Voegelin, whose monumental *Order and History* in 1956 reformulated the theory. Of these three, Jaspers coined the term "Axial Age" and made the theory famous; but it was only Voegelin who gave a comparably clear description of the 'pre-Axial' world, the world which Israel and Greece left behind. What in Weber's and Jaspers' reconstruction was nothing more than a pale counter-image of Europe, a mere 'not-yet', assumed a positive coloring in Voegelin's description as a world of its own right, a positive alternative to monotheism and philosophy. Voegelin's term for the pre-Axial world was "cosmological."

Voegelin describes the decisive Axial transformation as a breakthrough (or 'leap in being') from the 'cosmological myth,' leading to 'history' and monotheism in Israel, and to philosophy and metaphysics in Greece. He described this breakthrough as a process of conceptual transformation, from 'compactness' to 'differentiation.' Israel and Greece were able to recognize differences and draw distinctions where the oriental societies used 'compact' concepts blurring

<sup>1</sup> Metzler (1991).

these differences in a systematic way. The Egyptian evidence confirms this viewpoint, especially with regard to the distinction between the political and the religious sphere.<sup>2</sup> I think that the specific Axial transformation, which the Bible represents as the *children of Israel's* exodus from Egypt and entering into a new religious and political order, in fact concerns the fundamental distinction between religion and politics. This must therefore be reconstructed and interpreted in terms of political theology. What Voegelin, however, failed to see, and what only Egyptology is able to bring to light, is that this 'Axial' breakthrough had forerunners or foreshadowings in Egyptian history. This finding must affect the chronological implications of the Axial Age concept, and these forerunners may be explained historically by breakdowns and disappointments in the political sphere—historical experiences of a rather traumatic character. Is there a relation between breakdown and breakthrough, trauma and innovation?

## I ANTECEDENTS IN ANCIENT EGYPT

### 1. *The Judgment of the Dead*

The first of these traumatic experiences concerns the breakdown of the Old Kingdom (2800–2150 BCE), which gave rise of the idea of a *general judgment of the dead*.<sup>3</sup> In the Old Kingdom, judgment after death was modeled on a terrestrial court: it was only in session if there was a litigant. A dead person had to be prepared for any possible accusation, the more so as he/she had to reckon not only with human, but also with dead and divine accusers. However, if there was no accuser, there would neither be any trial. This form of post-mortem litigation was considered one of the many dangers belonging to the liminal state between 'this world' and the next. But it was not yet considered to be the necessary and inevitable threshold or passage between life and afterlife.

The idea that all who died had to pass an examination prior to entering the other world developed only after the fall of the Old Kingdom, at the beginning of the second millennium BC. This examination took the form of a tribunal, to which all had to present

<sup>2</sup> See Assmann (2000).

<sup>3</sup> See Griffiths (1991).

themselves after death. The significant difference between the old and the new concept, however, was that now the accuser was a god; but this god did not succeed whoever appeared, as per the Old Kingdom concept of judgment in the hereafter, as litigant and accuser; rather, he played the role formerly taken on by the king and the society. In the tombs of the Old Kingdom, biographical inscriptions began to appear during the latter half of the third millennium in which a tomb-owner addressed posterity and rendered account of his achievements. A common proverb conveyed that "the true monument of a man is his virtue; the evil character will be forgotten."<sup>4</sup> The immortality of the tomb owner depended on the verdict of posterity, on the memory of future generations and their willingness to read the inscriptions and to recall the personality of the deceased. Their judgment was to decide upon his immortality. Regarding their immortality, or at least a prolongation of their existence beyond the threshold of death, the Egyptians believed in the possibility to establish communication with posterity by means of a monumental tomb which would provide the possibility to future generations of visitors to read the inscriptions, regard the scenes and thus to become impressed enough by the virtue of the tomb-owner that would even recite a prayer for his soul.

The breakdown of the Old Kingdom in the last quarter of the third millennium, however, shattered this belief in the continuity of social memory and the durability of monuments. In this situation of anxiety and reorientation, the Egyptians 'divinized' posterity's verdict in the form of a divine judgment at the court of *Osiris*. The idea of such a general judgment of the dead, where divine authority made the decision about immortality or annihilation, might be interpreted as a breakthrough into a kind of transcendence.<sup>5</sup> Compared to this-worldly institutions such as king, society and posterity, the divine tribunal doubtlessly had a transcendent, other-worldly character. However, I prefer to speak not of 'breakthroughs' and 'transcendental visions,' but of 'semantic relocations' or 'transfers'.<sup>6</sup> Here, ideas or semiologies are transferred from one sphere to the other—that is, from the socio-political sphere of social memory to the divine

<sup>4</sup> For details see Goedicke (1962: 26) and Schenkel (1964: 11 pp.).

<sup>5</sup> See Assmann (1990: ch. V).

<sup>6</sup> See also Assmann (2000). Johan Arnason suggested the English term "relocation" for the German concept of "Umbuchung."

sphere. In this case the semantic relocation resulted from severe disappointment in the political sphere. In the Old Kingdom, people had invested all their means into erecting a monumental tomb which they considered to be a safe fundament of immortality. By means of such a tomb, they hoped to continue their existence in the vicinity of their lord, the pharaoh, and in the memory of posterity. The breakdown of the Old Kingdom, with the disappearance of kingship and the pilloring and destruction of the tombs, showed these hopes to be illusory. Longing for safer warrants of immortality, people looked beyond the social sphere. Thus, the 'breakdown' of political order caused a 'breakthrough' towards meta-political foundations of order. The god Osiris and his court filled the place vacated by the vanished pharaoh of the Old Kingdom, and he continued to stay in office even after pharaonic monocracy was reestablished in the Middle Kingdom. From then on, burial, tomb, and immortality were transferred from the political sphere of pharaonic competence to the divine sphere and laid into Osiris's hands, who became the lord of death and the afterlife.

## 2. *The Rise of Personal Piety*

Our next example represents the most conspicuous case of such a relocation in Egyptian religious history. It concerns the rise and the final breakthrough of a religious trend, which Egyptologists call "Personal Piety."<sup>7</sup> An individual formed a special relationship with a certain deity, which in Egyptian is paraphrased in formulas such as "putting god N into one's heart" and "walking (or acting) on the water of god N." This new trend finds its first expression in prayers and tomb inscriptions of the fifteenth century where we read sentences like

God is father and mother for him who takes him into his heart,  
He turns away from him who neglects his city, [. . .]  
But he whom he leads will not lose his way.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See Assmann (1996: 259–277, 2002). The term "Persönliche Frömmigkeit" has been coined by Erman in 1910 and translated as "Personal Piety" by James Henry Breasted, who, in his magisterial and highly influential book *The Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt* (1912), identified this concept as the hallmark of a whole period of Egyptian history ("The Age of Personal Piety"), referring to the Ramesside Age (1300–1100 BCE).

<sup>8</sup> Assmann (1983: 228 pp., 1975: No. 75).

And in a prayer:

I gave you into my heart because of your strength. [. . .]  
You are my protector. Behold: my fear has vanished.<sup>9</sup>

The language of these texts has a long history.<sup>10</sup> Many expressions can be traced back to the First Intermediate Period (2150–2000 BCE), where they describe the relation between patron and client. During the Middle Kingdom (2000–1750 BCE), the ruling dynasty adopted this relation, together with its rhetoric, for modeling of the new relationship between king and official. This was based on the latter's interior core of motivation, virtue and responsibility: the *heart*. This attitude, called 'loyalism,' was then, after the breakdown of the *Amarna* revolution, transferred to the divine sphere, and served to describe the relation between god and man. Typical of loyalism's rhetoric is the opposition of wrath and mercy, the formulae of *heart* and water, and especially the stylistic device called 'macarism' or 'beatitude' ("Happy the man who . . ."; "blessed is the man who . . ."), known to all of us from the beginning of the book of psalms.

The rhetoric of loyalism had an important revival in the Amarna age around the middle of the fourteenth century BCE where we often read sentences like:

Blessed the man who puts you into his heart,  
For he will spend his old age in perfection.<sup>11</sup>

The Amarna period is known as an age of religious revolution in Egypt.<sup>12</sup> *Akhenaten* closed the countless traditional cults and put the cult of the one single *Aten* in their place, the god of light and time. Akhenaten thought himself able to reduce the totality of reality to the workings of light and time; in his eyes, therefore, the other deities appeared as inert, superfluous, fictitious and false, contributing nothing to the explanation of reality. Akhenaten was the first in the history of mankind to apply the distinction between *true* and *false* to religion, the same distinction which later, in the form of biblical monotheism, led to a transformation of 'Axial' dimensions. Akhenaten changed Egyptian cosmology in a most radical way, but he did not

<sup>9</sup> Cairo CG 12217. See also Posener (1975: 206 pp.).

<sup>10</sup> Cairo CG 12217. See also Posener (1975: 206 pp.).

<sup>11</sup> Sandman (1938: 97.11–12).

<sup>12</sup> Hornung (2000); Montserrat (2000); Reeves (2001).

transcend it. His god was the sun, a cosmic energy, the source of light and time, without any personal and ethical traits. Above all, however, he did not touch the 'compact' unity or indistinction of religion and politics. On the contrary, he did everything to cement it and to counteract the beginnings of *personal piety*, which he seems to have felt as a rift in the politico-religious unity. Whereas Aton acted towards humanity as a cosmic energy, it was Akhenaten who presented himself as the personal god of the individual and the object of personal piety:

He shows his wrath against him who ignores his teachings  
And his favor to him who knows it.<sup>13</sup>

Whereas personal piety tended to form an immediate relationship between a deity and an individual outside the official institutions of cult and temple, Akhenaten reinstated the king as the sole mediator between god and man. In this respect, the Amarna religion was more of a restoration than an innovation.

However, Akhenaten failed with his project, and this failure led to a complete resurgence of what he originally strove to suppress. After his death, the Egyptians not only returned to their traditional deities; the beginnings of personal piety now developed into the dominant mentality and religious attitude of the time. For this reason, Breasted, as early as 1912, labeled this historical period "the age of Personal Piety."<sup>14</sup> This new form of personal piety is best described as a semantic relocation by which the concepts and rhetoric of loyalty were transferred from the political to the divine sphere, where they served to model the relationship between god and man. God succeeds the role played by Akhenaten in the Amarna period and formerly by the king in the Middle Kingdom and by the patron in the First Intermediate Period, acting as 'father' and 'mother to all': 'father of orphans,' 'husband of widows,' 'refuge for the persecuted,' 'protector of the poor,' 'good shepherd,' 'judge,' 'pilot' and 'rudder,' merciful towards his followers, terrible for his enemies. 'Relocation' means that something is withdrawn from one sphere and transferred to another. Thus, protection was no longer sought on the 'mundane' plane, from king or patrons, but on the divine plane, from a deity. In prayers we often read sentences of this kind:

<sup>13</sup> Sandman (1938: 86.15–16).

<sup>14</sup> Breasted (1972: 344–370).

I have not sought for myself a protector among men,  
 God N is my defender.<sup>15</sup>

In the time of *Ramses II*, a man called *Kiki*, a follower of the goddess *Mut* who donated all his property to her temple wrote in his tomb autobiography:

He bethought himself  
 That he should find a patron:  
 And he found Mut at the head of the gods,  
 Fate and fortune in her hand,  
 Lifetime and breath of life are hers to command.

[. . .] I have not chosen a protector among men,  
 I have not sought myself a patron among the great.  
 [. . .] My heart is filled with my mistress.  
 I have no fear of anyone.  
 I spend the night in quiet sleep,  
 because I have a protector.<sup>16</sup>

The triggering factor for this process of transaction seems obvious: it is the traumatic disappointment on the political level that the Amarna revolution must have meant to the majority of Egyptians, the spectacle of kingship turning sinful and criminal towards the gods in the most radical and terrible way. The breakdown of a politics stressing the religious monopoly of the state led to the loss of this monopoly and to the rise of personal forms of religiosity.

It is precisely in this line of historical trauma and semantic relocations that the rise of Biblical monotheism and covenant theology has to be interpreted. It means the transference of the political institutions of alliance, treaty and vassalhood from the mundane sphere of politics to the transcendental sphere of religion. In this respect, covenant theology may be compared to personal piety in Egypt which, as we have seen, was a relocation of the semiology of loyalism from the political to the religious sphere. In Israel, we are dealing with the 'semiological divinization' or 'theologization' of Egyptian, Hittite, Babylonian and especially Assyrian foreign politics (vassal treaties). What is most obvious, however, in the case of Israel is the connection with historical trauma. Covenant theology, and with it pure monotheism, developed after the fall of Jerusalem during and

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. Assmann (1975: 5 pp., 42 pp., 62 pp., 102 pp., 177).

<sup>16</sup> Qader-Mohammad (1960: 48 pp.); Wilson (1970) and Assmann (1975 Nr. 173).

after the Babylonian exile, after the complete failure and breakdown of the kingdom and after the loss of state and temple—in short, after the most traumatic series of experiences that could possibly befall a society in those times. The ensuing innovation corresponded in importance and consequence to the gravity of the historical traumatization, surpassing by far everything that ever occurred in Egyptian history.

Using the model of a political alliance as a new form of the relationship between god and man meant the creation of a completely new form of religion, which proved able to withstand the pressures of political oppression. The biblical texts, especially in *Deuteronomy*, use the language of Assyrian loyalty oaths<sup>17</sup> and vassal treaties.<sup>18</sup> The political theology of Assyria was adopted by ways of ‘subversive inversion’ and transformed into the political theology of Israel.<sup>19</sup> Whereas the former emphasizes the inseparable unity of the divine and the political, the latter accentuates the categorical separation of these two spheres.

It seems obvious to me that there is a connection between this distinction and separation between politics and religion. On the one hand we have the *Ausdifferenzierung* or separation of religion from the overall system of culture, politics, morality, and law, and, on the other, that much more general distinction between true and false in religion, which I have called the ‘Mosaic distinction.’ In this distinction I see the proper hallmark of monotheism.<sup>20</sup> My thesis is that this, rather than the widespread idea of the unity of the divine, was the great innovation that transformed the ancient world in the way of an Axial breakthrough. The distinction between true and false was alien to ‘primary religion,’<sup>21</sup> which was based on distinctions such as ‘pure’ and ‘impure,’ ‘sacred’ and ‘profane.’ Its introduction meant a revolutionary step, creating a new type of religion which, for the first time and quite unlike primary religion, set itself off; not only from other religions and its own religious tradition, but also from other spheres of culture such as politics, law and economy as a cultural sphere; not only as an autonomous sphere in its own right, but endowed with superior authority and normativity, forcing the other spheres under its spell.

<sup>17</sup> Otto (1999); Steymans (1995).

<sup>18</sup> Baltzer (1964).

<sup>19</sup> Otto (2000: 59–76).

<sup>20</sup> See Assmann (1997).

<sup>21</sup> See Sundermeier (1987: 411 pp., 1999).

Thus, the 'Mosaic distinction' between true and false meant, above all, the distinction between religion and politics or 'state' and 'church.' Akhenaten, it is true, had already drawn the same distinction with regard to the traditional religion of ancient Egypt, which he abolished as false. This step, however, did not lead to a separation between the political and the religious spheres. Kingship kept its position as a mediator between god and man even after the Amarna period, in the "age of Personal Piety"; only its monopoly was broken. But the state in Egypt continued to act simultaneously as a kind of church, it being the sole institutionalization of religion. The separation of politics and religion, "*Herrschaft*" and "*Heil*,"<sup>22</sup> the mundane and the transcendental, was therefore the exclusive achievement of Israel. This achievement is connected in the biblical account with the name of Moses and with the legend of the exodus of the children of Israel out of Egypt.<sup>23</sup>

The political meaning of the Mosaic Distinction becomes evident in the Exodus tradition. In this context, Egypt appears not so much as the representative of 'false religion,' that is, paganism and idolatry, but above all as the representative of 'false politics,' the 'house of serfdom.' The exodus from Egypt means leaving the house of oppression and entering the realm of freedom. 'Freedom,' to be sure, is not a biblical word and does not occur in this context, but the alliance or 'covenant' with God as formed at Mount Sinai is obviously presented as liberation from serfdom under human rulership. Entering the alliance and the Law did not initially mean to found a state, but to get rid of the oriental principle of statehood and to found a kind of counter-society, in which the principle of statehood or kingship is allowed only minimal place.<sup>24</sup> It is this anti-governmental impulse which is presented as a resistance against pharaonic oppression. Egypt appears as the paradigmatic 'state,' representing both political and divine power and order. By leaving Egypt, Israel separates itself from a political system denounced as false, oppressive,

<sup>22</sup> See Assmann (2000).

<sup>23</sup> As has been shown by Rodney Needham and Louis Dumont, a similar distinction underlies the Indian system of "Dual Sovereignty," that is, of religious (Brahmin) and political (Kshatriya) leadership. The duality of religious and military leadership seems, in fact, rather widespread even among tribal societies and has little to do with what I describe as the political implications and consequences of the "Mosaic Distinction."

<sup>24</sup> See Malamet (1990: 65-77); Handel (1981); Lohfink (1987); Clastres (1974).

and humiliating. Seen from the view-point of the biblical texts and narratively enacted as an exodus from Egypt, monotheism appears as a political movement of liberation from pharaonic oppression and as the foundation of an alternative way of life, where humans are not ruled by a state, but freely consent to enter an alliance with God and adopt the stipulations of divine law.<sup>25</sup> Just as the people are liberated from political oppression, God emancipates Himself from political representation. Religious salvation now becomes the exclusive competence of God, who now for the first time takes the initiative of historical action and withdraws once and for all the principle of salvation (“Heil”) from political representation and ‘mundane’ power. The new form of religion meant first and foremost a new way of life, based on the divine laws of justice and purity rather than a new belief system.

The story *takes place*<sup>26</sup> in Egypt and at a time strangely close to Akhenaten and his monotheistic revolution, in the fourteenth or thirteenth centuries BCE, but it *was told* at a much later time, in the seventh through fifth centuries, in Judah and Babylonia during the time of Babylonian exile and Persian supremacy. In historical reality, therefore, the separation of state and church was achieved only in the sixth and fifth centuries, when the political functions of the ‘state’ were taken care of by the Babylonian and Persian Empires, when Israel founded its identity as the people of God, a kingdom of priests based on *Torah* and *Temple* rather than on king and palace. From then on, politics and religion, or ‘state’ and ‘church,’ were different spheres whose relationship had to be laboriously negotiated and whose re-unification could only be achieved by force. Political theology turns into a critical discourse, which in biblical tradition is critical of government and, in Greek tradition, critical of religion. The distinction between and the separation of religion and politics or state and church has to be regarded as one of the most important features of *axiality*. This also means that the subsequent attempts at reuniting and streamlining<sup>27</sup> these two spheres, as in the French tradition of the ‘*rois thaumaturges*,’ in totalitarian forms of civil religion<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> See Assmann (2000: 46–52).

<sup>26</sup> I do not mean this, of course, in the historical sense of “what really happened”, but in the narratological sense of narrated time. The biblical narrative is located in Egypt somewhere in the 15th through 13th centuries.

<sup>27</sup> A helpless attempt at translating the Nazi-German term “Gleichschaltung.”

<sup>28</sup> See Voegelin (1993).

and also in religious movements insisting on the direct political realization of religious truth, may be regarded as shifts towards *de-axialization*.

The anti-Egyptian or, more generally, the anti-state character of biblical monotheism and its political theology finds clearest expression in the prohibition of images. Idolatry means, in the first place, legitimizing the state in terms of divine representation. The state presents itself, in its images, symbols and ceremonies, as representative of the Divine; in biblical view, this is idolatry. From the view-point of Egypt, however, this is precisely what the state was made for.<sup>29</sup> The Egyptians believed the gods were remote and hidden, withdrawn from earth and invisible. In lieu of their real presence, they installed the state on earth to represent them in the form of kings, images and sacred animals. The state's most important task is to ensure divine presence under the condition of divine absence, and thereby to maintain a symbiotic relationship between man, society and cosmos. The king acts as representative of the creator:

Re has installed the king  
on the earth of the living  
for ever and ever,  
administering justice to humans, satisfying the gods,  
creating true order and banishing disorder.  
The king gives divine offerings to the gods  
and mortuary offerings to the transfigured dead.<sup>30</sup>

The king depends on god whom he imitates and represents, and the god depends on the king for maintaining the order of creation on earth. God created the king, so to speak, 'in his image,' and in fact 'image of god' is one of the most-used royal epithets.

Biblical political theology is the exact inverse. From this perspective, it is precisely the category of representation which shows the falseness of pharaonic politics respectively religion in its most obvious and abhorrent form: the sphere of kings, images and sacred animals. The prohibition of images means, in the first place, that god must not be represented.<sup>31</sup> Images contradict the real presence of the divine which is implied in the idea of the covenant. Covenant

<sup>29</sup> See Assmann (1989: 55–88).

<sup>30</sup> See Assmann (1995: 19 pp.).

<sup>31</sup> See Dohmen (BBB 62, 2.ed. 1987); Mettinger (1995); Uehlinger (1998); Berlejung (1998); Dick (1999); Keel (2001).

means a form of god's turning towards the world which is both political and 'living.' The 'living god' (*Elohim hayim*) must not be represented. Images are a means of 'magically' representing the absent divine. Images, therefore, imply or presuppose the idea of divine absence. The 'living' god hides and reveals himself as he chooses and forbids any attempts at magical 'presentification.' This is the political meaning of the prohibition of images. The Golden Calf was meant to replace Moses, the only form in which God allowed Himself to be represented. The Israelites who believed Moses to be dead wanted to replace the representative of God by His representation. The function of the Golden Calf was clearly political. It was to serve not as a cult image but as a political symbol of leadership in the same way Moses did in his leading the people out of Egypt. The destruction of the Golden Calf put an end to these attempts of political representation. Images are artificial gods, and the relationship with 'other gods' (*elohim aherim*) is forbidden. An alliance is formed with one *overlord* only. The political meaning of monotheism in its early stage does not deny the existence of other gods. On the contrary, without the existence of other gods the request to stay faithful to the lord would be pointless. These 'other gods' were not non-existent, as were the gods whose worship Akhenaten abolished, but they were forbidden.

With the radical destruction of representation, the divine or 'transcendental' sphere became independent of political institutions. It was thus able to survive the Babylonian exile and the loss of sovereign statehood under the Persians, when the former kingdom of Judah became integrated into the Persian empire as a province within the *satrapy of Transeuphratene*. Religion became an autonomous sphere, constituting and consolidating a vantage point from which all other spheres of culture, including the political sphere, could be transformed. Max Weber, in his '*Zwischenbetrachtung*,' identified the tension between religion and other cultural spheres such as economy, politics, aesthetics, the erotic and the intellectual sphere, as characteristic of "*Erlösungsreligionen*" (religions of salvation or redemption).<sup>32</sup> Tension presupposes distinction and differentiation, and the process of differentiation, especially concerning the religious and the political spheres, so I believe, lies at the core of axiality.

<sup>32</sup> Weber (1920: 536–573).

Voegelin reconstructed the process leading from the "cosmological societies" of the Ancient Near East to the rise of new, meta-cosmic or "transcendental" world-views in Israel and Greece as a shift from "compactness" to differentiation. Compactness is the hallmark of myth and the totalizing tendency of mythical thinking.<sup>33</sup> Differentiation, on the other hand, may be identified as a hallmark of axi-ality. Axi-ality, however, is not to be equated neither with antiquity (a certain time-period around 500 BCE) nor with modernity per se.<sup>34</sup> Weber and all those following his lead, including Voegelin and Habermas, regarded differentiation as a purely mental process and a form of rationalization. What I wanted to show in my contribution, with regard to Ancient Egypt, is the close relationship between historical and intellectual processes. Distinctions and differentiations in the intellectual sphere were brought about and forced upon the human mind by catastrophic and traumatizing experiences on the plane of history. Certainly, the rise of monotheism in the Ancient World had historical consequences.<sup>35</sup> But the rise of monotheism may itself be seen as a consequence of historical changes. In this sense, I take the rise of intellectual and religious concepts in Ancient Egypt, such as the 'judgment of the dead' and 'personal piety' to be consequences of, or at least in some way or other related to, historical trauma such as the breakdown of the Old Kingdom and the Amarna experience.

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<sup>33</sup> See especially the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss. An overview can be obtained from Godelier (1973) and Habermas (1981).

<sup>34</sup> Weber, Habermas, and others have depicted the differentiation of autonomous spheres the most characteristic property of 'modernity.' I would like to thank Johan Arnason who drew my attention to the problem of reconciling my concept of "distinction and differentiation" with Max Weber's theory of the separation of cultural spheres which is closely related to Weber's concepts of occidental rationalization and modernization. I think it is important to distinguish between "axi-ality" and "modernity," especially if we take axi-ality as a non-evolutionary concept (the "axial paradigm", not the "axial age").

<sup>35</sup> See Stark (2001).

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where we had heard a lot, but not enough for academia. For one thing, I did not have enough credits for PPE. When I graduated in 1942, I was mobilized for war service like every one else. I was sent to work as an Assistant Pauper in the Colonial Office until 1946. There I had the good fortune to meet some anthropologists who encouraged me to read their books. This transformed my idea of what I wanted to do with my life. I wanted to become an anthropologist. So as soon as the war was over, I was demobilized and went back to university and to begin this new career.

Q: Was there any special reason for choosing Egypt?

M.D.: There weren't many places to study anthropology in England at that time, only Cambridge and London. Oxford had several

\* The interview was conducted on the occasion of Mary Douglas's visit to Kingston in September 2001 to chair the graduate conference 'Key-issues: Monism' on Politics and Religion. It was edited by David Soper and Mary Kester. A review in December 2003 gave the opportunity to fill gaps and clarify details. We want to thank Professor Douglas for her obligence and kindness. D.S. and M.K.