

**From the Axial Age to the Moral Revolution**  
John Stuart-Glennie, Karl Jaspers, and a New Understanding of the Idea

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**Contents, Preface, Excerpt**

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**1**

**Jaspers, Stuart-Glennie, and the Origins of the Theory**

*Abstract: Karl Jaspers published his theory of an "Axial Age" 1949, which was translated into English in 1953. He claimed credit for elaborating the first full theory of the axialage. Yet 75 years earlier, in 1873, unknown to Jaspers and to contemporary scholars today, folklorist John Stuart Stuart-Glennie elaborated a fully developed and nuanced theory of what he termed "the Moral Revolution" to characterize the historical shift around roughly 600 B.C.E. in a variety of civilizations. He continued to write and develop his theory, and also presented his ideas to the Sociological Society of London in 1905. This chapter provides evidence for Stuart- Glennie's claim to be the first to develop a fully articulated theory of what later became known as the axial age, as well as his*

three stage “ultimate law of history.” It also considers Lewis Mumford’s original contributions to the theory.

**Keywords:** Karl Jaspers; Axial Age; John Stuart-Stuart-Glennie; The Moral Revolution

## 2

### **Religion, Habitat, and Cosmos**

*Abstract: Religion, as Stuart-Glennie conceived it, is rooted in intuitions and conceptions of causation, developed out of relations to the physical and social environments. This starting point allowed a perceptive and experiential element to religion as expressive of life-experience, not simply of human sociality per se. Stuart-Glennie characterized the origins of religion as Panzoonist, literally “all life,” and this chapter describes how he distinguished it from anthropologist E. B. Tylor’s well-known idea of animism. He argued that with civilizational structures rooted in what he terms “a colonist-origin theory,” panzoonist belief transitioned into supernaturalist beliefs of polytheism and later, monotheism. His racial assumptions involved in his “colonist-origin theory” are criticized, and his understanding of supernaturalism as legitimating the dominant elite and its relation to the moral revolution are discussed. Stuart-Glennie’s understanding of religion is contrasted with that of Emile Durkheim.*

**Keywords:** panzoonism; animism; supernal; supernaturalism; colonist-origin theory of civilization; Emile Durkheim

## 3

### **Panzoonism, the Bioticon, and the 500-Year Cycles of History**

*Abstract: Stuart-Glennie did not limit his theory of history to the history of ideas, but also proposed to substitute for “the absolutist conception of the atom an entirely relative term, bioticon, fit for life, lively, of or pertaining to life.” This chapter describes his idea of the bioticon, its relation to panzoonism and his causal theory of history. Stuart-Glennie also developed theory of 500 year periods of history, which begin with the moral revolution of about 500 B.C.E. and culminate with the end of the*

twentieth century. His periodic view of history is compared with views of Charles Peirce and Mumford.

**Keywords:** panzoonism; bioticon; 500-year cycles of history; Charles Peirce

## 4

### Islands of Light

*Abstract: Prehistory was for Jaspers a “dark world,” literally in the sense that he did not think much evidence was available, and theoretically in the sense that he did not see it contributing to the development of human spirituality. He views the civilizations out of which the axial figures emerged as “little islands of light” in an otherwise unilluminated world of primitive peoples, who contributed “nothing of importance to the history of the spirit.” This chapter shows the limitations of Jaspers’ ethnocentrism, and provides evidence on why pre-axial and non-civilizational peoples achieved noteworthy religious outlooks of crucial significance to “the history of the spirit.” Such views, characterized in Stuart-Glennie’s view as panzoonism, provide a broader evolutionary context for understanding the supernaturalism of the moral revolution as a transitional phase, as Stuart-Glennie saw it, which Jaspers’ theory of an axial age cannot encompass.*

**Keywords:** hunter-gatherer; the sacred game; the generalized other; desacralization of the wild habitat

## 5

### Jaspers and Mumford

*Abstract: Mumford was one of the first thinkers after Jaspers to elaborate on the idea of the axial age, in 1956, along with Eric Voegelin, who first took up the theme of the axial age the year after Mumford in 1957. Though Mumford wrote on the axial age early, a few years after Jaspers’ publication, his multiple writings on the idea over the years have remained curiously marginal to scholarly discussion. This chapter compares Jaspers’ view of the axial age with that of Mumford, who was also aware of Stuart-Glennie’s work as preceding Jaspers by decades,*

*revealing a more critical stance by Mumford on the legacy of the axial age.*

Keywords: Lewis Mumford; axial man; Karl Jaspers; science and technology; myth of the machine; megamachine

## 6

### **The Next Transformation?**

*Abstract: Stuart-Glennie, Jaspers, and Mumford not only all wrote on the moral revolution/axial age, but also drew from their discussions of that revolutionary age its place in a potential transformation in the future, which this chapter discusses. These were not histories of a transformative but finished chapter of human development, but rather of a still unfolding narrative to be fathomed. Stuart-Glennie's "Ultimate Law of History" comprised a threefold dialectical process, from the panzooist stage, through the supernaturalist, to a future "Third Age of Humanity." This new age would begin with the twenty-first century and would involve the establishment of a "United States of Europe." Mumford and Jaspers not only shared an interest in the axial age and its place in history, but both were among the first thinkers to engage the consequences of nuclear bombs and the nuclear age, reflecting on the meanings of the axial age for contemporary technological civilization.*

Keywords: Ultimate Law of History; Third Age of Humanity; United States of Europe; post-historic man

## 7

### **The Moral Revolution and the Modern Revolution Today**

*Abstract: Stuart-Glennie, Jaspers, and Mumford all took the implications of the moral revolution as more than merely historical, as holding significance for understanding contemporary life and the future of humankind. This chapter turns to the contemporary context of the ideas of these figures, first by briefly examining Robert Bellah's recent book, Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age, then by discussing another unlikely contributor to this theme and an unknown predecessor to Jaspers, the well-known writer*

*D. H. Lawrence, who also addressed troubling issues of contemporary global civilization. Following that Halton presents his way of framing human development as involving progress in precision, counteracted by a contraction in mind, and the place of the moral revolution within that framework.*

Keywords: D. H. Lawrence; Robert Bellah; spectator consciousness; contractions of mind; animate mind; anthropocentric mind; mechanocentric mind

# Preface

Imagine what it is like to discover buried treasure, hidden in plain sight. I hope to share that buried treasure with you in this book. Like some Hollywood archaeology movie such as “Indiana Jones,” unearthing the hidden treasure involves exploring swaths of history and prehistory, from the Ancient Near and Far East, the philosophical and religious revolutions of Greek and Chinese philosophers, of Buddha and Jesus, of kingship and cosmos.

Finding the treasure also involves a missing person, a Scottish scholar who was known for his writings during his lifetime, and figured in prominent debates of the time. But within just a couple of years after his death in 1910, he had sunk into total oblivion, leaving prescient ideas buried within the leaves of his books, ideas clearly far ahead of their time. This scholar has provided a buried treasure of thought, whose time has finally come to be brought to light. His work deals with one of the most revolutionary and transformative periods of all human development, from over two millennia ago: a time of emergent religious, intellectual, and sociopolitical changes, which produced ideas which still have hold over billions of people. He called this period “The Moral Revolution,” but it has become known as “The Axial Age.”

The theory of the Axial Age is associated with Karl Jaspers (1883–1969), who, in his 1949 book, *The Origin and Goal of History*, claimed to be the first to develop a full theory of the phenomenon, despite a few earlier scholars who noted the facts, “but only marginally.” Yet 75 years earlier, in 1873, unknown to Jaspers, John Stuart Stuart-

Glennie (1841–1910) elaborated a fully developed and nuanced theory of what he termed “the Moral Revolution” to characterize the historical shift around roughly 600 B.C.E. in a variety of civilizations, most notably ancient China, India, Israel, and Greece, as part of a broader critical theory of history.

The shift involved the appearance of a new outlook, with a new emphasis on the inner resources of the person as against the centralized power structures characterizing civilized societies, new emphases on conscience over custom, and on religious and political democratization. Across diverse civilizations figures arose voicing inner power over the status quo of external power. Take, for example, Confucius (c.551–479 B.C.E.): “What the superior man seeks is in himself; what the small man seeks is in others.” Or Buddha (560–480 B.C.E.): “Self is the fleeting error of *samsāra*; it is individual separateness and that egotism which begets envy and hatred... The attainment of truth is possible only when self is recognized as illusion;” or Socrates (460–399 B.C.E.): “The unexamined life is not worth living.” or Jesus (6 B.C.E.–27 CE): “And he said unto them, the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” Consider that Jesus, like Socrates a construction worker and social agitator who was tried and sentenced to death, became the basis for the years of the calendar used throughout the globe today, displacing the God-like power of Roman emperors, even if they hung on to some of the months. Both Jesus and Socrates manifested what Vaclav Havel has called “the power of the powerless.” But it was also a time of the establishment of world empires, such as that of Cyrus the Great of Persia, as well as the beginnings of democracy in ancient Greece.

Though there were even earlier scholars who noted the theme, such as Ernst von Lasaulx in 1856, Viktor von Strauss in 1870, and possibly Anquetil-Duperron from the eighteenth century;<sup>1</sup> the theory of “The Moral Revolution” articulated by John Stuart Stuart-Glennie as early as 1873, and in numerous subsequent works throughout the rest of his life, marks the first fully articulated theory of the concept, a theory for which Jaspers unknowingly claimed to have been the originator.

If Stuart-Glennie had lived in complete obscurity, the absence of his ideas in discussions of this historical phenomenon might be understandable. But he did not live in obscurity. He returned again and again to the theme of the Moral Revolution in books and articles. Over 30 years after he articulated the theory in 1873, he presented his ideas yet again to a major meeting of the sociological society in London, where his

papers were discussed and commented upon. But virtually no one there noticed his theory of the moral revolution. The emergent social science of sociology let slip by a theory that would come back decades later from growing interest in Jaspers' work. And historians of sociology to this day are unaware that the theory of the "axial age" proposed by Jaspers had already been articulated decades earlier in a sociological context by John Stuart Stuart-Glennie.

The recent publications of Robert Bellah's book in 2011, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age*, and Bellah and Hans Joas's edited volume in 2012, *The Axial Age and Its Consequences*, mark comprehensive collections with a broad array of scholarship on the topic. These works have sparked renewed interest in the idea, yet Stuart-Glennie remains missing from the debate (despite a quotation from his work in a footnote to the bibliography in the Bellah and Joas edited volume). Where those books are comprehensive, this book aims to be exploratory, opening up ideas for consideration. Though I will make some use of materials from these and other works, this book has a more limited scope, dealing primarily with issues related to the origins and context of the theory of what Jaspers called the axial age.

This book brings to light Stuart-Glennie's now-eclipsed theories of the Moral Revolution and "Ultimate Law of History," compares his ideas with those of Jaspers, and proposes a new context for understanding the phenomenon. Lewis Mumford (1895–1990), who was one of the first scholars after Jaspers to make use of the idea of the axial age, is the only scholar after Stuart-Glennie's eclipse to note his original contribution, though he never discussed the content of Stuart-Glennie's ideas, and mistakenly took his last name to be "Glennie." I first became acquainted over three decades ago with Stuart-Glennie indirectly from Mumford's passing mention of him as a predecessor to Jaspers, and cited him myself in the mid-1990s. I had begun to be interested in the phenomena of the axial age from the time I was still a graduate student in the late 1970s, discussing it with a number of Ancient Near East students and scholars, as well as historians such as Arnaldo Momigliano. And I was interested in the parallels and contrasts between Jaspers' view of history and Mumford's. But I had not gotten around to reading Stuart-Glennie directly and at length until 2009, and immediately realized that he had developed a far-reaching understanding of the phenomenon.<sup>2</sup>

There are a number of reasons why Stuart-Glennie's eclipsed work needs to be reconsidered. I wish to claim: 1) that Stuart-Glennie deserves



to be given full credit as originating the fully articulated theory well in advance of Jaspers; 2) that his term “Moral Revolution” provides a more accurate depiction of the phenomena than the term “Axial,” with its assumption of one key pivot in history; 3) that Stuart-Glennie’s understanding of the prior historic and especially prehistoric eras provides a sounder context than that of Jaspers, despite some significant shortcomings which I will note; and 4) that Mumford’s position provides another valuable though rarely discussed perspective, more critical of the legacy of the era than Jaspers, or even of some recent commentators. Neither Bellah, Shmuel Eisenstadt, or the contributors to the Bellah and Joas edited volume even mention Mumford, despite his prominence over decades as a public intellectual.<sup>3</sup> Though these last three claims may be open to question to some, they merit being brought into public discussion.

But there is more, another discovery, I will bring to light. In the final chapter I will introduce more buried treasure, another unlikely predecessor to Jaspers, who, though a well-known writer, remains unknown to the decades of scholarship on the axial age. Yet he laid out an original theory on the phenomena almost two decades before Jaspers. And where Stuart-Glennie’s writings were out of print for more than a century and difficult to find, this writer’s relevant works have been hiding in plain sight for anyone to read, and remain in print today. He is D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930).

In contrast to Jaspers’s depiction of a singular world-historical “axis,” both Stuart-Glennie and Mumford, while acknowledging its profound significance, provide a more nuanced view of the phenomena and their larger context, especially of the prior historic and prehistoric eras. By the ethics of terminology, Stuart-Glennie and his term deserve to be given credit, and the history of this fascinating idea needs to be revised.

Given the broad acceptance of the term “axial” today, it may seem presumptuous to call for a revision of the originator of the theory and of the term. But what if, say, psychoanalysis had been discovered 75 years earlier than Freud by someone and given a different name?

The scientist and philosopher Charles Peirce, who also worked professionally as a lexicographer, claimed that a scientific ethics of terminology should include not only a scientific name for a scientific conception, but that “The author of a scientific conception has the first right to name it; and his name ought to be accepted, unless there are grave substantial objections to it” (Peirce, 1992, 230).<sup>4</sup> There is an accepted ethics of terminology that an original theory should be credited to its originator, and the originator of the theory I am discussing clearly preceded Jaspers. This does not mean that

Stuart-Glennie's theory of the moral revolution is without some serious flaws, as I hope to show, just as Jaspers's theory of the axial age is.

Yet Stuart-Glennie also introduces gradations unexplored by Jaspers, such as a view of prehistory as *panzoonist* (sometimes spelling it "panzoo-ist") in outlook, revering "all life" as a religious basis for conceiving nature. *Panzoonism* is a term introduced by Stuart-Glennie to depict a worldview that has also been characterized as animism, and I shall discuss it in more detail in Chapter 2. Yet Stuart-Glennie makes a good case for why animism does not accurately characterize prehistoric outlooks, though his argument is not always the easiest to follow. Similarly he invented a term, *bioticon*, to characterize matter, as I shall discuss in Chapter 3. His writing, terminology, and outlook can be in places thorny, and so I take it as my task to attempt to "translate" Stuart-Glennie's sometimes difficult prose and ideas into a fluid compelling narrative as best as I can.

I also will compare Lewis Mumford's critical discussion of the axial age with that of Jaspers. Mumford was one of the first thinkers after Jaspers to elaborate on the idea, in 1956, along with Eric Voegelin, who first took up the theme of the axial age the year after Mumford in 1957 in the second volume of his book *Order and History Volume Two: The World of the Polis*. Voegelin's discussion of Jaspers in a few brief pages of an almost 500-page book has entered into the literature on the axial age, but Mumford's multiple uses of the idea over the years has not, which is regrettable. Mumford and Jaspers not only shared an interest in the axial age and its place in history, but both were among the first thinkers to engage the consequences of nuclear bombs and the nuclear age, reflecting on the meanings of the axial age for contemporary technological civilization. The alternatives to Jaspers provided by Stuart-Glennie, Mumford, and D. H. Lawrence open new ways of conceiving the meaning of what has thus far been termed the axial age. Yet Stuart-Glennie, the originator of the theory, is unknown, as are Lawrence's contributions, and Mumford's discussions only rarely mentioned. All three need to be put into the picture, because their respective theories change the picture.

# 1

## Jaspers, Stuart-Glennie, and the Origins of the Theory

**Abstract:** *Karl Jaspers published his theory of an “Axial Age” 1949, which was translated into English in 1953. He claimed credit for elaborating the first full theory of the axial age. Yet 75 years earlier, in 1873, unknown to Jaspers and to contemporary scholars today, folklorist John Stuart Stuart-Glennie elaborated a fully developed and nuanced theory of what he termed “the Moral Revolution” to characterize the historical shift around roughly 600 B.C.E. in a variety of civilizations. He continued to write and develop his theory, and also presented his ideas to the Sociological Society of London in 1905. This chapter provides evidence for Stuart-Glennie’s claim to be the first to develop a fully articulated theory of what later became known as the axial age, as well as his three stage “ultimate law of history.” It also considers Lewis Mumford’s original contributions to the theory.*

**Keywords:** Karl Jaspers; Axial Age; John Stuart Stuart-Glennie; The Moral Revolution

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## Jaspers' axial thesis

Karl Jaspers published his theory of an "Axial Age" in his book *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* in 1949, which was translated into English in 1953 as *The Origin and Goal of History*. The German term "Achsenzeit," literally "axis-time," translated as Axial Age, signifies axis or pivot, and characterizes the historical shift that occurred largely between 800 and 200 B.C.E. in a variety of civilizations, though inclusive of later figures including Jesus and Mohammed. Jaspers cites Hegel's remark, "All history moves toward Christ and from Christ. The appearance of the Son of God is the axis of history." But he notes that this really applies only to believing Christians, and that if there is an axis of history, it must apply to all humankind. Let me quote at length his depiction of the axial age to give a sense of his understanding of its breadth:

It would seem that this axis of history is to be found in the period around 500 B.C., in the spiritual process that occurred between 800 and 200 B.C. It is there that we meet with the most deep cut dividing line in history. Man, as we know him today, came into being. For short we may style this the "Axial Period."

The most extraordinary events are concentrated in this period. Confucius and Lao Tse were living in China, all the schools of Chinese philosophy came into being, including Mo-ti, Chuang-tse, Lieh-tsu, and a host of others; India produced Upanishads and Buddha and, like China, ran the whole gamut of philosophical possibilities down to skepticism, to materialism, sophism and nihilism; in Iran Zarathustra taught a challenging view of the world as a struggle between good and evil; in Palestine prophets made their appearance, from Elijah, by way of Isaiah and Jeremiah to Deutero-Isaiah; Greece witnessed the appearance of Homer, of the philosophers — Parmenides, Heraclitus and Plato — of the tragedians, Thucydides and Archimedes. Everything implied by these names developed during these few centuries almost simultaneously in China, India, and the West, without any one of these regions knowing the others.<sup>1</sup>

Other characteristics include the rise of "rationally clarified experience" over myth; religion becoming increasingly ethical belief; the appearance of philosophers, speculative thought, and longing for transcendence, whether through Buddhist Nirvana, Greek ataraxia (lucid freedom from agitation), or Chinese alignment with the Tao; and a heightening of "the *specifically human in man* which, bound to and concealed within the body, fettered by instincts and only dimly aware of himself, longs

for liberation and redemption and is able to attain to them already in this world."<sup>2</sup>

Jaspers notes further:

What is new about this age, in all three areas of the world, is that man becomes conscious of Being as a whole, of himself and his limitations. He asks radical questions. Face to face with the void he strives for liberation and redemption. By consciously recognizing his limits he sets himself the highest goals. He experiences absoluteness in the depths of selfhood and in the lucidity of transcendence.

All this took place in reflection. Consciousness became once more conscious of itself. In this age were born the fundamental categories within which we still think today, and the beginnings of the world religions, by which humans still live, were created.<sup>3</sup>

Through the axial age, Jaspers claimed, "the spiritual foundations of humanity were laid simultaneously and independently. And these are the foundations upon which humanity still subsists today."<sup>4</sup> In providing "the spiritual foundations," the axial age appeared to Jaspers as the prime pivot of all of human development.

Jaspers takes credit for elaborating the first full theory of the axial age. He does cite Ernst von Lasaulx and Viktor von Strauss as the earliest scholars to call attention to the *facts* of the axial period, in 1856 and 1870 respectively:

Lasaulx writes: "It cannot possibly be an accident that, six hundred years before Christ, Zarathustra in Persia, Gautama Buddha in India, Confucius in China, the prophets in Israel, King Numa in Rome and the first philosophers-Ionians, Dorians and Eleatics-in Hellas, all made their appearance pretty well simultaneously as reformers of the national religion."<sup>5</sup>

Viktor von Strauss, in his wonderful Lao-tse commentary . . . (1870), says: "During the centuries when Lao-tse and Confucius were living in China, a strange movement of the spirit passed through all civilised peoples. In Israel Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Daniel and Ezekiel were prophesying and in a renewed generation (521-516 [B.C.E.]) the second temple was erected in Jerusalem. Among the Greeks Thales was still living, Anaximander, Pythagoras, Heraclitus and Xenophanes appeared and Parmenides was born. In Persia an important reformation of Zarathustra's ancient teaching seems to have been carried through, and India produced Sakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism."<sup>6</sup>

Both of these quotations denote the phenomenon explicitly, and the Lasaulx quotation cited by Jaspers continues, in Hans Joas's

translation: “this remarkable coincidence can have its foundation only in the inner substantial unity of mankind and the life of peoples . . . , not in the particular effervescence of one national spirit.” Joas notes, “It would seem as if Jaspers had directly taken it up from here.”<sup>7</sup>

Jaspers did acknowledge these forerunners, yet also notes that “Since then these facts have now and then been noted, but only marginally. As far as I am aware, they have never been grasped as a whole, with the aim of demonstrating the universal parallels obtaining for the entire spiritual being of the humanity at that time.”<sup>8</sup> In his early 1919 book, *Psychology of Worldviews*, Jaspers had drawn heavily from his mentor Max Weber’s work on world religions, and was aware later of Weber’s suggestion of the parallel rise of prophecy “in connection with the reconstitution of the great world empires” in the eighth through fifth centuries B.C.E.<sup>9</sup> But again, Weber’s statement was at best a marginal footnote to Jaspers’ independent development of the axial age theory. Weber had stated in his book, *Economy and Society*, posthumously published in 1922:

The period of the older Israelitic prophecy at about the time of Elijah was an epoch of strong prophetic propaganda throughout the Near East and Greece. Perhaps prophecy in all its types arose, especially in the Near East, in connection with the reconstitution of the great world empires in Asia, and the resumption and intensification of international commerce after a long interruption. At that time Greece was exposed to the invasion of the Thracian cult of Dionysos, as well as to the most diverse types of prophecies. In addition to the semiprophetic social reformers, certain purely religious movements now broke into the simple magical and cultic lore of the Homeric priests . . . It is not necessary to detail here these developments of the eighth and seventh centuries, so brilliantly analyzed by Rhode, some of which reached into the sixth and even the fifth century. They were contemporary with Jewish, Persian, and Hindu prophetic movements, and probably also with the achievements of Chinese ethics in the pre-Confucian period, although we have only scant knowledge of the latter.<sup>10</sup>

This is a clear intuition of the common theme Jaspers later termed the axial age, though Weber did not develop it explicitly further. Also of note is that Stuart-Glennie had explicitly written decades earlier, in 1873, about “Prophetianism” as a new outlook characterizing emergent religions of the age of the moral revolution, when Max Weber was only nine years old.

Jaspers also took Max Weber’s brother Alfred as an influence. In 1935 Alfred Weber had noted, “The three established cultural spheres – the

Near Eastern—Greek, the Indian and the Chinese—arrived at universally-oriented religious and philosophical seeking, questioning and choosing with remarkable synchronicity and apparently independently of one another from the beginning of the second half of the age of the great migrations, that is, from the ninth to the sixth century B.C.”<sup>11</sup> He also argued for the expanding colonization by central Asian horse cultures as an influence in the cross-civilizational simultaneity of the axial period.

Jaspers’ idea of the axial age slowly spread, and began to reach a broader audience after a special issue devoted to it appeared in the journal *Daedalus* in 1975. In 1986 S. N. Eisenstadt edited an excellent collection titled *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations*, and more recently co-edited *Axial Civilizations and World History* in 2005. As mentioned, sociologist Robert Bellah has also written recently on the concept, publishing a major book in 2011, and in 2008 organized a conference with Hans Joas on the topic, which resulted in the recent comprehensive volume *The Axial Age and Its Consequences* (2012). One of Bellah’s chief concerns was to address the rise of “second order” or theoretic thinking in the axial age, through using Merlin Donald’s approach to the evolution of culture and cognition. I shall discuss Bellah’s work in Chapter 7.

But almost twenty years before the 1975 *Daedalus* issue, and three years after the translation appeared in English, Lewis Mumford devoted a whole chapter to “axial man” in his 1956 book, *The Transformations of Man*. Mumford acknowledged using Jaspers’ concept of the axial age, but also claimed that he used the word “axial” independently in his 1951 book, *The Conduct of Life*, though his context for the term in that work is to argue for a contemporary axial transformation rather than to single out an earlier historical epoch. But he also mentions that the idea has been around for a while, and how “this change of direction was noted early in the present century by J. Stuart Glennie [sic].”<sup>12</sup>

Later, in his 1967 book, *Technics and Human Development*, Mumford again drew attention to Stuart-Glennie: “The first scholar to describe this simultaneous movement and understand its significance was an almost forgotten Scotsman, J. Stuart Glennie (sic), who also called attention to a five-hundred year cycle in culture: and both Karl Jaspers and I have independently called these new religions and philosophies ‘Axial’—a deliberately ambivalent term which includes both the idea of ‘value,’ as in the science of Axiology, and centrality, that is the convergence of all separate institutions and functions upon the human personality, around

which they revolve."<sup>13</sup> Again, Mumford's earlier use of the term "axial" was for a contemporary "axial change," not the ancient "axial age," termed by Jaspers. So it seems to me Mumford was exaggerating his independence in his uses of the term "axial age."<sup>14</sup>

In his annotated bibliography for this work, under Jaspers' book *The Origins and Goal of History*, Mumford also drew attention again to Stuart-Glennie by cross-referencing: "Note chapter on the Axial period. See Glennie, J. Stuart."<sup>15</sup> There, under Glennie, Mumford cited and commented on Stuart-Glennie's 1906 piece: "The latest and most available exposition of a thesis first set forth in the seventies, on periodicity in history. Glennie (sic) discerned five-hundred year cycles, and was the first to point out the contemporaneity of the Axial religions and philosophies, and the significance of the ethical transformation they introduced."<sup>16</sup>

Mumford most likely became aware of Stuart-Glennie through his mentor, sociologist Patrick Geddes, who, with Victor Branford, brought Mumford to London in 1920 to be editor of *The Sociological Review*. Geddes and Branford had both commented on Stuart-Glennie's presentation of his theory of the moral revolution in the 1906 collection, *Sociological Papers, Volume 2*. This was an annual publication by the Sociological Society which led to the founding of *The Sociological Review* in January 1908. Geddes also wrote an obituary for his friend Stuart-Glennie in *The Sociological Review* in 1910.

As mentioned, I have been aware of Mumford's reference to "Glennie" for over three decades, yet only finally got around to begin dredging up and reading the major works of Stuart-Glennie in 2009. They had long since fallen into obscurity, and had to be tracked down. It immediately became apparent that Stuart-Glennie had fully fleshed out the idea as early as 1873, had given it a term, *The Moral Revolution*, and had put it in a historical context which has some distinct advantages over that of Jaspers' conception of the axial age, despite Stuart-Glennie's shortcomings.

## The strange eclipse of Stuart-Glennie

John Stuart Stuart-Glennie was born in 1841 in Aberdeen, Scotland, and died in Florence, Italy, in 1910. He was a known scholar and writer in his day. His grandfather on his mother's side was a Professor of Greek at the University of Aberdeen. Geddes notes in his obituary that



He was educated at the Grammar School and the University of Aberdeen and at the University of Bonn. After graduating, he travelled widely in Europe and America, was called to the Bar at the Inner Temple, and practiced in the court of his kinsman, the Vice-Chancellor Sir John Stuart. Then, giving up practice, he undertook a series of journeys of historical exploration in the East, the fruit of which was a long series of books and papers beginning with the 'New Philosophy of History' (1873), and including numerous contributions to the transactions of the Royal Historical Society, the British Association, the Congresses of Orientalists, the Folklore Congress, the Sociological Society, etc.<sup>17</sup>

He corresponded and did some early traveling with philosopher John Stuart Mill. Both, according to Geddes, shared the middle name Stuart from Stuart-Glennie's grandfather, Sir John Stuart, though it is not clear to me whether it is Stuart-Glennie's grandfather the Greek scholar, or the "kinsman" Vice-Chancellor, cited in Geddes' obituary above, who was a judge and well-regarded landlord. From Geddes' description it seems to be the latter:

It was after his grandfather, Sir John Stuart, that both Stuart-Glennie and John Stuart Mill derived their names: for James Mill [John Stuart Mill's father], the son of a small tenant upon Stuart's estate, thus in later life commemorated his old laird's kindness in helping him with his own education at Aberdeen. Does not a little point like this throw light upon Stuart-Glennie's philosophy of society? His broadest generalisation of social philosophy, his evolutionary hope of the progressive interaction of all classes are thus based more deeply than he ever realized upon his early experience of that broad diffusion and general interaction of culture and capacity throughout all classes which to this day distinguish the region-city and university of Aberdeen.<sup>18</sup>

Stuart-Glennie also interacted with other leading intellectuals, yet his writings fell into eclipse. He was a historian and folklorist, a member of the folklore society who debated the leading ideas of Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, criticizing his understanding of animism. In the first *Sociological Papers, Volume 1*, published in 1905, he also responded to a paper given by Emile Durkheim in a session "On the Relation of Sociology to the Social Sciences and Philosophy," where Victor Branford had also given a paper. Other responders included Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Bertrand Russell, and Ferdinand Tönnies. Unfortunately Stuart-Glennie devoted most of his response to Durkheim to enunciating his own "principles of Method, courses of Research, and resulting Theories" rather than

taking up Durkheim's paper.<sup>19</sup> He does, however, criticize Durkheim for using the term "sociology" "to signify both a causal or 'pure' science, 'a theory of the origin, growth, and destiny of Humanity,' and an applied science—a science concerned with 'the construction of principles applicable to the ordering of social life.'"<sup>20</sup> He then suggests that anthropology should be the term for a causal science, and sociology, or what Stuart-Glennie calls *politology*, to the applied general science of man. One sees that the disciplinary terms were perhaps not yet as fully fixed as they would become in the institutionalization of disciplines in universities, though they were already well on the way. Stuart-Glennie characterized himself variously both as folklorist and sociologist, though neither he nor Durkheim, nor any of the contributors to these early volumes, had degrees in sociology.

Stuart-Glennie was also an early associate of the British socialist movement known as The Fabian Society, and an early influence on George Bernard Shaw. As mentioned, Stuart-Glennie published a three-part chapter in 1906 titled "Sociological Studies," in the coauthored book, *Sociological Papers, Volume II*, in which he restated his 1873 arguments on *The Moral Revolution*, as well as his characterization of pre-civilized religious beliefs as "panzoönist." He stated there: "An essential part of the discovery of the law of intellectual development was the deduction of such an historical differentiation as was verified in the discovery of that great Asian-European movement which I have called the Moral Revolution of the sixth century B.C."<sup>21</sup> In his earlier work of 1879, *Europe and Asia*, he also had said, "Christianity was the second of those great movements which, at intervals of about half a millennium, have succeeded each other both in Asia and Europe since that great Moral Revolution of the Sixth Century B.C., which may be briefly indicated by recalling the approximately contemporary names of Confucius and of Buddha, of Cyrus the Great, of Isaiah, and of Xenophanes."<sup>22</sup> And in his original statement of 1873, "we are led to the deduction of a great moral revolution initiating a long middle Age in the history of Humanity; it is further deduced that we should find in the history of Humanity, as the history of the progressive unity of recorded Thought, three specially distinguished Ages; and further, that the Second Age of Humanity should be found to be, in its most conspicuous social phenomena, characterised by a moral transformation of the corresponding phenomena of the First Age. Having generally verified our Ultimate Law in discovering that such a moral revolution,

as is one of the first deductions from it, did actually occur in the Sixth Century B.C. ”<sup>23</sup>

In these excerpts the outlines of his general, three-part “Ultimate Law of History” appear, wherein the moral revolution is the second phase of development, and also his idea of 500 year cycles in history, as we shall see in more detail later.

But let us return to his 1906 restatement of his theory to the sociological society. Think about it: Stuart-Glennie gave a complete exposition of “The Moral Revolution,” later to become known as “the Axial Age,” in a long chapter titled “Sociological Studies,” in a book called *Sociological Papers*, which included a number of well-known authors and founding sociologists of the day, including Geddes and Branford. But one cannot find it discussed in sociological histories, which too frequently tend to replicate the contracted bureaucratic boundaries of the academic discipline, shedding what does not fit the expected ideas. This single sociological volume contains the restatement of Stuart-Glennie’s 1873 work, as well as summarizing other of his ideas, and could have opened the discussion of the idea almost a half a century before Jaspers’ work appeared.

When I first tried to locate a copy of this rare book through interlibrary loan, one of only three copies worldwide was listed as at Monmouth University, New Jersey. I knew that Lewis Mumford had donated his library and art works to Monmouth University, where it sits as a special collection, and sure enough, upon going there and examining it, the book is his signed and annotated copy. So when Mumford stated in 1956 that both Jaspers and he were preceded by “J. Stuart Glennie,” he had the proof in his own library. His acquisition of the book was likely a legacy of his time spent as editor of *The Sociological Review* in London in 1920 with Patrick Geddes and Victor Branford, who brought him there, and who were also discussants of Stuart-Glennie’s 1906 chapter, based on the meeting of the Sociological Society at the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1905. Geddes had also contributed chapters on “Civics as Applied Sociology” in the first two volumes, which were influences on Mumford. Additional contributors to the book included Charles Booth, L. T. Hobhouse, eugenicist Francis Galton, Edvard Westermarck, Lady Victoria Welby, who was an advocate for a theory of signs she called “significs,” and others. That Mumford had early working connections to sociology is a fact also lost to current sociological histories. An even greater lost history is Stuart-Glennie’s work.

There is also the broader puzzling question of why his work disappeared. As historian Richard M. Dorson noted of Stuart-Glennie in his book *The British Folklorists*: "For all his talk of steady converts, the single-minded Scot obtained no articulate supporters to his cause, and it remains another overlooked memorial of the excitement once engendered by ingenious folklore speculations."<sup>24</sup> Stuart-Glennie had written on a wide variety of folklore, including the legends of King Arthur and Fairies, and developed theories to interpret the origins of legends, including the likely localities of the historical Arthur in Scotland.

Dorson devotes 35 pages to Stuart-Glennie's writings on the origins of myth and civilization, including commentaries on them by leading folklorists, but there is no mention of his idea of "the moral revolution." Geddes makes no mention of it either in his obituary for Stuart-Glennie, though he had been a commentator on the 1905 presentation. Geddes also noted that Stuart-Glennie, in Switzerland at the time of the meeting in London on April 7, 1905, was unable to attend due to sickness and weather. He also remarks how the members of the Sociological Society, where Stuart-Glennie's three papers in 1905 were read and later published in the 1906 *Sociological Papers*, and which included discussions of the moral revolution, "were not a little perplexed by three papers of such difficulty and magnitude in a single evening."<sup>25</sup> This is completely understandable, given the complexity and sometimes obscurity of Stuart-Glennie's writing and terminology, and especially if Stuart-Glennie was not there in person to read and then respond to criticisms. Stuart-Glennie made some bold claims, but did not write in an accessible way that could make those claims and terminology transparent.

Stuart-Glennie's critical philosophy of history also attempted to give a scientific understanding to the history of Christianity, or what Stuart-Glennie distinguished as "Christianism," for the religion per se. His 1878 book, issued as "Proemia 1" or the first volume of *The Modern Revolution*, is titled *Isis and Osiris; Or, The Origin of Christianity as a Verification of an Ultimate Law of History*.<sup>26</sup> There he takes "Christianism" as a "transformed Osirianism," of the dying and reborn god Osiris, yet a manifestation of the broader moral revolution.

Such an outlook gave rise to some negative reactions, yet it seems to me that something more than Victorian aversion to the critical views of history and Christianity which Stuart-Glennie developed over his career contributed to his rapid eclipse after his death. Some theologians