

## Robert N. Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011)

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[See table of contents](#)

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**Review: Robert N. Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011)**

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Berkeley's distinguished sociologist of religion Robert N. Bellah's 775-p. magnum opus *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (2011) constructs an evolutionary Big History account in which to situate Karl Jasper's account of the ancient axial age (roughly, the first millennium BCE) in which four operationally defined and explained religions (roughly, symbol systems about the beyond) emerged: (1) in ancient Israel; (2) in ancient Greece; (3) in ancient China; and (4) in ancient India. For Bellah, both Christianity and Islam are beyond the scope of his investigation.

Karl Jasper's book about the axial age is *The Origin and Goal of History*, translated by Michael Bullock (1953; orig. German ed., 1949).

Now, my favorite scholar is the American Jesuit Renaissance specialist and cultural historian and pioneering media ecology theorist Walter J. Ong (1912-2003; Ph.D. in English, Harvard University, 1955 – the same year that the late Robert N. Bellah [1927-2013] received his Ph.D. in sociology and Near Eastern Languages from Harvard). Ong never tired of touting the evolutionary Big History of the French Jesuit paleontologist and religious thinker Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), whose controversial writings were posthumously published in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Ong first touted Teilhard's evolutionary thought about Big History in a publication in his February 1952 review-article titled "The Mechanical Bride: Christen The Folklore of Industrial Man" in the now-defunct journal *Social Order* (Saint Louis University), which is about Marshall McLuhan's 1951 experimental book *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*.

Ong's review-article is reprinted, revised and oddly re-titled as "In a way, the angels have a greater social problem than even industrialized man," in the book *McLuhan Hot & Cool: A*

*Critical Symposium*, edited by Gerald Emanuel Stearn (1967a, pp. 82-92) – which also contains six overlapping selections by or featuring Marshall McLuhan (pp. 106-110, 111-116, 121-137, 137-146, and 146-157) and “A Selected Bibliography: The Writings of (Herbert) Marshall McLuhan” (pp. 305-312), thereby meriting the subtitle’s promise of “A Critical Symposium.”

As part of young Walter Ong’s lengthy Jesuit formation, he did graduate studies in philosophy (in Latin, for Jesuits) and English at Saint Louis University, the Jesuit university in the City of St. Louis. The young Canadian convert to Catholicism Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980; Ph.D. in English, Cambridge University, 1943) taught English at Saint Louis University from 1937 to 1944), where he continued to work on his 1943 Cambridge University doctoral dissertation and served as the director of Ong’s Master’s thesis on the sprung rhythm of the Victorian convert to Catholicism, the Jesuit poet and classicist Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), whose poetry was posthumously published in the 1920s. According to Ong, during McLuhan’s years at Saint Louis University, he was working on the materials that he later published in his 1951 book *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*.

After Ong was ordained a Jesuit priest in 1946 and subsequently completed his tertianship year in his Jesuit formation, he proceeded to doctoral studies in English at Harvard University. Earlier, young McLuhan had called young Ong’s attention to Harvard’s Perry Miller’s 1939 book *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* – in which he extensively discusses to the best of his ability the work of the French Renaissance logician and educational reformer and Protestant martyr Peter Ramus (1515-1572) (for specific page references to Ramus, see the “Index” [p. 528]). However, Miller also called for somebody to undertake a more thorough study of Ramus. About a decade later, Ong stepped forward to undertake such a more thorough study of Ramus, and Miller served as the director of Ong’s massively researched

doctoral dissertation. With the financial assistance of two Guggenheim Fellowships, Ong tracked down the more than 750 volumes (most in Latin) in more than 100 libraries in the British Isles and Continental Europe that he lists and briefly annotates in his 1958 book *Ramus and Talon Inventory*. Ong dedicated it to McLuhan, “who started all this” – meaning that McLuhan had started Ong’s interest in Ramus.

In 1958, Ong’s first major study in media ecology was published, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason*. In it, Ong pioneered his sensory-based approach to the study of media ecology with what he refers to as the aural-to-visual shift in cognitive process in our Western cultural history (for specific page references to the aural-to-visual shift, see the “Index” [p. 396]). I discuss Ong’s account of the aural-to-visual shift in his massively researched 1958 book *RMDD* in my somewhat lengthy online article “Walter J. Ong’s Philosophical Thought” (dated September 20, 2020).

Subsequently, over the years, Ong played with various terms to characterize the crucial contrast that he worked with in his massively researched 1958 book *RMDD* – famously settling on the terms orality and literacy – for example, in the title of his 1982 book *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, his most widely read and most widely translated book. He also famously came to distinguish what he referred to variously as primary orality and secondary orality. For Ong, secondary orality involves various forms of communications media that accentuate sound. Thus, for Ong, forms of communications media that do not involve sound, but rather sight, are not forms of secondary orality. In other words, for Ong, the crucial sound-sight contrast with which he worked in his massively researched 1958 book *RMDD* holds with respect to emerging new forms of communications media.

In any event, Ong’s various publications about Ramus and Ramism inspired McLuhan to write his first major study in media ecology, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962; for specific page references to Ong’s works, see the “Bibliographic Index” [pp. 286-

287]). Ong's generous review of McLuhan's 1962 is reprinted in *An Ong Reader: Challenges for Further Inquiry*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (2002, pp. 307-308).

In any event, for three years (November 17, 1950, to November 16, 1953), Ong was based at a Jesuit residence in Paris. From Paris, he dispatched his 1952 review-article about McLuhan's 1951 book. It turns out that Teilhard also had a room at that Jesuit residence in Paris. Ong first read Teilhard's works in manuscript form at that Jesuit residence in Paris. After Teilhard's death in 1955, his controversial writings were posthumously published, starting in the late 1950s and early 1960s – about when Ong's first major study in media ecology was published in 1958 and McLuhan's first major study in media ecology was published in 1962. From 1962 to 1965, the Second Vatican Council in the Roman Catholic Church convened in Rome. In 1963, the first Catholic president of the United States, President John F. Kennedy, was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. In short, Ong's 1958 major study in media ecology and McLuhan's 1962 major study in media ecology appeared amidst major intellectual ferment in Catholic circles in North America. Suffice it to say that North American Catholics were not quick to embrace Ong's work or McLuhan's.

Now, Bellah's 2011 book is exemplary. His writing is admirably lucid as he weaves together various strands of thought to produce his nuanced account of religion, broadly conceived as about the beyond, in the context of Big History. I am thankful that Bellah had the leisure necessary to research and write such an ambitious and comprehensive book.

The most efficient way for me to provide you with an overview of Bellah's 2011 book is to provide you with the chapter titles. To prepare the reader for his more highly specific discussions of those four distant ancient developments, Bellah provides the reader with the following discussions:

A "Preface" (pp. ix-xxiii; followed by "Acknowledgments" [pp. xxv-xxvii]);

Chapter 1: "Religion and Reality" (pp. 1-43);

Chapter 2: "Religion and Evolution" (pp. 44-116);

Chapter 3: "Tribal Religion: The Production of Meaning" (pp. 117-174);

Chapter 4: "From Tribal to Archaic Religion: Meaning and Power" (pp. 175-209);

Chapter 5: "Archaic Religion: God and King" (pp. 210-264).

Next, Bellah does indeed eventually devote a chapter to each of those four distant ancient developments in the so-called axial age:

Chapter 6: "The Axial Age I: Introduction and Ancient Israel" (pp. 265-323);

Chapter 7: "The Axial Age II: Ancient Greece" (pp. 324-398);

Chapter 8: "The Axial Age III: China in the Late First Millennium BCE" (pp. 399-480); and

Chapter 9: "The Axial Age IV: Ancient India" (pp. 481-566).

Bellah rounds off his book with Chapter 10: "Conclusion" (pp. 567-606); "Notes" (pp. 609-714); and "Index" (pp. 715-746). Incidentally, I found some of his discussion notes very interesting.

Now, the political scientist Eric Voegelin discusses ancient Israel and then ancient Greece in three books published by Louisiana State University Press in the late 1950s: (1) *Israel and Revelation* (1956); (2) *The World of the Polis* (1957a; see pp. 19-23 for his discussion of Karl Jaspers); and *Plato and Aristotle* (1957b; see the note of pp. 185-186 for Voegelin's discussion of Johan Huizinga's 1955 book *Homo Ludens: The Play-Element in Culture* [orig. German ed., 1944; but author's "Foreword," 1938]; see the "Index" in Bellah's book for specific page references to Huizinga's 1955 book [p. 727]).

In my estimate, Voegelin is a far more discerning philosophical thinker than Bellah. However that may be, I gratefully acknowledge that Bellah is an impressively learned social scientist.

In Voegelin's book *Plato and Aristotle*, he discusses Aristotle's use of the Greek term *spoudaios*, which translators usually render as the good man (pp. 300, 303, 313, 320, 323, 327, and 335-336). As Voegelin explains, Aristotle uses this Greek term to mean something

more honorific than simply the good man. In my estimate, Bellah is one example of a man who can be aptly described by Aristotle's honorific sense of the term *spoudaios*.

Now, Voegelin alerts us to the movement in both ancient Israel and ancient Greece from what he refers to as compact consciousness to what he refers to as differentiated consciousness – a movement of inwardness that was advanced in ancient and later times in Christianity. For Bellah's specific references to Voegelin, see the "Index" of his book (p. 744).

For further discussion of the movement of inwardness in Western cultural history, see Charles Taylor's book *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (1989, pp. 109-207; for Taylor, the modern period emerges in Western culture after the Gutenberg printing press emerges in the mid-1450s – centuries after Christianity emerged in ancient times).

But also see my online 3,700-word review essay "Charles Taylor's 1989 Book *Sources of the Self*, and Walter J. Ong's Thought" (2021) that is available through the University of Minnesota's digital conservancy.

Taylor has supplied one of the four blurbs about Bellah's book on the back cover of his book (for Bellah's references to Taylor, see the "Index" [p. 743]). But Bellah himself tells us that his book "is not a book about modernity" (p. xxiv). Nevertheless, he also tells us that Leszek Kolakowski has published a book about "modernity on trial" (p. xxiv). Indeed, our climate crisis is putting "modernity on trial." However, if this is indeed truly the case, then what good, if any, will Bellah's book about such distant ancient developments do for us as we participate in the trial of modernity?

In Bellah's Chapter 10: "Conclusion" (pp. 567-606), he further amplifies what all he himself sees as being on trial, figuratively speaking, by discussing (pp. 597-602) Thomas McCarthy's book *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development* (2009) and Niles Eldredge's alarming June 2001 article "The Sixth Extinction" online in the now-defunct *Bioscience*

*Magazine.*

For further discussion of the sixth extinction, see Elizabeth Kolbert's alarming book *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (2014).

When you consider the crises involving climate and the Covid-19 pandemic, you do not need to become apocalyptic to be concerned about our current human situation, as Bellah was for understandable reasons.

Now, in Bellah's "Preface" (pp. ix-xxiv), he includes a somewhat lengthy quotation from Mencius as one of three epigraphs (p. ix). Then Bellah says, "Mencius suggests that in history we can find friends who, if we make the effort to understand them, can help us on our way. . . . Mencius is reminding us that we can find friends from whom we can learn all the way into the deep past" (p. x).

In Bellah's "Acknowledgments" (pp. xxv-xxvii), he says, "It perhaps goes without saying, but I will say it anyway, that I owe much to the friends in history that Mencius talked about, not least Mencius himself, but to all the creators of the great traditions that I deal with in the later chapters of this book, as well as to the reciters of myth and the dancers of ritual in the tribal and archaic traditions, who must remain anonymous, but who have been, not merely my examples, but my teachers in this enterprise" (p. xxvii).

Now, if we make the effort to understand Bellah's massive book, can he help us on our way?

In any event, the poet medieval Italian poet Dante (c.1265-1321) selects the ancient Roman poet Vergil (70-19 BCE) to serve as a friend from the past to guide for the character named Dante in the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio* portions of his *Divine Comedy*. However, for Dante, Aristotle is also a friend from the past who helps guide Dante on his way through life.

The Victorian Jesuit poet and classicist Gerard Manley Hopkins, mentioned above, found a friend from the past named John Duns Scotus (died 1308) to serve as a guide on his way through life, and Hopkins found another friend from the more distant past named Heraclitus



(c.535-c.475 BCE) to also serve as a guide on his way through life. See Hopkins' poems "Duns Scotus' Oxford" and "That Nature Is a Heraclitean Fire and of the Comfort of the Resurrection." For further discussion of Hopkins' fascination with Scotus' thought, see Ong's book *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (1986a), the published version of Ong's 1981 Alexander Lectures at the University of Toronto.

For further discussion of Hopkins' fascination with Heraclitus' thought, see the American Jesuit theologian David S. Toolan's pamphlet titled "*Nature Is a Heraclitean Fire*": *Reflections on Cosmology in an Ecological Age*, published in the pamphlet series *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* (November 1991). (For specific page references to Heraclitus in Bellah's book, see the "Index" [p. 727].)

Now, Ong's most widely translated book is *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982), which Bellah briefly discusses (pp. 281 and 658, note 39). It has been translated into twelve other languages. It is a good introduction to Ong's thought, but it should be read in conjunction with Ong's other books.

In Ong's 1982 book *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, he discusses what he refers to as "Further Characteristics of Orally Based Thought and Expression" (pp. 36-57). I myself further elaborate these nine characteristics in connection with what Ong refers to as the world-as-event sense of life and the world-as-view sense of life in my article "Walter Ong and Harold Bloom Can Help Us Understand the Hebrew Bible" in *Explorations in Media Ecology* (2012).

Now, I should also mention here Ong's book *Fighting for Life: Contest, Sexuality [Gender], and Consciousness* (1981), the published version of Ong's 1979 Messenger Lectures at Cornell University. In the "Preface" (pp. 9-12), Ong refers to Edward O. Wilson's book *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (1975). But then Ong proceeds to discuss what he is up to in his book:

“This book goes a bit farther than sociobiology ordinarily does. Indeed, if the term is properly understood, what it deals with might be called ‘noobiology,’ the study of the biological setting of mental activity (Greek *nous*, noos, mind). Intellect does not sit on the biological organism like a rider on a horse in a Cartesian or Platonic super-dualistic world. Thought itself operates out of genetic as well as intellectual history. It has neurophysiological support or grounding. If a human being is truly a microcosm [of the macrocosm], as he or she is in an even deeper sense than the ancients could have been conscious of, he or she will bring together the extremes of existence: the genetic heritage, which reaches back into the inorganic world, and the biologically unprocessable, genetically free-floating self-consciousness which is the only situs of human intelligence and of its dialectical complement human freedom. (There is no knowledge or human freedom outside individual, personal consciousnesses.)

“This book is an exploration of the cosmology of the ‘little world,’ the human being, the microcosm, in some of its rich complexity. There are of course many ways into this complexity. The one taken here is through the study of adversativeness as focused in a special kind of adversativeness, contest. My reasons for taking this way in [to the rich human complexity] will, I hope, appear in the text that follows” (pp. 11-12).

In plain English, Ong’s approach to what he styles noobiology is not based on the materialist philosophical position. On the contrary, Ong embraces a non-materialist philosophical position. In the final analysis, from the standpoint of materialists, this makes Ong a creationist, despite his longstanding interest in Darwinian evolutionary theory.

However, even if we use the contrast materialist/creationist to categorize Ong as a creationist, we do not necessarily have to align the creationist position with the emergence of the species *Homo sapiens* in the genus *Homo*. It suffices to say simply that the species *Homo sapiens* is characterized by what the Western philosophical tradition of thought refers to as distinctively human the rational soul (or psyche), which, the materialist philosophical position to the

contrary, is not a materialist soul.

Now, I hold the philosophical position that the distinctively human soul does not emerge until the human fetus is viable. See my *OEN* article “Why Obama Should Shun the Pope’s Views on Abortion” (dated October 10, 2009).

Now, just as the physical body of the human fetus develops for a long time before the fetus becomes viable, so too our human ancestors probably developed physically before the distinctively human rational soul emerged in human evolution, in the species *Homo sapiens*. Concerning the species known as Neanderthals, see Rebecca Wragg Sykes’ accessible 400-p. book *Kindred: Neanderthal Life, Love, Death and Art* (2020).

Now, Ong’s interest in Darwinian evolutionary theory is expressed in his poem “Cosmologist” in the campus literary magazine at Saint Louis University, the *Fleur de Lis* (May 1939). It is also expressed in his essay “Evolution and Cyclicism in Our Time” in the anthology *Darwin’s Vision and Christian Perspectives*, edited and with an “Introduction” by Walter J. Ong (1960, pp. 125-148). Ong’s essay is also reprinted in his 1967 book *In the Human Grain: Further Explorations of Contemporary Culture* (pp. 61-82).

Now, persons who embrace the materialist philosophical position are not likely to be impressed with Ong’s book *Fighting for Life: Contest, Sexuality, and Consciousness* (1981) – nor with Bellah’s book *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (2011).

One further point I should also mention here is that Ong also discusses (1981, pp. 18, 25, 33, 44-45, 133, and 170) Johan Huizinga’s 1955 book *Homo Ludens: The Play Element in Culture*, which I mentioned above in connections with Bellah’s book (for specific page references to Huizinga in Bellah’s book, see the “Index” [p. 727]).

Ong supplied the “Preface” to the English translation of the German Jesuit scholar Hugo Rahner’s book *Man at Play*, translated by Brian Battershaw and Edward Quinn (1967, pp. ix-

xiv). It is reprinted as “Preface to *Man at Play*” in the 600-p. introductory anthology *An Ong Reader: Challenges for Further Inquiry*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (2002, pp. 345-348).

But also see Ong’s plenary address to the American Catholic Philosophical Association titled “The Agonistic Base of Scientifically Abstract Thought: Issues in *Fighting for Life: Contest, Sexuality, and Consciousness*” that is also reprinted in the anthology *An Ong Reader: Challenges for Further Inquiry*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (2002, pp. 479-495).

Now, Ong liked to say that we need both proximity (closeness) and distance to understand something, and he even suggested that his mature thought from the early 1950s onward to his death in 2003 could help persons on their way in life by providing them with a measure of distance. Similarly, I would suggest that Bellah’s massive book can help persons on their way through life by providing them with a measure of distance.

Now, because Bellah’s subject is religion, broadly defined, I should mention here that Ong’s most comprehensive discussion of religion can be found in his seminal book *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (1967), the expanded version of Ong’s 1964 Terry Lectures at Yale University. In it, in Ong’s “Readings” (pp. 325-344 at 335-336), he provides lengthy annotations regarding the work of the French Jesuit anthropologist Marcel Jousse (1886-1961). No doubt Ong learned a lot from Jousse’s work.

More recently, three English translations of Jousse’s work have been published: (1) *The Oral Style*, translated from the French by Edgard Sienaert and Richard Whitaker (1990); (2) *In Search of Coherence: Introducing Marcel Jousse’s Anthropology of Mimism*, edited, translated, and with an “Introduction” by Edgard Sienaert; “Foreword” by Werner H. Kelber (2016); (3) *Memory, Memorization, and Memorizers: The Galilean Oral-Style Tradition and Its Traditionists*, texts selected, edited, and translated by Edgard Sienaert; “Foreword” by Werner

H. Kelber (2018).

Now, Voegelin's discussion of the movement from compact to differentiated consciousness in both ancient Israel and ancient Greece parallels the movement from what Ong refers to as the world-as-event sense of life to the world-as-view sense of life. See Ong's article "World as View and World as Event" in the journal the *American Anthropologist* (August 1969). It is reprinted in volume three of Ong's *Faith and Contexts*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (1995, pp. 69-90).

Bellah discusses (p. 31) both Basil Bernstein's book *Class, Codes and Control* (1971) and Mary Douglas' book *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (1970), in which she uses Bernstein's approach to language codes but modifies his terminology for the two language codes. As Bellah notes, Bernstein describes the two language codes as a restricted code and an elaborated code. However, in Douglas' discussion of ritual, she prefers to refer to condensed symbols and diffuse symbols, as Bellah explains.

For all practical purposes, what Bernstein refers to as a restricted code and can also be applied to what Voegelin refers to as compact consciousness, and what Bernstein refers to as an elaborated code can be applied to what Voegelin refers to as differentiated consciousness. Similarly, what Douglas refers to as condensed symbols can also be applied to what Voegelin refers to as compact consciousness, and what she refers to as diffuse symbols can also be applied to what Voegelin refers to as differentiated consciousness.

Similarly, what Ong refers to as the world-as-event sense of life can also be applied to what Voegelin refers to as compact consciousness, and what Ong refers to as the world-as-view sense of life can also be applied to what Voegelin refers to as differentiated consciousness. Now, I do not happen to advert explicitly to Bernstein's patently related account of a restricted code and an elaborated code in my controversial article "IQ and Standard English" in the

National Council of Teachers of English journal *College Composition and Communication* (1983).

Also see my related article “A Defense for Requiring Standard English” in the journal *Pre/Text* (1986). It is reprinted in the anthology *Rhetoric: Concepts, Definition, and Boundaries*, edited by William A. Covino and David Jolliffe (1995, pp. 667-678).

But also see Ong’s two related articles from around the same time: (1) “Writing and the Evolution of Consciousness” in *Mosaic: A Journal for the Comparative Study of Literature and Ideas* (University of Manitoba Press) (Winter 1985); and (2) “Writing Is a Technology That Restructures Thought” in the anthology *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition*, edited by Gerd Baumann (1986, pp. 23-50).

Ong’s 1985 essay “Writing and the Evolution of Consciousness” is reprinted in volume three of Ong’s *Faith and Contexts*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (1995, pp. 202-214).

Ong’s 1986 essay “Writing Is a Technology That Restructures Thought” is reprinted in volume four of Ong’s *Faith and Contexts*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (1999, pp. 143-168).

Now, what Bellah refers to as unitive events (esp. pp. 12-14) are open to people who have what Ong refers to as the world-as-event sense of life. Moreover, what Bellah refers to as unitive events are not unavailable to people who have what Ong refers to as the world-as-view sense of life. (What Bellah refers to as unitive events are also known as mystical experiences.)

What Bellah refers to as unitive events involve what James L. Kugel refers to as encounters with God in his book *The Great Shift: Encountering God in Biblical Times* (2017).

Plato may also have experienced what Bellah refers to as a unitive event. See Robert E. Cushman’s book *Therapeia: Plato’s Conception of Philosophy* (1958).

Now, before Ong formulated his characterization of the world-as-event sense of life and the

world-as-view sense of life, he repeatedly referred to the aural-to-visual shift in cognitive processing in his massively researched 1958 book about the history of the formal study of logic titled *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (for specific page references, see the “Index” [p. 396]), mentioned above.

Now, for Ong, the world-as-view sense of life emerges with phonetic alphabetic literacy in ancient Israel (as exemplified in the written records in the anthology of texts known collectively as the Hebrew Bible) and in ancient Greece (as exemplified especially in Plato and Aristotle). According to Ong, phonetic alphabetic literacy was the key factor contributing to the development of the world-as-view sense of life.

For a discussion of the shift from the world-as-event sense of life expressed in the Homeric epics to the world-as-view sense of life expressed in Plato’s dialogues, see Eric A. Havelock’s book *Preface to Plato* (1963).

For Bellah’s references to Havelock’s work, see the “Index” in his book (p. 726; and see p. 735 of the “Index” for Bellah’s brief references to Ong).

If we assume that what Ong refers to as the world-as-event sense of life also was found in ancient China and in ancient India, then we should ask, “Did a comparable world-as-view sense of life also emerge in ancient China and in ancient India during the crucial axial age?”

Now, even though Bellah refers briefly to Ong (pp. 281 and 658, note 39), I have no reason to suspect that he was familiar with Ong’s terminology about the world-as-event sense of life.

Consequently, I want to point out here that Bellah’s careful discussion of the “unitive event” as he styles it in religious experience (esp. pp. 12-14) is patently connected with Ong’s account of the world-as-event sense of life.

Bellah says, “Conceptual reflection is present in all religions to some degree but becomes particularly significant in the axial religions, where theory, though still related to ritual and

narrative, has to some degree become dis-embedded. In that there is a cognitive moment, a knowing, in the very heart of the unitive event, we can say that conceptual representation is incipiently present even there, and all symbolic representation gives food for conceptual reflection. But even though conceptual representation is an indelible element in religious reality, it does not, as we have argued, define it” (p. 14).

With that, Bellah is now off and running through the following subsections titled “Unitive Representation” (pp. 14-18), “Enactive Representation” (pp. 18-20), “Symbolic Representation” (pp. 21-22), “Iconic Symbolization” (pp. 22-27), “Poetic Symbolization” (pp. 27-32), “Narrative” (pp. 32-37), and “Conceptual Representation” (pp. 37-43).

Later, Bellah says, “It will be my argument that the axial breakthrough [in all four instances: (1) in ancient Israel, (2) in ancient Greece, (3) in ancient China, and (4) in ancient India?] involved the emergence of theoretic culture [as operationally defined and explained by Merlin Donald] in dialogue with mythic culture as a means for the ‘comprehensive modeling of the entire human universe’” (p. 273; Bellah is here quoting statements from Merlin Donald).

Merlin Donald’s book is *Origins of the Modern Mind: Three Stages in the Evolution of Culture and Cognition* (1991). By the “Modern Mind,” he means the mind of *Homo sapiens*, as distinct from any earlier species in the genus *Homo* such as *Homo erectus*. In other words, Merlin Donald is not discussing what Charles Taylor discusses in his book *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (1989), mentioned above. In any event, in my estimate, Bellah makes excellent use of Merlin Donald’s stages (for specific page references to Donald’s book, see the “Index” [p. 722]).

Now, Bellah also says, “Donald sees Greek culture in the first millennium BCE as the place where theoretic culture first clearly emerged, and the efficient external memory systems provided by a fully alphabetic writing system as an aspect (not a cause [but how could it possibly NOT be a cause, in the sense of some kind of efficient cause?]) of that emergence”



(p. 273).

In addition, Bellah says, “But graphic invention and the external memory system it makes possible are only the essential prerequisites for the development of theoretic culture, which is the ability to think analytically rather than narratively, to construct theories that can be criticized logically and empirically. . . . So analytic thinking or theoretic thinking does not displace, but is added to, narrative thinking, a point essential to our understanding of the axial age” (p. 274).

In a discussion note, Bellah says, “Modern education, to which tribal peoples are increasingly exposed, is also a conduit for theoretic culture” (p. 640, note 179). Similarly, modern Western education is available to Chinese and other non-Western people today.

Now, in Bellah’s Chapter 10: “Conclusion” (pp. 567-606), he discusses in detail (pp. 577-582) Andrea Wilson Nightingale’s book *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy: Theoria in Its Cultural Context* (2004). I have no quarrel with Bellah’s discussion of specific points from her book. However, it strikes me that his discussion of her book should have been part of his Chapter 7: “The Axial Age II: Ancient Greece” (pp. 324-398).

In any event, Nightingale’s book about visibility and theory in ancient Greek philosophy dovetails nicely with what Ong says about visibility, for example, in his account of the world-as-view sense of life – and with what he says about the aural-to-visual shift in the history of the formal study of logic in Western culture in his 1958 book *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason*, mentioned above.

For further discussion of Ong’s theme of visibility, see my lengthy *OEN* article “Walter J. Ong’s Philosophical Thought” (dated September 20, 2020), mentioned above.

For bibliographic references to Ong’s theme of visibility, see my online resource document “A Concise Guide to Five Themes in Walter J. Ong’s Thought and Selected Related Works” (2017) that is available through the University of Minnesota’s digital conservancy.

For an introductory survey of Ong's life and eleven of his books and selected articles, see my book *Walter Ong's Contributions to Cultural Studies: The Phenomenology of the Word and I-Thou Communication*, revised and expanded second edition (2015; first edition, 2000). (For specific page references to my discussion of Voegelin, see the "Index" [p. 324].)

For a briefly annotated bibliography of Ong's 400 or so distinct publications (not counting translations or reprintings as distinct publications), see Thomas M. Walsh's "Walter J. Ong, S.J.: A Bibliography 1929-2006" in the anthology *Language, Culture, and Identity: The Legacy of Walter J. Ong, S.J.*, edited by Sara van den Berg and Thomas M. Walsh (2011, pp. 185-245).

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