APOCALYPSE

From Antiquity to the Empire of Modernity

JOHN R. HALL

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The former handling of this Historye, was a certaine preparation & fitting of the parts as they were distinguished one from the other, but this perpetuall narration compacteth all into one, & setteth the whole building before our eyes, that we might see to what perfection that singular frame doth at length come. Nowe it is reserved for this time, because there could not be a full understanding of these things before the last Trumpet. The events came forth by little and little, and point by point, to the knowledge of which the world attained severally & by leasure – like, as when hangings are unfolded, but nowe when al things were at last accomplished, it was a fit time to see the whole garment displaid at large, and to make up the whole frame of the building together & at once. …

Thomas Brightman, *A* REVELATION *of the Revelation* … (1615: 396–367 [*sic*])

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Acknowledgements

The present book draws together themes that span three decades of my work. Indeed, it has origins in my interest in religion when I was growing up. Many people along the way have helped me in ways that do not lend themselves to bibliographic references, and I want to thank them. My parents, Edmund Kennard Hall and Marian Ross Hall, brought me along on their religious journeys, but they did not push any particular faith or practice upon me. My father, who died in 1961, was an embryologist and a kind and thoughtful man. When I was young, he wisely resisted trying to answer my questions about whether it is possible to reconcile predestination and free will. My mother, with her abiding interest in literature and criticism, cultivated my concern with hermeneutic issues in social inquiry throughout her life, until her death in 1998. H. Stith Bennett introduced me to phenomenology, and during my years in graduate school and thereafter, Guenther Roth encouraged the engagement between phenomenology and the sociology of Max Weber that is at the heart of the present volume. I also deeply appreciate the colleagueship and friendship of Michael Hechter and Philip Schuyler.

To undertake a phenomenological history of the apocalyptic and modernity in the long term inevitably is to write a synthesis that ranges far beyond the expertise of any single scholar, certainly my own. The scale of the project has confronted me with choices about what episodes and issues to examine, and in what ways. All those who write about history know that, even on much narrower topics, they usually could burrow down to deeper levels of detail than

economy of exposition allows. Written history is, by its nature, telescoped interpretation. Here, that historiographic condition is doubled, or even tripled: I traffick not in archival data, but in other scholars' time- and discipline-bound studies. I often do so on the basis of an agenda different from those of scholars on whose analyses I have drawn (themselves not always the most well-known sources, but instead an incomplete and sometimes apocalyptically skewed selection of the scholarship on a topic). The result is necessarily a highly exploratory and provisional inquiry. The compensation, I hope, is that it brings into focus an otherwise unavailable understanding of the apocalyptic in relation to modernity.[1]

To try to make sense of humanity's historical legacies over the long term inevitably requires transgressing the borders of academic specializations. For these purposes, licenses for poaching are justifiable in principle, and they should be freely issued. I hope that the license taken here has not become excessive, for the present book is deeply indebted to the scholars who have studied and debated diverse issues linked to its analytic themes. Beyond those cited in endnotes, I wish to thank the people who have read, critiqued, and discussed with me various presentations, working papers, and chapter drafts that built toward and became incorporated into the present volume: Ari Adut, Mucahit Bilici, Anthony Blasi, Fred Block, Kenneth Broome, Sande Cohen, Jack Goldstone, Laura Grindstaff, William Hagen, Gary Hamilton, Naomi Janowitz, Michelle Kendall, Ming-cheng Lo, Reginald McGinnis, Rebecca Moore, Angela Moskow, Ben Orlove, Isaac Reed, Candace Rudmose, Philip D. Schuyler, David Simpson, Blake Stimson, Eddy U, Robin Wagner-Pacifici, Barbara Walters, and Fred Wherry. In addition, I much appreciate opportunities I have had to participate in the communities constituted through the University of California – Davis Center for History, Society, and Culture and the UC Davis Department of Sociology's Power and Inequalities Workshop. Beyond Davis, this project has benefited from exchanges on the New Religious Movements listserve, and from various occasions when I have presented material subsequently incorporated into the present study: the 2002 Conference on Religions and Violence organized by the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cooperation with the University of California Institute for Global

[1] Perry Anderson, in *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (1974: 7–9), confronted much the same array of challenges, and I have taken inspiration from how he addressed them.

Conflict and Cooperation; the 2006 conference, "Dying for Faith," at Kings College London; as well lectures and colloquia at the University of California – Los Angeles, Lancaster University, Stanford University, the University of Sussex, and Yale University. I am grateful to Penney Alldredge for her research assistance during an early phase of the project, and to Genevieve Payne for her editorial help during the last phases of completing the manuscript. Finally, my editor at Polity, Emma Longstaff, gave crucial early encouragement for writing this book, and Jonathan Skerrett and Justin Dyer shepherded it through important phases of production and copy-editing. Those who so graciously offered all this help are not responsible for the shortcomings that remain.

In a more material way, UC Davis has supported this study through two Faculty Research Grants as well as a sabbatical year in which I drafted the book. I also wish to thank Routledge for permission to incorporated revised versions of text from John R. Hall, "Apocalypse 9/11," pp. 265–82 in Phillip C. Lucas and Thomas Robbins, eds., *New Religious Movements in the Twenty-First Century: Legal, Political, and Social Challenges in Global Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2004). In addition, portions of the book have been developed on the basis of a long working paper from which a shorter essay is also being published: John R. Hall, "Apocalypse, history, and the empire of modernity," pp. 3–16 in Madawi Al-Rasheed and Marat Shterin, eds., *Dying for Faith: Religiously Motivated Violence in the Contemporary World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009).

Writing a book depends on a considerable theft of time, stealing away from those you love, from the communities in which you live, seizing odd moments to write on the roof or elsewhere, living out part of your life in something of an other-worldly existence. My wife, Jenny Broome, our eight-year-old daughter Phoebe Cecile Hall, and three-year-old Nicola Ross Hall not only have tolerated this odd behavior, they have accommodated and facilitated it beyond any reasonable expectation. I am deeply appreciative of their patience, and hope I can redeem it in this-worldly life in the future. No, Phoebe, I didn't think the publisher would endorse your proposed title, *The Apocalypse Comes to Town*, but it has real poetic strength, and I'm glad you were interested enough to propose it. I dedicate this book to you and to Nicola, and the future that the two of you embody.

1

Seeing through the Apocalypse

In 2006, the American cable channel Comedy Central presented spliced-together clips from U.S. television news coverage of "the Apocalypse." Finally it had come to this, the Apocalypse as news. CNN's Paula Zahn posed the lead question: "Are we really at the end of the world? We asked CNN's faith-and-values correspondent Delia Gallagher to do some checking." Later in the segment, CNN anchor Kyra Phillips reported: "At least a couple of those four horsemen of the Apocalypse are saddling up as we speak." This prompted the Comedy Central anchor to ask, "Yo, Wolf? Can we get a live shot of that?" Comedy Central's send-up was amusing to watch, in part because it shows how sober, down-to-earth modern news has been displaced by breathless postmodern coverage. Nevertheless, it gave me pause. Comedy Central zeroed in on the *zeitgeist* of an epoch. But we need to do more than trivialize American news media's pseudo-earnest construction of the Apocalypse.

Apocalyptic dramas rarely sweep up significant numbers of people, but they do sometimes. If one measure of an era concerns how widely people embrace any of various apocalyptic meanings, surely we have been experiencing some serious end times, even if we are not agreed about the End of What. The apocalypse is no longer simply the grist of "end of the world" cartoons, "doomsday cults," or the potentially serious, but ultimately insignificant, Y2K anxieties about computers crashing when their software calendars rolled over to the year 2000. Numerous examples suggest that an apocalyptic mood is no longer confined to cultures of religious fundamentalism. 9/11, the globalized Islamicist movement, and the

counterposed "War on Terror" triggered diverse mainstream apocalyptic references. In a 2002 *Time*/CNN poll, 59% of Americans surveyed believed that the events depicted in the Book of Revelation would come true. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina both fueled religious anticipation of the coming apocalypse and merited news consideration as an apocalyptic event in its own right. A serious non-fiction book entitled *The World without Us* projects a scenario in which human beings no longer survive on Earth. Only slightly less dismal is *The New Yorker* story about creating a global seed bank. Called "Sowing for Apocalypse," the article anticipates possible crop failures that raise the specter of "widespread starvation." In 2008, Russia's invasion of Georgia provoked rhetoric about an apocalyptic resurgence of the Cold War, and the *New York Times* described economic conditions as "sliding from grim to potentially apocalyptic."[1] We no longer just have an apocalyptic counterculture; there is an apocalyptic culture to boot.

Such apocalyptic invocations concerning imminent or ongoing catastrophes "of biblical proportions," as the rhetoric goes, signal the seriousness of crises, but they sometimes use the word "apocalypse" loosely, and they thereby blur meanings of the term. This is unfortunate. Yet how might we make sense of such a religiously charged term as "the Apocalypse"? One approach is to "translate" it for purposes of social inquiry.[2]

What I will call "the apocalyptic" encompasses a broad range of beliefs, events, and social processes centered on cultural disjunctures concerned with "the end of the world" and thereafter.[3] As the meaning of the ancient Greek word *apokalyptein* suggests, an apocalyptic crisis is marked by "disclosure." In ways that people often read the Bible's New Testament, disclosure means "revelation" of God's will, purpose, or plan, either through prophecy or in events themselves. However, apocalypse can be shifted out of its ordinary register by noting that prophecy is divinely inspired speech, and not inherently speech predicting future events. This suggests that even within religion, an apocalyptic text may be something other than an eschatology that describes the final and absolute end of the world. Such texts usually are not about the End, but about the Present Crisis. Theologies often address the question of eschatology, and are thus in some sense apocalyptic, but theologies – and actions – become more centrally apocalyptic when the *present* historical moment is experienced as the ending of the old order and the passage to a new beginning in a post-apocalyptic era. As the scholar of rhetoric Stephen O'Leary has observed, the central

apocalyptic argument can be captured in the formula, "The world is coming to an end." Yet, he continues, the rhetorical possibilities that emerge from the formula are manifold. For this reason, it is important to give consideration to a range of apocalyptic meanings that are not exclusively religious in the conventional sense.[4]

"Disclosure" can entail not only prophecy but also the subject that prophecy addresses. Ordinarily, the culture of an established social order, especially its religious legitimations, screens off everyday life from the harsh light of ultimate reality.[5] However, sometimes the manifestation of powerful forces envelops collective social experience. Apocalypse as disclosure may unveil aspects of the human condition or present historical moment that pierce the protective screen, just as a loved one's death proves traumatic for those who survive, but on a wider scale. Previously taken-for-granted understandings of "how things are" break down. Historically new possibilities are revealed, so awesome as to foster collective belief that "life as we know it" has been transgressed, never to be the same again. Events or prophecies mark a collective crisis so striking that it undermines normal perceptions of reality for those involved, thereby leading people to act in unprecedented ways, outside their everyday routines. Sociologically, then, the time of the apocalypse encompasses more than the religious end time of God's final judgment, or some absolute and final battle of Armageddon. Rather than the actual end of the world, the apocalypse is typically "the end of the world as we know it," an extreme social and cultural disjuncture in which dramatic events reshape the relations of many individuals at once to history.

Life, civilization, and indeed the physical and biological conditions of planetary survival ultimately are precarious, and we live on a tiny planet in an unimaginably immense universe. However, most people would rather hold the awe and anxieties at bay and take the conditions of our everyday existence for granted, pretending them to be durable, even immutable. The apocalypse upsets this contrivance. Under its sign, unfolding history is interrupted. Thus, an apocalyptic episode is a special moment of *social time*. The German social critic Walter Benjamin alluded to this circumstance when he wrote about how a present historical moment could be shot through with "chips of messianic time."[6] Yet Benjamin's image of messianic time bears unpacking. How does the Messiah come? When, for whom, and to accomplish what? Sociologists like myself cannot answer such questions directly: we are researchers, not prophets. What we can do is to look to diverse historical situations

in which apocalyptic times engulf social action, when people in various quarters act out one or another apocalyptic narrative. Such narratives, when they manifest, often arise on multiple fronts. Thus, a generalized climate of apocalyptic expectation sometimes takes hold when people confront natural disasters, social or economic dislocation, or calendrical shifts such as the passage to the third millennium or the end of the Mayan calendar in 2012. More intensely, revolutionary apocalyptic narratives call on people to transcend their everyday lives under special historical circumstances, to undergo a rebirth of self and act collectively in sectarian organizations of true believers. In turn, the actions of such groups can amplify a generalized apocalyptic mood.[7] In these dialectical processes, apocalyptic imaginaries can give rise to historical times that are themselves apocalyptic.

This, of course, is not the premise of either the apocalyptic news coverage or Comedy Central's send-up of it. They both invoked a particular religious understanding that treats the apocalypse as a preordained event, already prophesied in intricate detail. Though Comedy Central's satire may have disabused some among the U.S. public of this kind of apocalyptic thinking, it may also have reassured those who were not predisposed to apocalyptic thinking that there was no real crisis, thus helping sustain the seemingly limitless complacency of some Americans about civic issues and world affairs.

The present book is based on a different premise: if we leave to one side questions about God's will, thinking about the apocalyptic can move beyond either mystification or amusement. We can still laugh at the apocalyptic joke, but we need not allow historical encounters with "disclosures" to become overwhelmed by awe. Instead, we can consider the apocalyptic directly, in relation to wider social processes, by examining extreme events and the passionate meanings that envelop them. We can thus significantly shift how we make sense of history and the social conditions of our existence.

Although seemingly alien to modern life, the apocalyptic sometimes punctures history in decisive ways that lie beyond the purview of conventional social and historical research. In this book, I trace a history of the apocalyptic from ancient origins in Mesopotamia to increasingly complex manifestations in relation to emergent modern society. By way of this historical analysis, I argue that encounters with the apocalyptic, and ways of "containing" and "harnessing" it, have shifted dramatically at various historical junctures – for example, in early Jewish and Christian apocalyptic movements, in

the emergence of Islam, in the Crusades and the Protestant Reformation, and in increasingly secular ways in the French Revolution, other revolutionary movements, and the consolidations of modern states. The latest apocalyptic eruption of world-historical significance is, of course, the globalized jihad of al-Qaida and its allies versus the Bush administration's counterposed "War on Terror" undertaken from within what I will call the *Empire of Modernity* – that historically emergent generalized global complex of governing projects and strategic power initiatives centered in the West, and militarily in the U.S.

Containing and harnessing the apocalyptic have not been one-directional initiatives: those confronting the apocalyptic, we will see, changed as well, in part by absorbing apocalyptic features that transform society itself. Most importantly, the violence of the state and of modern insurgent revolutionary movements, now increasingly played out in relation to the Empire of Modernity, has taken on apocalyptic trappings.

The apocalyptic thus has a history not because it is a single, coherent social force or reified "thing," but because the interactions between alternative kinds of apocalyptic manifestations and broader social developments have had relatively durable *configurational* consequences, both for subsequent apocalyptic eruptions and for society more broadly.

The history I trace here is only one of many narratives that could be offered.[8] It focuses predominantly, though not exclusively, on the West, where apocalyptic visions arose early, and with profound repercussions.[9] The apocalyptic has also surfaced outside the West, sometimes through diffusion from the West, sometimes through largely independent developments. Today, it has a global significance. The persistence and renewed importance of the apocalyptic in modern times confronts us with the puzzle of a phenomenon that seems neither modern nor non-modern, or perhaps a hybrid of both.[10] But we can go beyond simply acknowledging this heterogeneous complexity. Viewing history "in the long run" through the lens of the apocalypse allows us to reach new understandings of the character of modern society, the forces structuring our historical situation, and the prospects for our world. This book is dedicated to that end.

To understand modern society in a new way requires us to become agnostic about any teleology that assumes the movement of history as "progress" toward some end point of utopian perfection. Indeed, such an assumption is now empirically in doubt.

For much the same reason, we need to avoid any "totalizing" assumption that "Modernity" constitutes a coherent whole. As S. N. Eisenstadt has argued, there are "multiple modernities" rather than a single, overarching reality.[11] Under these historical circumstances, we can no longer rely on modern social theory as our interpretive guide. We need a fresh alternative strategy that avoids complacently employing any of the conventional modern lenses.

A "phenomenology of history" offers such a strategy. This strategy, daunting enough as a term, involves an even more challenging shift in how we think about history. Social phenomenology seeks to identify the most basic ways in which each of us is situated in the "lifeworld" – the everyday realm of the temporally unfolding here-and-now within which we live our lives, connecting to other people and media, social groups and institutions, culture and history.[12] By addressing how different kinds of social time become elaborated in the here-and-now, phenomenology moves away from the conventional modern assumption that there is one, objective world time. It thus disrupts any ordinary sense of "history" as a set of sequenced events located on a line of past objective time. Thus, a broader phenomenological "history of times" becomes integrated with the narrower "time of history."[13]

My central concern is with times that are *apocalyptic*. However, apocalyptic times, eruptions that they are, arise in relation to diverse other kinds of social time: the *synchronic* time centered in the here-and-now, the *diachronic* time of the calendar and clock, and other social elaborations of time – history (itself an invention of social self-understanding, as we will see), strategic time, social constructions of "eternity," and so forth. Thus, a history of multiple social times helps establish a level playing field in which the calendar and "clock time" so important to modern society are no longer privileged in relation to other kinds of social time with which they become intermingled. And different kinds of social time, as we will see, are mediums through which the organization of social life and the exercise of power take quite different forms. The time through which bureaucracy operates, for example, is radically different from the time experienced within a community, different again from the time of war. Piecing together how different kinds of social time emerge and become interrelated in different historical epochs yields a first pass at a phenomenology of history.

With this approach, we can consider how the apocalyptic, along with other seemingly alien, non-modern social forms, articulates with diverse modernizing developments. A phenomenology of history centered on the apocalyptic thus offers a new way of under-

standing society. With it, we can look to the world as it is becoming. Rather than looking backward to the twentieth-century theories of society developed when high modernity seemed more than just ideology, phenomenology promises a (but not "the") social theoretical description of historical reality.

The chapters that follow pursue a genealogical account of how and why possibilities of the apocalyptic have shifted over the long run, and with what consequences for modern society.

- Chapter 2 describes alternative ways that social time can be orchestrated, and then explores the dawn and historical emergences in the ancient world of both the modern sense of history and the apocalyptic.
- In chapter 3, I show how key transformations of the apocalyptic in Western Christendom from the Crusades through the initial phases of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century reorganized sacred powers in relation to the powers of increasingly powerful "absolutist" states.
- Chapter 4 focuses first on the rise of objective, diachronic time, and then on the containment and harnessing of religious apocalypticism by both Protestant and Catholic European states from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century and, in a decisive new way, in the French Revolution.
- Chapter 5 explores nineteenth- and twentieth-century developments of both religious apocalypticism and secularization of the apocalyptic – in state-initiated war, revolutionary movements, and terrorism that played out in a world increasing structured as the Empire of Modernity.
- In chapter 6, the emergence of the global apocalyptic war of the early twenty-first century – framed on one side as jihad and on the other as the "War on Terror" – is traced in relation to the hybridic circumstances of modernity's empire.
- The history of the apocalyptic in relation to the emergence of modern society detailed in earlier chapters yields, in chapter 7, a radically recast understanding of modernity itself, and thus provides a novel and clear calculus by which to consider alternative pathways of history beyond apocalyptic struggle. In light of modernity's relationships to the apocalyptic, I ask, where do we stand? What are our prospects?

My hope is that bringing the long-run history of the apocalyptic into view within a single sociological analysis will yield understandings that build on the many specific studies to which the

present inquiry refers. The scope of this historical survey may seem reminiscent of earlier and now discredited "grand theories" or "universal histories." But I make no universalistic claim to trace the history of humanity or the character of society from some "objective" vantage point. The present study has a sharply delimited focus on the apocalyptic in relation to modernity, and this means that a great deal else gets left out – even concerning the apocalyptic, much less historical developments more widely. Given the long time span considered in this short volume, it amounts to an exploratory inquiry rather than a grand theory or universal history. The stakes are quite different. Once we put into question the relation of the apocalyptic to the emergence of modern society, it is impossible to go back to modern theoretical projects of purification that claim to get at the "essential" character of either modernity or the apocalyptic. Since the eclipse of high modernity, with the rise of postmodern skepticism, and especially in the wake of 9/11, advanced societies have faced increasing cultural pessimism about the prospects of the modern vision, and defenders of that vision have offered increasingly beleaguered affirmations of it. The pessimism no doubt has real sources, and the affirmations are often heartfelt, but both partly derive from a myopic understanding of modernity that comes of misconstruing it on the basis of its (incompletely realized) program. Under these conditions, a pragmatic exploration borne of an altogether different viewpoint may prove useful.

2

The Ancient Origins of History and the Apocalypse

To understand either the apocalyptic or modernity in a new, phenomenological way depends on recognizing their forms of social temporality. But today we are so used to coordinating activities within the web of clock and calendar enveloping our lives that objective time seems "natural" to us. No one doubts that the week has seven days, the day, twenty-four hours, the hour, sixty minutes. Yet a moment's reflection will underscore what a series of social theorists and historians have observed about social time. Yes, in certain respects it is based on repetitive physical phenomena – the earth tilted in its axis in relation to the sun, around which it orbits, the rotation of the earth on its own axis yielding day and night – and human biochemical and neural processes. However, the units of time by which social life is temporally ordered are arbitrary. Hours might have a hundred minutes, and minutes, fifty seconds. Some social groups have "weeks" that last five or six days between weekly markets, and others fail to identify seasons or even years. In some societies in the past, the number of hours of day equaled the number of hours of night, even though in regions of the world with strong seasons, this meant that in the winter, night hours lasted longer than day hours. In short, despite how nearly ubiquitous measurement of time has become, people in different social settings organize and experience even objective temporality in highly divergent ways.[1]

As phenomenological sociologists emphasize, the possibilities of social life are diverse in how they are organized and experienced. Each of us experiences a "shock" when moving from one "finite

province of meaning," where we gear into the world in a particular way, to another one where we gear in differently – from dream time to waking up in the world around us, from sitting around the house to working, from talking to making love, or watching television, a movie, or a play.[2] The most diverse social phenomena – bureaucracy, work, worship, play, war, and shopping, for example – are constituted by how people collectively orchestrate and negotiate the multiple horizons and always unfolding mix of temporally structured meaningful social actions – in the vivid present, in anticipation of the future, and in meaningful remembrance of past events. When we consider social life in these terms, phenomenology shifts our attention from events and processes "in" conventional, continuously unfolding "real" time toward sometimes intersecting, sometimes relatively autonomous *social* temporalities of life. By the same token, "history" no longer amounts to a web of events linked on an objective temporal grid; events themselves have to be considered in their temporally textured historicities.[3] This "phenomenological turn" provides a distinctive way to address social processes as diverse as class formation, economic activity, politics, and social movements. A phenomenology of modernity thus can aspire to provide a way of linking everyday life and history.[4]

To chart developments of the apocalyptic and modernity in phenomenological terms, I will proceed by way of reference to six types of social temporality:

1 The most straightforward situation we can imagine involves meanings that are completely contained in the *here-and-now*. Action does not reference events "outside" the horizon of the unfolding moment. But life is rarely, if ever, so simple.
2 *Collective synchronic time* ritually organizes "sacred" meanings designed to guide action. Traditions, memories, precedents, "the old ways" of doing things, habits – all these create the here-and-now – even when oriented to the future – as a presumed replication, reenactment, or commemoration of the past.
3 *Diachronic time* uses rational and objective unit durations of time – seconds, hours, days, weeks, and so on – to provide a constructed framework for coordinating social action and scheduling and commodifying activities, most notably, labor.
4 Historically oriented *strategic time* orients toward intercontingent sequences. People make meanings in relation to events prior to the

present that yield emergent conditions upon which they act in the vivid present to try to influence contingent outcomes and thus advance future attainment of goals. When action is oriented to anticipation of "the End," strategic time becomes *pre-apocalyptic*.

5 *Post-apocalyptic* temporality is strongly inflected with utopian meanings, for apocalypticists, centered on constructing a tableau of the social in a New Era, either a heavenly one or a "*timeless eternity*" on earth, which is approached from a different direction through tradition that seeks a "return" to a "golden age."

6 Finally, *transcendence* encompasses the various ways that the world of everyday experience and the conventional institutional structures of society may fall away or be "bracketed," making absolute present time available to be experienced as "infinite."

This ensemble of possibilities yields a typology that models alternative yet interconnected social temporalities (see figure 2.1). I will invoke these types of temporality as benchmark reference points in the remainder of this book. As we will see, the often nuanced, hybrid, and overlapping complexities of lived temporal enactments cannot be reduced to the six ideal types. Nevertheless, as figure 2.1 shows, alternative basic patterns of social interaction and organization are associated with the six types, suggesting a degree of face validity.[5] Moreover, the typology can be used to tease out the deep meaning structures of more elaborated temporal social forms – both in relation to a single type (e.g., different constructions of apocalyptic temporality) and as hybrids (e.g., tradition mapped in the objective time of a ritual calendar).

Among actual historical developments, both the apocalyptic and modernizing social forms entail distinctive social temporalities. These can be tracked in their historical emergence. However, we have to suspect that many of the developments important to either modernity or the apocalyptic are *discontinuous* with one another: they do not have sequential histories in their own right. Lacking any reason to assume other than this non-linear circumstance, we can trace a genealogy of apocalyptic developments in relation to modernity by pursuing a "configurational history" – one that zeroes in on the most salient and decisive "structural" shifts in apocalyptic circumstances over the long run.[6] This chapter initiates that configurational history in two steps: (1) engaging in a brief and necessarily speculative consideration of primordial social temporalities along what I will call the "synchronic" axis centered in

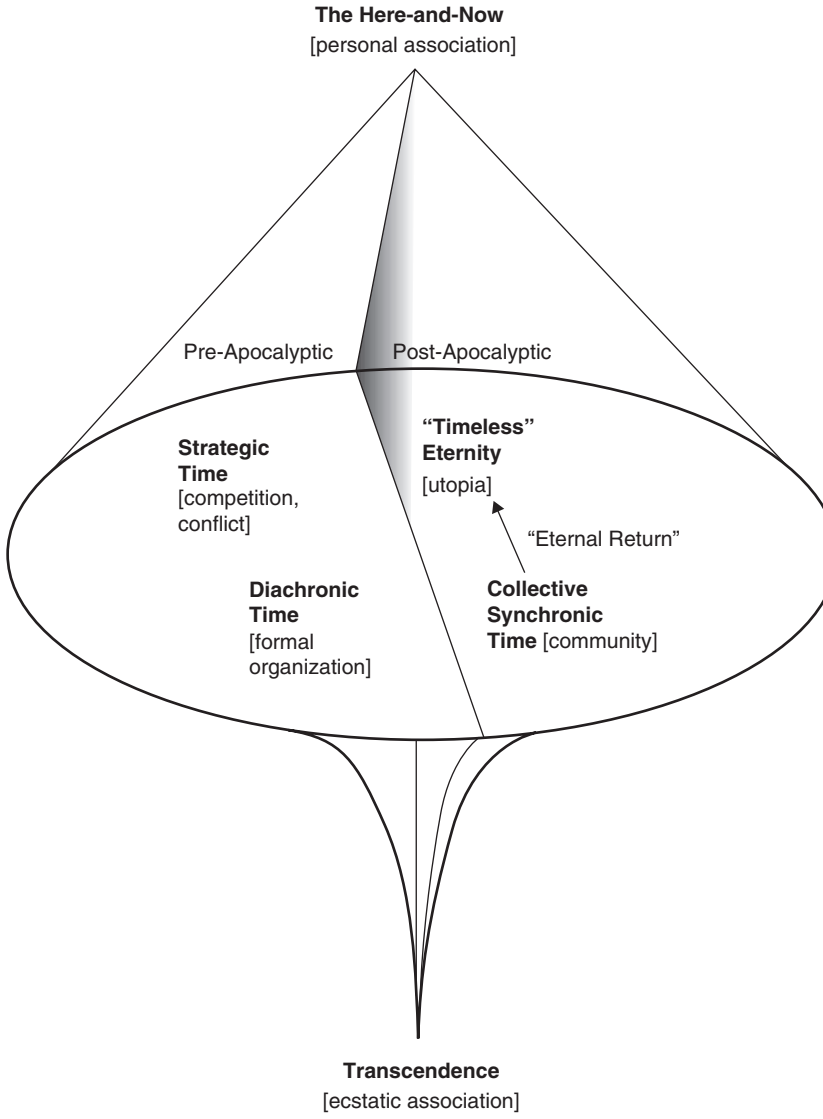

Figure 2.1. A general model of meaningful social temporalities that structure the vivid present, with associated typical forms of social interaction in brackets

the immediately present "here-and-now"; and (2) examining the deep origins of the temporal possibilities of "apocalypse" and "history" that first strongly emerge in ancient times – among the followers of Zarathustra, in ancient Israelite religion, in early Christianity, and in the religion of Islam.

Antecedents: time in its primordial and ancient enactments

The earliest forms of social temporality are those that arose in primordial hunting and gathering societies, and then, with the rise of agriculture and the domestication of animals, during the advent of the ancient cities and civilizations that began to emerge in the fourth millennium BCE. Sketching the basic structures of primordial and ancient times can help us determine whether and how they persist during later historical epochs, and what novel temporalities arose.

The social marking of the cycle of human life can be traced back as far as Neanderthals who buried their dead tens of thousands of years ago. Also, birth inherently is a central event, and early human societies began to mark the passage of their young to adulthood in puberty rites of passage. Moreover, hunting and gathering groups clearly had to orient to seasonal changes, for animal life cycles affected hunting, and plant cycles affected gathering. When agriculture emerged around 10,000 years ago, the seasonal cycle of social life became even more pronounced.[7]

Overall, we may surmise, the temporality of a social group orchestrated its daily rounds, years and seasons (including weather-shift seasons near the equator), festivals marking temporal passages, and the cycles of human birth, life, and death. Temporal experience was centered in the here-and-now, which referenced various objective events – days, lunar and solar cycles – and social rounds of time, but initially without formalizing their measurement. Life transpired in the sequenced ebb and flow of events, not within "time" as a medium or "thing." Here and more generally, as the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard observed, "we must not say time flows *in* consciousness – it is, on the contrary, consciousness which, on the basis of its now, deploys or constitutes time."[8] The challenge is to identify the alternative forms in which this constituting activity occurs in the social world.

In primordial social worlds, the here-and-now was not undifferentiated in its moments. Rather, we may posit a "synchronic

axis" that encompasses all the forms of social time strongly centered in the here-and-now in and of itself. What primordial synchronic temporalities might there have been, apart from the everyday here-and-now? On the evidence from ethnographies of surviving groups, insofar as they can be read back, the here-and-now likely was structured in part by storytelling that created "taleworlds" about significant prior events.[9] There is also considerable archeological evidence that primordial human societies engaged in rituals. These rituals, which brought group members together in collectively experienced events, mark first steps in the institutionalization of social time, organized on the basis of tradition. Here, the French sociologist Émile Durkheim argued, is to be found religion in its most "elementary" form.[10] In Durkheim's 1912 account, religion ritually constitutes society's moral and normative imaginary. Importantly, the performance of rituals distinguishes whatever is considered holy – the "sacred" – from "profane" everyday things. Durkheim's theory is rightly critiqued as overly functionalist, ahistorical, and inattentive to religion's diverse meaningful and institutional manifestations. But his basic point about ritual is well taken: it brings the realm of the sacred into the immediacy of vivid present experience, and thereby orchestrates an episode of the here-and-now as a distinctive ecstatic experience of collective excitement that crystallizes social solidarity in the group.[11] Implicitly, Durkheim constructs the synchronic time of elementary societies as divided between the profane here-and-now and the here-and-now of ritual. The latter cordons off the sacred, and the sacred here-and-now potentially alters the collective experience of the here-and-now from what German philosopher Herman Schmalenbach described as people's experience of "communion" with each other to an ecstatic moment of transcendence.[12]

In the mid-twentieth century, the theorist of religion Mircea Eliade identified much the same range of temporalities, but he gave a different valence to ritual. Like Durkheim's account of elementary religion, Eliade's structuralist account of sacred time generalizes across diverse societies. The key difference from Durkheim centers on the relation of ritual to collective meanings. For Eliade, *all* meaningful action in early societies was ritualistic, and communally held archetypes organized such action in relation to mythic meanings. "[W]e might say," he wrote, "that the archaic world knows nothing of 'profane' activities: every act which has a definite meaning – hunting, fishing, agriculture; games, conflicts, sexuality, – in some way participates in the sacred." For Eliade, action in