Foreword

All papers collected in this volume stem from a seminar on Utopias in Axial Age Civilizations, which was conducted in 1985/6 and 1986/7 within the framework of the program on Comparative Civilizations at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology and the Truman Research Institute of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Eisenstadt, 1986a).

It follows some of the other publications on the analysis of Axial Age Civilizations which came out of this program—such as those on the Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations (Eisenstadt, 1986b) and the Historical Dynamics of Axial Age Civilizations (Eisenstadt, 1989, forthcoming).

In this seminar we did not intend to cover the many aspects of utopias which have been abundantly analyzed in the literature (Kateb, 1972; Manuel, 1979; Vosskamp, 1982). Nor did we intend to present a thorough analysis of all—or even most—of the utopian movements that have developed in the different Axial Age Civilizations. Rather, we intended to explore what seemed to us to be a central problem of such an analysis, namely, the inherent relations between utopias—as distinct from millenarian movements or from movements of protest—and the basic characteristics of Axial Civilizations, and to provide a general analytic framework for the comparative analysis of utopias in these civilizations. The papers presented here address themselves to these problems.

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