The Forms of Brotherly Love in Max Weber’s Sociology of Religion*

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This article examines the concept of “brotherliness” as presented in Max Weber’s sociological studies of religion. It argues that Weber presents a complex, if at times implicit, understanding of a number of contrasting forms of brotherliness: charismatic, Puritan, mystic, and medieval Christian. The article suggests that although these contrasting forms have been largely overlooked by Weberian scholars, they add an important dimension to Weber’s understanding of the costs and paradoxes of Western rationalization.

INTRODUCTION

For a thinker renowned for his monumental study of the emergence and eventual global dominance of depersonalizing rationalization, it may seem strange or even contradictory to find within the work of Max Weber an extensive and illuminating examination of love. But, perhaps surprisingly, such is the case. Weber’s particular concern is with “brotherly love” or “brotherliness,” which is a type of love that is religious in origin, developing from a concern with the universality of human suffering. The most extensive discussion of this love, and the ethical stance that emerges out of it, lies in the Intermediary Reflections (Weber [1915] 1948b, entitled Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions by Gerth and Mills), a text that has been extensively discussed in the interpretative literature and that has, at times, been considered the central, key text in understanding Weber (e.g., Tenbruck 1980; C. Turner 1992; Bellah 1999). Remarkably, although “brotherliness” is manifestly a prominent theme in this crucial work, this ethic of religious love has hardly been examined at all by Weberian scholars. In this article, we attempt to trace the uses of the term brotherliness in Weber’s works, and argue that he presents a complex and important insight into the nature of Western cultural rationalization that has so far remained substantially overlooked.

First, however, three points of clarification may be useful here. Our discussion of love in Weber’s work does not aim to assert some new unifying principle to his works, but merely draws attention to some facets of his thought that we believe have been neglected in the ever-accumulating interpretative literature. We will certainly try, however, to show how these ideas can be traced throughout Weber’s vast empirical/historical studies. Second, although the two “vocation” lectures on politics and science also contain references to the ethical love of brotherliness in their concluding

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statements, we will not be taking up the prescriptive use of the concept in these essays as this would entail a paper on its own. Instead, we will be concentrating on Weber’s descriptive empirical writings. Finally, we are only trying to give an account of Weber’s meaning in this area and are not engaged in offering criticisms of, or responses to, his ideas.

SOME PREVIOUS COMMENTARIES ON BROTHERLY LOVE

The importance of brotherly love or brotherliness in the works of Max Weber has been noted by many authors (see, e.g., Nelson 1969, 1976; B. Turner 1983:105; Brubaker 1984:3; Scaff 1991:Ch. 3), but has rarely been examined beyond what amounts to just a passing remark. The most notable exceptions to this tendency are works by Bologh (1990) and Bellah (1999), and, to a lesser extent, with Schluchter (1981) offering some brief comments that need noting.

Schluchter (1981:156–74) has traced Weber’s concern with the cultural significance of brotherly love, as well as the influence of Troeltsch’s work on Weber in this area. He has also stressed the effect of Protestantism on this brotherliness:

consistent Calvinism has had above all two consequences: the inner loneliness of the individual and the treatment of “brothers” as “others”. We can say, then, that the religious ethic of ascetic Protestantism is a monologic ethic of conviction with unbrotherly consequences . . . the autonomous vocational culture of Western modernity reveals the remnants of the religious elements which helped bring about its birth. They continue to haunt us in the secularised attitude of world mastery and the world domination of impersonality and lack of brotherhood. (1981:172–74, emphasis in the original)

Despite these insights, Schluchter’s account of brotherliness in Weber’s work remains relatively undeveloped and brief, a circumstance that is unsurprising given that this theme has never been his primary focus.

Bologh (1990:165) discusses the idea of love as presented in Intermediate Reflections as part of her overall critique of Weber, a critique aimed at Weber’s alleged advocacy of public “greatness” over love as part of a feminine, private realm. Brotherliness is not discussed in detail beyond the terms of this critique. Hence, Bologh will see Weber as supporting a form of brotherliness as an ethic of “ impersonal love,” in opposition to her own position of a “ personal ethic of erotic love” or “ethic of personal love” (Bologh 1990:168). This article promotes a substantially different interpretation of brotherliness and the personal/impersonal in Weber’s texts from that of Bologh.

Bellah’s (1999) essay is perhaps the most comprehensive and impressive examination of the question of love in the works of Max Weber yet composed. In our view, however, his analysis is limited by his concentration on just one kind of brotherliness: acosmic mysticism. The various meanings of brotherliness are not clearly revealed within this discussion. Bellah also tends to concentrate too much on Intermediate Reflections, so that the range of meanings exhibited by Weber in his empirical religious studies is somewhat overlooked. We are, however, indebted here to many of Bellah’s insights and references.

A close reading of Weber’s use of the term brotherliness throughout his works indicates that it is a consistent, if sometimes implied, theme in Weber’s most notable writings. While the concept is prominently discussed in Intermediate Reflections and has a strong, if sometimes assumed, presence in the Introduction to the Economic
Ethics of the World Religions (Weber [1915] 1948a, entitled Social Psychology of the World Religions by Gerth and Mills), it is also used in a subtle and multifaceted manner in his empirical studies of the world religions, and in the sections on religion and political domination in Economy and Society (Weber [1921] 1978). In these works, a complex typology of brotherly love emerges, one that allows Weber to trace the paradoxical and ineluctable fates of a number of different empirical forms of brotherliness within different cultural rationalization processes. Specifically, we believe four main types of brotherliness are identified by Weber: Puritan brotherliness; mystic brotherliness; medieval Christian brotherliness; and charismatic communistic brotherliness. These different types of “brotherliness” are contrasted with each other by Weber, as well as with a more general, ideal-typical form. To understand this typology, and the different types of brotherliness it identifies, it is necessary to go back to the two works containing his most explicit discussion of brotherly love, Intermediate Reflections and, to a lesser extent, Introduction to the Economic Ethics of the World Religions.

THE IDEAL-TYPE OF A “GENUINE ETHIC OF BROTHERLINESS”

There is little doubt that Weber’s use of the term brotherliness, and the way the various usages are related to each other throughout his works, pose a serious problem of consistency and opaqueness. However, greater clarity is obtained once Weber’s favored methodological starting point of the ideal-type is assumed. The aim of outlining such an ideal-type, Weber states, is to allow “us to see if, in particular traits or in their total character, the phenomena approximate one of our constructions: to determine the degree of approximation of the historical phenomena to the theoretically constructed type” ([1915] 1948b:324). Hence, when Weber introduces the term “a genuine ethic of brotherliness” (der echten Brüderlichkeitsethik) ([1915] 1948b:336; 1920b:548), it is clearly meant as a kind of standard against which specific historical forms are to be measured and, in this sense at least, can be taken as an ideal-typical construction. However, it is an odd kind of ideal-type in that rather than being a theoretical construction “prepared with a rational consistency which is rarely found in reality” ([1915] 1948b:323), it is a combination of elements that tended to come together, according to Weber, at the beginning point of the historical life of this ethic; and the later social manifestations of brotherliness will become increasingly distant from this original ideal the more they are subject to the forces of rationalization, either in terms of internal consistency or in terms of responding to the gathering rationalized forces of the social context. Weber never explicates the precise nature of this model of brotherliness; however, based on his comments in Intermediate Reflections, and through an examination of his religious sociology, we believe it is possible to ascertain five important dimensions to this ideal-typical standard of historical measurement. First, it is universal in scope. It applies to all human beings as sufferers. Second, it maintains a personal or ethical appreciation of the suffering of the other, emphasizing the face-to-face nature of care. Third, it is in tension with the orders of this world. As a consequence, it rejects this world as imperfect, thus becoming to a great extent world-denying or acosmic (see Bellah (1999) for an extended discussion of the meaning of “acosmism”). Under this acosmic orientation, only the suffering of other human beings is deemed important in this world. Finally, it is uncompromising in its dealing with the world. It refuses to accept any other value position as valid or worthwhile, and in this sense operates as an ethic of ultimate ends.
or “convictions” (Gesinnungsethik). We will elaborate on how Weber understands each of these dimensions as we move through this article.

These dimensions of the ideal-typical model of brotherliness are identified by Weber in the early attempts of the main salvation religions to deal with human suffering. The major historical form of brotherliness at this stage is charismatic communism (to be discussed below), which stands closest to the ideal-type, although it is not an exact fit in terms of the dimension of universality. The universal, personal, acosmic, and uncompromising aspects of the ideal-type, along with a reference to the first communist communities, are explicitly expressed in the following quotation.

The principle that constituted the communal relations among the salvation prophecies was the suffering common to all believers. And this was the case whether the suffering actually existed or was a constant threat, whether it was external or internal. The more the imperatives that issued from the ethic of reciprocity among neighbours were raised, the more rational the conception of salvation became, and the more it was sublimated into an ethic of absolute ends. Externally, such commands rose to a communism of loving brethren; internally they rose to the attitude of caritas, love for the sufferer per se, for one’s neighbour, for man, and finally for the enemy... In religions of salvation, the profound and quiet bliss of all heroes of acosmic benevolence has always been fused with a charitable realisation of the natural imperfections of all human doings, including one’s own. The psychological tone as well as the rational, ethical interpretation of this inner attitude can vary widely. But its ethical demand has always lain in the direction of a universalist brotherhood, which goes beyond all barriers of societal associations, often including one’s own faith. ([1915] 1948b:330)\(^1\)

To the salvation religions, Weber argues, the brutal fact of unjustified suffering within this world marks it as an essentially irrational place. Attempts to solve and understand this problem of suffering have been the driving force behind the evolution of important aspects of all the major religions, including the development of an ethic of brotherly love ([1915] 1948a:272, 275, [1921] 1978:518). Such an ethic first emerges, Weber asserts, when “[t]he magical ties and exclusiveness of the sibs have been shattered” ([1915] 1948b:329; see also [1921] 1978:361) and a brotherhood of faith established. As the quotation above indicates, the origins of this religious love are to be found in the ancient neighborly ethic common among hunters, villagers, and seafarers ([1915] 1948b:329, [1921] 1978:360), which emphasized the giving of aid and alms to those clearly in distress within the community. Weber provides an illustration of this emergence in his study of the Judaic tradition (Weber [1917–1919] 1952:64, 67, 342–43).

If the universal, personal love of fellow sufferers does become such an uncompromising ethic of absolute ends, then such a position places anyone pursuing such ideals in direct conflict and tension with the orders and value spheres of the world, especially as the latter are rationalized according to their own inner logics. Indeed, this is the

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\(^1\) And one’s family. The ethic of brotherliness created a community of believers who had to “stand closer to the saviour, the prophet... the brother in the faith than to the natural relations and to the matrimonial community” ([1915] 1948b:329, [1921] 1978:580). Thus, in Chinese cultural history, in which the sib (and “magical garden”) were never broken or challenged by a revolutionary salvation religion, there emerged no equivalent to the paradoxes of brotherliness that other cultures experienced (see Weber [1915] 1951:Ch. viii, especially pp. 233, 236).
very theme of Intermediate Reflections: “The tension between brotherly religion and the world has been most obvious in the economic sphere” ([1915] 1948b:331); “The consistent brotherly ethic of salvation religions has come into an equally sharp tension with the political orders of the world” ([1915] 1948b:333, emphasis added); “Above all there is tension between the ethic of brotherliness and the spheres of aesthetic and erotic life” ([1915] 1948b:341); and there is an “ultimate inward tension” between religion and intellectualism ([1915] 1948b:352). All the forms of brotherliness will maintain tension with the erotic, aesthetic, and intellectual spheres, but some will be able to overcome the tension with the economic and political orders of the world. It is this final point that is of crucial importance in differentiating types of brotherliness, and thus will be focused on here.

Within the origins of an ethic of brotherliness, therefore, we see the dimensions emphasized by Weber in his ideal-typical model of that ethic. Yet from this common origin in religious attempts to solve the problem of “theodicy” ([1915] 1948a:275), numerous historical forces have created a variety of empirical forms of brotherly love. Weber’s work traces these historical trajectories and, as mentioned, seems to concentrate on four main empirical forms of brotherliness—the types found in Puritanism, mysticism, and organic social ethics, as well as early charismatic communities. Throughout Weber’s work, we find a recurring demonstration of the inability of these empirical forms of brotherliness to measure up to the ideal-typical, “genuine ethic” of brotherliness. Each of the four loses one or more of the crucial dimensions of the ideal-type—its universalism, ethical personalism, its acosmism, its tension with the world, and refusal to compromise with it. We now examine each of these empirical variations, and their tension with the theoretical ethic of brotherliness, in turn.

PURITAN BROTHERLINESS

Puritan brotherly love is at variance with the ideal-typical form on four of the five scales of measurement. Weber particularly identifies two major trends that place it in direct contrast with the ideal-type of genuine brotherliness.

First, the ideal of universalism stands in stark contrast to the idea of “brotherhood” found in sects of religious virtuosi such as those found in early Protestantism (particularly in America). As The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism (Weber [1906, 1920] 1948c) demonstrates, a much more limited form of brotherly love was developed within Protestantism when the idea of universal suffering was abandoned and boundaries for group membership were instead placed around proof of one’s state of grace. This Protestant form of brotherliness might be termed “sect brotherliness,” as it is usually based on a requirement of care only for those “brothers” in the faith (Weber [1906, 1920] 1948c:308, 318–19) as against the universalism of the “church” ([1915] 1948a:288, [1921] 1978:1204).

A qualification is needed here about Protestant exclusivity. Although the Protestant sects will put up certain barriers, there is also a universal aspect to Protestant brotherliness in the obvious sense that we are all God’s children and that, beyond the American model at least, Weber does say that systematic charities were organized for those not capable of work, such as orphans and cripples ([1921] 1978:588). A universal aspect to the care of the suffering is thus evident here. So, in terms of the ideal-type, Protestantism is both exclusive and universal unevenly, with the major tendency moving against universality.
Second is the Puritan logic of abandonment of the personal, or ethical, aspect of the brotherly ethic of suffering. At stake here is what Weber precisely means by “the personal.”

In essence, “personal” or “human” relations between people are regarded by Weber as the place where an ethical dimension is possible.

For every purely personal relationship of man to man, of whatever sort and even including complete enslavement, may be subjected to ethical requirements, and ethically regulated. This is true because the structures of these relationships depend upon the individual wills of the participants, leaving room in such relations for manifestations of the virtue of charity. ([1921] 1978:585)


The contrast is with impersonal relations that are deprived of this ethical aspect. This quotation goes on to state:

But this is not the situation in the realm of economically rationalised relationships, where personal control is exercised in inverse ratio to the degree of rational differentiation of the economic structure. There is no possibility, in practice or even in principle, of any _caritative_ regulation of relationships arising from the holder of a savings and loan bank mortgage and the mortgagee who has obtained the loan from the bank, or between a holder of federal bond and a citizen taxpayer. . . . The growing impersonality of the economy on the basis of the association in the market place follows its own rules, disobedience to which entails economic failure and, in the long run, economic ruin. ([1921] 1978:585, emphasis added; see also [1921] 1978:636, 1186, [1915] 1948b:331)

The rationalized fulfillment of the economy in capitalism is clearly the greatest source of unethical impersonality. Politics is not far behind, however. In the political sphere:

the political man acts just like the economic man, in a matter-of-fact manner, “without regard to the person”, _sine ira et studio_, without hate and therefore without love. By virtue of depersonalisation, the bureaucratic state, in important points is less accessible to substantive moralisation than were the patriarchal orders of the past . . . ([1915] 1948b:334; see also [1921] 1978:600–01, 975)

Weber’s analysis of Puritan vocationalism examines how this religion encouraged its adherents to operate “without regard to the person,” to in effect relinquish direct, personal love and care in the name of allegiance to God (on Calvinist impersonality, also see [1921] 1978:1200; Weber [1915] 1951:236, 241, 245). For Weber, this impersonality is a logical consequence of the Puritan conceptualization of predestination: God’s plan cannot be known or doubted; those in need should not be helped as this would seem to question God’s creation of the order of the world; those in need would seem to deserve their suffering since through labor there is always the opportunity to develop God’s bounty; and to be in needful suffering and not laboring in the world
would indicate damnation, which no action on this earth can, nor should try to, alter (see [1921] 1978:588 on begging and almsgiving).

If this is the case for those who were considered capable of labor, the same impersonal logic extends to those who could not work. Hence, the charitable institutions for cripples and orphans, mentioned above, were “oriented to the goal of discouraging the slothful” and, because they “became a rationalised ‘enterprise’, [their] religious significance was therefore eliminated or even turned into the opposite significance” ([1921] 1978:589). There is no longer any regard for the person and his or her suffering; rather, such charity is aimed at promoting labor and the market. Brotherliness has become loveless. And even further, the elect would consider “the sin of one’s neighbour,” not in terms of “sympathetic understanding” but through “hatred and contempt for him as an enemy of God bearing the signs of eternal damnation” (Weber [1904, 1920] 1985:122). Brotherly love now includes elements of hatred when the ethical concern with the suffering of every person is replaced by the elect’s sense of vocational labor and certainty of grace.

At least in the most extreme Protestant types, the impersonality of capitalism and the elect’s impersonal denial of personal ethical relationships can come together without essential conflict and perhaps in fruitful harmony, as Weber’s most famous thesis argues. The world-denying acosmism of the early salvation religions is thus reversed. Labor in the vocational calling, in the very center of the economy itself, becomes the absolute standard of moral worth. For the Calvinist:

Brotherly love, since it may only be practised for the Glory of God and not in the service of the flesh, is expressed in the first place in the fulfilment of the daily tasks given by the lex naturae; and in the process this fulfilment assumes a peculiarly objective and impersonal character, that of service in the interest of the rational organization of our social environment. For the wonderfully purposeful organization and arrangement of this cosmos is, according both to the revelation of the Bible and to natural intuition, evidently designed by God to serve the utility of the human race. This makes labour in the service of impersonal social usefulness appear to promote the glory of God and hence to be willed by Him. (Weber [1904, 1920] 1985:108–09)

Such certainty of activity in the world leads to “the complete elimination of the theodicy problem and of all those questions about the meaning of the world and life, which have tortured others” (Weber [1904, 1920] 1985:109; see also [1915] 1948b:359). The Protestant logic leads, then, to an impersonal brotherliness within the world, where suffering and the ethics of the personal are superseded because those who do not adopt the Puritan discipline of labor are beyond help.

This abandonment of the universal and the personal in the drive to consistent “loveless clarity” ([1915] 1948b:359) is summarized in the following.

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2This is obviously a reference to the so-called Weber thesis, which, due to restrictions of space, we will not discuss further here, except to note that although the brotherliness references in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism are relatively slight, this famous text can still be seen in the light of the themes of suffering and love when the specific references to The Protestant Ethic in Intermediate Reflections are considered. The Protestant Ethic can, in fact, be regarded as substantiating the way Puritan vocationalism and the capitalist economy can come together as a structure of impersonality. This is not idle speculation when it is remembered that Intermediate Reflections was published in 1920 in the same volume of religious studies as The Protestant Ethic (although, of course, it also had a much earlier life as a publication). Schluchter (1981:153, 174) has made similar observations.
As a religion of virtuosos, Puritanism renounced the universalism of love, and rationally routinised all work in this world into serving God’s will and testing one’s state of grace. ([1915] 1948b:332)

Impersonal and tending to exclusivity, Puritan brotherliness does escape the tensions with the economic and political worlds that other religions do not. In the injunction to vocational labor and the acceptance of “the routinisation of the economic cosmos,” the Puritans fulfilled their God-willed duty ([1915] 1948b:332) in the economic sphere. There is no tension here—quite the opposite, according to Weber. The Puritan vocational logic means that this participation in the economy does not compromise this particular form of brotherly love. This same position with regard to tension and compromise is seen with politics. Puritanism interpreted God’s will as allowing that His “commandments should be imposed upon the creatural world by the means of this world, namely violence” ([1915] 1948b:336), and this means that the state’s “consummated threat of violence, war” ([1915] 1948b:335) can be reconciled with the Puritan ethic.

The Puritan brotherliness is, in this way, impersonal, mainly exclusive, world-affirming, and without inherent tension in its dealing with the economic and political worlds. Yet it can maintain an uncompromised ethic in the very pursuit of these aspects of its highly consistent theology. In short, its internal logic pushes it to a position of extreme contrast with the ideal-type.

MYSTIC BROTHERLY LOVE

The second main form of empirical brotherliness examined by Weber is that of the mystic. Mystic forms of brotherly love maintain an acosmic, uncompromised universalism but, like the Puritan form, they tend toward the impersonal and can avoid tension with the economic and political world. Once again, intellectualized consistency is the reason for such impersonality and lack of tension.

At its most logically consistent, the acosmism found in the ethic of brotherliness leads to a complete rejection of this world, including, therefore, a rejection of other human beings as important entities. This seems to be the basis of the problems, from an ideal-typical point of view, of mystic brotherliness. Mysticism logically exaggerates brotherliness to such an extent that the world is escaped or denied so that anybody who happens to cross one’s path becomes the object of devotion and love ([1915] 1948b:333, 336). “The postulate of brotherly love” is therefore expanded to a “completely unselective generosity” ([1921] 1978:589). Such love reaches a height of impersonality in that the actual person and his or her suffering are not of concern:

the mystic’s “benevolence”…does not at all enquire into the man to whom and for whom it sacrifices. Ultimately, mysticism is not interested in his person. Once and for all, the benevolent mystic gives his shirt when he is asked for his coat, by anybody who accidentally happens to come his way—and merely because he happens to come his way. Mysticism is a unique escape from this world in the form of an objectless devotion to anybody, not for the man’s sake but purely for devotion’s sake, or in Baudelaire’s words, for the sake of the ‘soul’s sacred prostitution.’ ([1915] 1948b:333; see also [1921] 1978:589, [1915] 1948a:291)

The motivating drive here is not personal brotherly love, not the maintenance of the great problem of suffering, but the salvation of the mystic. Mystic brotherly love
involves, according to Weber, a search for individual salvation in the emotional state of love for love’s sake. All people are treated equally as merely a means toward this end. The logical consistency of mystic brotherliness lies in the fact that the world is so thoroughly denied that there cannot be any attachment to particular suffering. Each person is only regarded as an “anybody” and benevolence is dispensed without individualized or personalized love. For this reason, from the viewpoint of an ethic of brotherliness that maintains some sense of the personal, of the importance of the other and their suffering, it will be judged as essentially selfish. These points are reinforced in Weber’s examination of mystic brotherliness as found in Buddhism.


the specific form of Buddhistic “altruism”, universal compassion, is merely one stage which sensitivity passes when seeing through the nonsense of the struggle for existence of all individuals in the wheel of life, a sign of progressive intellectual enlightenment, not, however, an expression of active brotherliness. In the rules for contemplation, compassion is expressly defined as being replaced, in the final state of mind, by the stoic equanimity of the knowing man. (Weber [1916–1917] 1958:213)

Buddhist brotherliness reaches an extreme of impersonality in its detachment. In fact it is comparable to Puritanism in this regard.

Buddhist caritas is characterised by the same impersonality and matter-of-factness as Jainism, and in another manner, also that of Puritanism. The personal certitudo salutis, not the welfare of the neighbour is the issue. (Weber [1916–1917] 1958:209)

Buddhism thus represents for Weber the most prominent, consistent example of mystic, universal impersonality.

Here an important distinction needs to be drawn within the ranks of acosmic brotherliness. In Intermediate Reflections, Weber lists the Buddha along with Jesus and St. Francis as a purveyor of brotherly religion ([1915] 1948b:357). All three might be taken as examples of acosmic brotherliness (see [1921] 1978:630–03, 592 on Jesus, and [1921] 1978:540, 552 for St. Francis), yet Buddhism is also stated to be a logical extreme of love’s mystical escapism ([1921] 1978:627–28, [1915] 1948b:339–40). Weber would appear to be distinguishing Buddhist mysticism from some Christian manifestations of acosmism. This is confirmed in the study of Buddhism where he states: “The

concept of neighbourly love, at least in the sense of the great Christian virtuosi of brotherliness is unknown” (Weber [1916–1917] 1958:208, emphasis added). Both may be termed religions of acosmic brotherliness, but in their practice and belief they are qualitatively different.

The quotations given here suggest that Christian acosmic brotherliness is relatively “warmer,” more active, and less distant than the Eastern forms, which are directly aligned with the ultimate coldness of Puritanism. Weber does not spell out this contrast further, but some additional points might be deduced.

All consistent mystic acosmism, whether Eastern or Western (although Weber stresses the Eastern logics) will be subject to the judgment of impersonality. However, the great Christian virtuosi of brotherliness, although adopting an acosmistic position and indifference to the world ([1921] 1978:630–33), will not have traveled as far down the road of consistency to reach the point of pure mystic indifference. Hence, although Jesus (if we accept him as the first Christian virtuoso) and Buddhism both “evoke the most radical demands for the ethic of brotherly love” ([1921] 1978:593), and although Jesus is said to adopt a “mystically conditioned acosmism of love” ([1921] 1978:633), there are significant differences in terms of religious rationalization. Jesus is characterized as a magician by Weber ([1921] 1978:630–31, although this is just one element of Weber’s depiction and is itself qualified, see [1921] 1978:564) rather than a mystic; an important difference since the “charisma of the pure ‘mystic’ serves only himself [while the] charisma of the genuine magician serves others” ([1915] 1948a:290). Further, Jesus’ acosmic views are inconsistently mixed by him with contrasting Judaic attributes ([1921] 1978:633). This relative inconsistency is combined with a stress Weber puts on the active nature of Occidental acosmism, which is especially seen in the idea of ascetics being God’s tools rather than as “vessels of the divine” ([1915] 1948a:285). Being active in a world that is still denied, rather than following the path of contemplative withdrawal, perhaps allows this form of Christian brotherliness a more direct engagement with suffering. For these reasons, we can deduce how Christian acosmistic love can be contrasted to the Eastern variants. In this sense, the Christian virtuosi of brotherliness might be said to stand closer to the ideal-type than pure mysticism, in that their active, relatively “warm” love approaches a personal concern with the sufferer. However, it has to be said that this form of brotherliness is hardly developed by Weber and this conclusion must remain speculative.

Mystic brotherliness also differs from the ideal-typical form in that its withdrawal from the world entails the elimination of tension with the economy and politics, while also maintaining, in agreement with the ideal-typical form, an uncompromised position in terms of its own theological consistency. For example, “mysticism is the other consistent avenue [besides Puritanism] by which the tension between economics and religion has been escaped” ([1915] 1948b:333). Since all the world is denied, there is no interest in the other, nor in any of the routines of economic life—the only interest is in salvation (as above, [1915] 1948b:333, [1921] 1978:589). Similarly with the political sphere, in its consistent acosmism, mysticism simply “withdraws from the pragma of violence which no political action can escape” ([1915] 1948b:336; see also [1921] 1978:594). Such consistent withdrawal allows mysticism an obvious way of dealing with the social world without tension⁴ or compromise.

⁴Indeed, the tension it does feel with the world, particularly against art and eroticism, arises precisely because these value spheres, with their similar withdrawal from the world, are direct competitors with its “bursting individuation” ([1915] 1948b:348; see also [1915] 1948b:342–43, 348–49).
In sum, the most consistent mystic forms of brotherliness are universal, world-denying, and uncompromised, but impersonal and without tension with the economic and political realms.

ORGANIC SOCIAL ETHICS

The third major historical expression of brotherliness that Weber discusses is a form of organic social ethics, which is universal, personal, and full of compromises and tensions with the world. Unlike the consistent acosmic direction of mystical love, this organic brotherly ethic is cosmic in orientation.

Organic social ethics, where religiously sub-structured, stands on the soil of “brotherliness”, but, in contrast to mystic and acosmic love, is dominated by a cosmic, rational demand for brotherliness. Its point of departure is the experience of the inequality of religious charisma. The very fact that the holy should be accessible only to some and not to all is unbearable to organic social ethics. ([1915] 1948b:338, emphasis added)\(^5\)

Though he makes brief mention of the Lutheran vocational life (discussed below), Weber’s most sustained discussion is in relation to the medieval, hierarchical “organic social ethic”\(^6\) associated with Aquinas ([1915] 1948b:338–39, [1921] 1978:597–601). Within these perspectives, a conservative, God-ordained social world is imagined and instantiated wherein an order of vocational life is set out on the assumption of the social inequality between humans, but not the inequality of suffering. Such an order holds reality to be relatively rational despite its wickedness, since there are at least traces of the divine plan in the world. Herein lies its cosmic, that is, world-affirming, orientation ([1915] 1948b:338–39). Perhaps the most important sociological reason for this was the fact that the “democratic” impulses ([1915] 1948a:288) of the church that lay behind such doctrines are starkly opposed to the exclusiveness of the virtuosi sect (Weber [1906, 1920] 1948c:308, 318–19, [1916–1917] 1958:201–02). It is universal in this sense.

The possibility of this organic ethic rested on a certain period in the rationalization of the Western economic and political spheres. In the medieval stage of Western social development, the economic and political spheres had not yet attained the state of impersonality that they were to acquire in modernity. Weber thus allows that they were able to maintain a personal dimension to brotherliness.

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\(^5\) Of all the secondary literature on Weber’s religious works, to our knowledge it is only that of Mitzman (1969:197) that notes this important distinction between cosmic and acosmic brotherliness. At least in the English translations, such a distinction is not always easily detected in Weber’s texts. For example, there is a misleading translation by Gerth and Mills of an important passage in Introduction to the Economic Ethics of the World Religions. Their version reads: “The Buddhist monk, certain to enter Nirvana, seeks the sentiment of a cosmic love” ([1915] 1948a:278) when in fact the German provides a different interpretation based on the cosmic/acosmic distinction: Das akosmische Liebesgefühl des seines Eingangs in Nirvana sichern buddhistischen Mönches (Weber 1920a:249).

\(^6\) The other organic social ethic, which is given much more substantial scrutiny by Weber than the Western medieval variant, is Hinduism. But the karma/ caste determination of the theodicy problem does not include an ethic of brotherliness and so Hinduism will not be discussed further here.
The medieval and Lutheran traditionalistic ethics of vocation actually rested on a general presupposition, one that is increasingly rare, which both share with the Confucian ethic: that power relationships in both the economic and political spheres have a purely personal character...these relationships of domination had a character to which one may apply ethical requirements in the same way that one applies them to every other purely personal relationship. ([1921] 1978:600)\(^7\)

Here, Lutheran vocationalism is directly linked by Weber to the medieval organic form in being open to the ethics of the personal. In fact, at one stage, labor was specifically justified through brotherly love by Luther because “the division of labour forces every individual to work for others” (Weber [1904, 1920] 1985:81). Weber describes this connection as “highly naïve” (Weber [1904, 1920] 1985:81), and suggests that the calling would come to be more fully justified by Luther as the only way to live acceptably in the eyes of God. A highly conservative, traditionalistic outlook is evident in this later approach of Luther. The individual should remain once and for all in the station and calling in which God had placed him or her, and should restrain worldly activity within the limits imposed by his or her established station in life. Although his economic traditionalism was originally the result of Paulinian indifference, it later became that of a more and more intense belief in divine providence, which identified absolute obedience to God’s will with absolute acceptance of things as they were (Weber [1904, 1920] 1985:85). In other words, Luther initially conceived of vocational labor in terms of brotherly love specifically, but modified this position to a traditionalist acceptance of one’s place in the world, which was, in this way, akin to the medieval organic form of vocational ethics in Catholicism. This later Lutheran understanding of the calling, even though the explicit ethic of brotherly love is no longer its justification, has the ethical possibilities of the personal available to it because of its traditionalist structure. And here, in the personal relations of the laboring life itself, the ethic of brotherliness can be pursued.

Thus, Weber suggests, prior to modernity, personal, ethical relations were possible in vocational life, even if such societal order was highly unequal. (Weber’s discussions of the personal political and social relations in patriarchal, patrimonial, and feudal structures might help in filling out this traditional ethical capacity, although indirectly (Weber [1921] 1978:1006, 1013, 1025–26, 1028–31, 1070, 1083, 1105, [1915] 1948b:331).) Furthermore, although the form of brotherliness possible in such a social structure is logically undeveloped from the perspective of Calvinist and mystical consistency, it is precisely within this lack that the ethic of the personal is preserved for Weber. Society and religion were thus uneasily allied as both were simultaneously underdeveloped from the viewpoints of modernity and theological rationalization. Because of the pressures of history and rational theology, however, and the necessary conflict between this morality and social reality, such an ethic would be overwhelmed by the forces of

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\(^7\)It should be stressed that the ethical dimension of the personal can include much more than the ethic of brotherliness. This was the case in the patriarchal, patrimonial, and feudal relations (Weber [1921] 1978:1006, 1013, 1025–26, 1028–31, 1070, 1083, 1105, [1915] 1948b:331) of the premodern West; and in Confucianism, which also contained social, political personal and ethical relations, but, as mentioned, these were exclusively tied to the family, and so did not involve the brotherly ethic, which went beyond the ties of the sib (Weber [1915] 1951:236–37).
the economy and politics, as well as by the pull of religious rationalization itself in the shape of Puritanism.

Weber thus explains how the personal, universal ethic of brotherliness did once exist empirically. However, because the personal, universal relations in which caritas could be cultivated were part of vocational life, this period of the Christian church entered into “compromises and relativities” with the worldly spheres (Æ1915] 1948b:338). Such a cosmic orientation, such a compromising integration with the economy, must be judged harshly “as an accommodation to the privileged strata of this world” from the viewpoint of “the radical mystical ethic of religious brotherliness” (Æ1915] 1948b:338). The tension with this manifestation of brotherliness and the world is acute.

All these points—cosmic/acosmic, exclusive/universal, personal/impersonal, the tension with the world—are brought out in the following quotation where the contrasts between the cosmic brotherliness of organic ethics and exclusionary Puritanism on the one hand, and acosmic mystical brotherliness on the other, are made explicit.

The organic pragmatism of salvation must consider the redemptory aristocracy of inner-worldly asceticism [as seen in Protestantism], with its rational de-personalisation of life orders, as the hardest form of lovelessness and lack of brotherliness. It must consider the redemptory pragmatism of mysticism as a sublimated and, in truth, unbrotherly indulgence of the mystic’s own charisma. The mystic’s unmethodical and planless acosmism of love is viewed as a mere selfish means in the search for the mystic’s own salvation. Both inner-worldly asceticism and mysticism ultimately condemn the social world to absolute meaninglessness, or at least they hold that God’s aims concerning the social world are utterly incomprehensible. The rationalism of organic doctrines of society cannot stand up under this idea; for it seeks to comprehend the world as an at least relatively rational cosmos in spite of all its wickedness. (Æ1915] 1948b:338–39)

In sum, Weber seems to argue that the organic social ethics of medieval Christianity (and Lutheranism) maintained a universal, ethical brotherliness because a historical junction of social and ideational forms could allow the actual, if highly compromised, existence of such an ethic as part of the everyday, tension-filled, vocational world. Universal and tending to the impersonal, it had not yet developed in such a consistent way as to lose the ethical concern for the suffering of the other, nor had it yet been trampled under the weight of the autonomous cogs of the economic and political spheres.

CHARISMATIC BROTHERLINESS

A final form of empirical brotherliness mentioned by Weber is that of charismatic communism. Although this is the form of brotherliness closest to the ideal-type, it is the least mentioned by Weber, mainly because it has no real historical significance for the problems of modernity. It is only obliquely referred to in the central arguments in Intermediate Reflections, and so should perhaps be seen as relatively less important than the other forms discussed.
As indicated above, for Weber, most religious ethics began with some form of brotherly love: “caritas, brotherhood and ethically imbued personal relations between master and servant...remain the foundation of every ecclesiastic ethic, from Islam and Judaism to Buddhism and Christianity” ([1921] 1978:1188). That is, some similar limited personal ethical relations, in which caritas might be exhibited, can be seen to underlie all these religions, and Weber points to a common originating source, the ethic of neighborliness. Further, in this move from the neighborhood ethics to the brotherly love of salvation religions, a world-denying brotherhood is commonly found that lives by the ethic of brotherliness in terms of a “charismatic communism” ([1917] 1978:1187; see also [1921] 1978:581, 1119–20). In the quotation given from Intermediate Remarks at the beginning of this article, Weber terms this early community a “communism of loving brethren” ([1915] 1948b:330). Although this might be seen in many religions, Weber particularly speaks of groups that came into being in the Middle East during the pre- and early Christian period. In the closing sections of Ancient Judaism, he comments on the Essenes, and suggests that although such groups lived with a personal ethic of brotherliness, were acosmic, and in necessary tension with the rest of the world, they were exclusionary and were confronted by logics in the world that meant this ethic could maintain only a fleeting existence.

The Essenes, from the second century B.C., rigorously segregated themselves from the less pure and shunned all economic possession beyond some bare necessities. “Correspondingly they pushed the old social commandment of brotherliness to the length of an unworlly love communism of consumption” (Weber [1917–1919] 1952:407). This ethic of the Essenes can be linked to original Christian practices in terms of a strict pacifism and love of enemies, and “the communism of acosmic love” (Weber [1917–1919] 1952:410).

Unlike the medieval and Lutheran vocational ethics, which entered into an ethically flawed relationship with the forces of the economy and politics, these early, founding religious communities cut themselves off from the impure, impersonal structures of society and tried to live out an uncompromising ethic of brotherliness. Hence, in their separation from the larger society they did not succumb to the social-economic compromises of the cosmic, organic ethic. Further, these social organizations offered another variant of mystical brotherliness in apparently still being able to maintain a personal ethic and are, consequently, not so “selfishly” concerned with salvation as the world-denying flight of more developed mysticism. However, they were inherently unstable, not just because of the difficulty of keeping economic/political reality at bay, but because “once the eschatological expectations fade, charismatic communism in all forms declines and retreats into monastic circles” ([1921] 1978:1187). That is, these communities were formed around an indifference to economic/political life based on charismatic religious expectations, but such an existence must be overtaken by the eventual routinization of charisma ([1921] 1978:Pt. 1, Ch. 111, v; see also [1921] 1978:1121). As Weber states:

It is only in the initial stages and so long as the charismatic leader acts in a way which is completely outside everyday social organization, that it is possible for his followers to live communistically in a community of faith and enthusiasm... ([1921] 1978:249)
To be so radically world-denying (acosmic), and held together by charismatic religious authority, meant that such “anti-societies” could not long endure. This helps to explain their relatively minor historical importance. For Weber, they are a stage on the road to more significant forms of religious brotherliness.

In relation to the ideal-type, a certain aristocratic exclusivity of the brotherhood is apparent, especially in terms of purity/impurity, despite the fact that this particular pursuit of brotherliness was relatively untainted by economic social reality and did command “a love of enemies” (Weber [1917–1919] 1952:411). These early mystic communities were personal in their ethical relations, acosmic, and in clear and uncompromised tension with the world they shunned, but lacked the universality of the ideal-typical brotherly ethic.

CONCLUSION

To understand Weber’s notion of brotherliness, we have had to follow a trail of terms throughout his writings. Although this ethical theme is not a dominant topic in any of the major works beyond Intermediate Reflections, a remarkably consistent account can be pieced together. A certain, if somewhat implied, ideal-typical brotherliness is offered by Weber as a kind of scale to measure the four main types of brotherliness that are present throughout his works: Puritanism, which is limited in scope and not based on a concept of fellow suffering; mystic brotherliness, which addresses the suffering of others, but in an impersonal manner (as seen in Buddhism); cosmic brotherliness (as found in medieval Christianity), which, unlike the first two, compromises itself with the structures of this world while seeking a personal concern for all sufferers; and the charismatic communities, which displayed all the traits of the ideal-type except a clear universalism. Only the cosmic, medieval type attempted historically to bend the world (especially the economic and political spheres) toward an ethic of brotherliness, entangling itself in power interests and this-worldly compromises as a result ([1915] 1948b:336–37). Neither the mystic, Puritan, or charismatic community attempted to transform the world in alignment with such an ethic; instead, they either used the economic/political orders, or escaped them.

All four types can be seen, then, to fall short of the “pure” ethic outlined in Weber’s idea-typical brotherliness, with the Puritan form being the most distant from the ideal-type and the charismatic the closest. The types of brotherliness might be schematized as shown in Table 1 to reveal their elemental structure.

Weber consistently uses these explanatory parameters in all of his widely scattered commentaries on brotherliness. However, the obvious qualification must be made that such a schema loses much of the important differences that exist within each simplified category, especially the differences in Christian and Eastern mysticism; the Puritan and mystic resolutions to tension with the world, and the huge variety of Puritan doctrines and practices.

How Weber himself advocates an ethic of brotherliness within modernity is hinted at in his famous “vocation lectures” on science and politics. This prescriptive discussion lies, however, beyond the scope of the present article, which has only tried to untangle his scattered, empirical descriptions of the brotherly ethic. What is clear is that the general usage of the concept of brotherliness throughout Weber’s works requires more substantive study and importance than has previously been thought necessary by Weberian scholars.
Table 1. Types of Brotherliness in Weber’s Sociology of Religion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Brotherliness</th>
<th>Universal</th>
<th>Personal/Ethical</th>
<th>Acosmic/World-Denying</th>
<th>Tension with the World (Economic and Political Spheres)</th>
<th>Compromises with the World</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideal-type</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puritan</td>
<td>No (and yes on a more minor level)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystic (e.g., Buddhist)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organic Christian</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(medieval Catholic, Lutheran)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charismatic communities</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g., the Essenes)</td>
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REFERENCES


