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AAR   ARTICLES

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THIS ARTICLE HAS ITS GERM in puzzlement and curiosity about a term that appears in a number of different places in Max Weber's writings on the sociology of religion but nowhere more centrally than in his famous essay "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions" (1920, 1:536-573;1946:323-359), a term generally translated as "acosmistic love" or "the acosmism of love," leaving not only generations of students to whom I have taught Weber utterly baffled but also myself—although I understood the literal meaning of the words—largely at a loss. The German word that lies behind these translations is *Liebesakosmismus*, and, in the course of teaching a seminar on Weber's sociology of religion in the spring of 1997, I decided at last to get to the bottom of this term and why it was so important to Weber. The closest English equivalent I could come

Robert N. Bellah is Elliott Professor of Sociology, Emeritus, at the University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720-1980.

up with is "world-denying love." "World-denying[2] love" is a more accessible English translation, but even that reverses the German noun and adjective. "World-denying love," as opposed to worldly love, which is always love for particular persons, is love for all, without distinction—love for whoever comes, friends, strangers, enemies—which led Weber to quote Baudelaire in calling it "the sacred prostitution of the soul"[3] (1920, 1:546; 1946:333); but a fuller understanding of the term, as we will see, must depend on the contexts in which he uses it. At any rate, *Liebesakosmismus*, what I am pointing to with the inadequate term "world-denying love," was for Weber a central notion. I will argue that tracing this idea in Weber's work will lead us to the core of his historical sociology of religion and to problems that are still very much on the agenda today.

We may begin by looking at this idea in the "Intermediate Reflections" ("*Zwischenbetrachtung*") in Volume One of his *Collected Essays on the Sociology of Religion* (1920, 1:536-573).[4] One can see why Gerth and Mills in their *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* preferred to call this essay "Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions"[5] (1946:323-359), a title adapted from the German subtitle "*Theorie der Stufen und Richtungen religiöser Weltablehnung*," which is literally "A Theory of the Stages and Directions of Religious Rejections of the World." "Intermediate Reflections" refers to the place of the essay in the *Collected Essays*, between *The Religion of China* and *The Religion of India*, and since it no longer had that place in the Gerth and Mills volume, they used the German subtitle. But whether in German or English, this title is both inadequate and inaccurate. The title fundamentally misleads the reader as to the content of the essay

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2 Gr. *kosmos*=world, Gr. *a*=alpha privative; following Hegel's point about Spinoza, that he was not an atheist, one who denies God, but an acosmist, one who denies the world, because God is all (1990:162-163).

3 Two German colleagues, Professors Wolfgang Schluchter and Dirk Kaesler, have given me generous advice and assistance concerning *Liebesakosmismus* in personal communications. Schluchter writes, "To my knowledge, Weber used the term *akosmism of love* for the first time during the convention of the German Sociological Association in 1910." In a discussion of mysticism following a paper by Troeltsch, Weber considered the case of Tolstoy. According to Schluchter Weber said that "Tolstoy's interpretation of Christian love qualifies as *akosmism of love*. It is regarded as formless, opposed to *any* form of life" (1997). Schluchter discusses this event elsewhere (1996:275-277). There Schluchter defines "*Akosmismus der Liebe*" as "love transcending the orders of the world" (281). Schluchter has indicated in his personal communication that the word *Akosmismus* was in general use in the intellectual life of the time: for example, the article on "Types of Religion" in the famous German encyclopedia of religion, *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, says, "The more mystical the mysticism is the more its *Weltanschauung* becomes *a k o s m i s t i s c h*" (1415). Kaesler has helped me sort out the sources of the term in Spinoza, Fichte, and Hegel, and has pointed out that for Feuerbach the acosmism of Christianity was a great defect and point of criticism (Kaesler 1997; Feuerbach 1957).

4 Rogers Brubaker (1984) provides a useful commentary on the "*Zwischenbetrachtung*" and related essays.

5 I will frequently make minor alterations in the Gerth and Mills translation. Emphasis in all Weber translations is Weber's.

and so may obscure the fact that this is a key text, perhaps *the* key text in Weber's entire corpus. For the subject is not, or not simply, religious rejections of the world but the differentiation of what Weber calls the value spheres (*Wertsphären*) and the increasingly irreconcilable conflict between them, a differentiation that leads to the "polytheism" of modernity, a "war of the gods," which is the result of the entire process of rationalization, Weber's central preoccupation during his last and most fruitful period.

WEBER'S HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY

In order to understand the place of world-denying love, *Liebesakosmismus*, in Weber's thought, we must first look at the overall conception of social development that organizes his entire sociological work. Although he rejected nineteenth-century evolutionism, Weber's own comparative historical sociology has a strongly developmental framework, which could still be called evolutionary if that word is properly construed.[6] In this framework the baseline from which all later development begins is characterized by a social structure rooted almost entirely in kinship and neighborhood. What is characteristic of such baseline societies, which we might—though the term is not without ambiguities—call tribal societies, is that all aspects of life are organized through kinship and local group association. There is no differentiated political system or economic system. Hierarchy is not missing but is organized almost exclusively through age and sex differences. Economic life is carried on largely through kinship and neighborhood reciprocity. Religion is embedded in the ongoing social life of the people and is largely oriented to immediate needs, which led Weber to characterize it as magic.

In strongest contrast to tribal societies, Weber characterized modern societies as divided into a number of competing spheres, each with its own needs and values, and each increasingly incompatible with other spheres. I will illustrate extensively what Weber means later in this article, but for now let me give it a common sense interpretation. It is often said that people today find themselves "fragmented and exhausted." We rush from work to family to school to recreation to church, if there is time for church, shifting gears and changing personalities, it would almost seem, each time we move from one context to another. Lacking a close attachment to locality such as is characteristic of many tribal societies, where

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6 See the discussion of this issue in Schluchter (1981) where he speaks of "Weber's limited program in evolutionary theory" (141). Schluchter prefers the term "developmental history," but he takes note of the same features of Weber's thought to which I am calling attention. For a qualified use of the term evolution, see "Religious Evolution" (Bellah:20–50). Recently Schluchter (1996) has expressed stronger reservations about the relation of Weber's developmental history to neo-evolutionary theory.

every rock and tree has its special meaning and often a story connected to it, we jump into our cars and rush from one impersonal location to another, always hoping we can find a little solace at the end of the day at "home." But at home most of us spend several hours in front of a television set watching things jump around from drama to comedy to sports, always interrupted by incessant advertisements, in a way even more chaotic than the rest of our lives.

In this evolutionary framework,[7] which is the essential context for understanding the "*Zwischenbetrachtung*," kinship societies are succeeded by more complex societies characterized by patriarchalism, patrimonialism, and traditional bureaucracy—and related developments in economics, law, and urbanism—all with greater capacity for rationalization than kinship societies but usually with various blockages to continuous rationalization. In the sphere of religion, these intermediate societies see the emergence of salvation or prophetic religions, which, through the rejection of magic, have, in varying degrees, rationalizing potentialities. Weber organized his comparative work in the sociology of religion around the salvation religions that emerged largely in the first millennium B.C.E., the most important of which he called world religions. These include, following the order of Weber's own presentation, Confucianism and Taoism, Hinduism and Buddhism, and Judaism, studies which were to be completed by further work on Christianity and Islam. Although he never treated it extensively, he also included Zoroastrianism among the world religions. Karl Jaspers, a close friend and student of Weber's work, called the period of the emergence of these religions the Axial Age (1948).[8] S. N. Eisenstadt, the leading Weberian sociologist today, speaks of the world religions as axial religions and their related civilizations as axial civilizations.[9]

Rationalizing potentialities exist in all the axial civilizations, but, according to Weber, it was several tendencies within Western Civilization

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[7] One can detect such a framework not only in the *Collected Essays on the Sociology of Religion* (1920-21) (and in every section of the "*Zwischenbetrachtung*") but in every chapter of *Economy and Society* (1978) as well.

[8] Weber himself referred in passing to "the prophetic age" (1978:447). In connection with the development of prophecy in ancient Greece he wrote: "It is not necessary to detail here these developments of the eighth and seventh centuries, . . . some of which reached into the sixth and even the fifth century. They were contemporary with Jewish, Persian, and Hindu prophetic movements, and probably also with the achievements of Chinese ethics in the pre-Confucian period, although we have only scant knowledge of the latter" (1978:442). Weber's dating of the prophetic age to the early-middle first millennium B.C.E. fits with Jaspers's dating of the axial age. The latter has been criticized for leaving out not only Islam but Christianity. But these and later developments can be seen as "secondary formations" from the original breakthroughs. Such a dating has a certain irony in view of the fact that the term "axial" undoubtedly derives from the notion of Christ as the "axis" of history, something very clear in Hegel, for example.

[9] Among many relevant works one might mention especially S. N. Eisenstadt (1986).

that led to the decisive breakthrough into modernity, the third of his major evolutionary stages, one characterized by a high degree of rationalization in every sphere and the increasing disjunction between the spheres. Although Weber used the term "capitalism" as his most frequent way of referring to modern society, he by no means considered economics the key to the entire complex. He attributed to the Protestant Reformation, particularly in its Calvinist and sectarian forms, a key role in the emergence of modernity, especially through its relentless criticism of magic and its methodical organization of ethical life in an effort to transform the world.

THE *ZWISCHENBETRACHTUNG*

A close reading of the *"Zwischenbetrachtung,"* which is what I want to undertake in this article, leads to the central problem of Weber's sociology of religion. The opening paragraph notes that the essay precedes the treatment of the Indian case, which is, "in strongest contrast to the case of China, the cradle of those religious ethics which have abnegated the world," and Weber goes on to wonder whether perhaps it was from India that this idea "set out on its historical way throughout the world at large" (1920, 1:536;1946:323). After a brief excursus on the value of ideal types, Weber develops in swift overview his typology of world-rejection, namely, asceticism and mysticism, each in an other-worldly (*ausserweltlich*) and inner-worldly (*innerweltlich*) form. I will assume familiarity with this basic Weberian typology and only note that there is an ambiguity about whether all four types involve rejection of the world. The inner-worldly types are not "world-fleeing" (*weltfluchtig*, a synonym for *ausserweltlich*), since they require that believers stay in and work with the world. They are, however, world-rejecting, in that they do not take the world for granted but either work in the world to change the world (inner-worldly asceticism) or act in the world without attachment to the results of action (inner-worldly mysticism). For Weber's sociology of religion the critical case is inner-worldly asceticism, above all as expressed in Puritanism, because of its role in the emergence of capitalism and the other essential features of modernity.

Weber then turns to the central topic of the essay, "the tensions existing between religion and the world," which involves not only the notion of religious rejections of the world but, at least equally, worldly rejections of religion. He begins with the emergence of salvation religions from magic. "The magician has been the historical precursor of the prophet, of the exemplary [mystical] as well as of the emissary [ascetic] prophet and savior" (1920, 1:540;1946:327). But the prophet or savior who is a bearer of a true religion of salvation—that is, one that holds out deliverance from suffering to its adherents—will often lead to "not only an acute but

a permanent state of tension in relation to the world and its orders." The tension has become greater "the more religion has been sublimated from ritualism and towards 'religious absolutism'"(1920, 1:541;1946:328). But the rationalization of salvation religion is paralleled by the rationalization and increasing autonomy of the other value spheres, thus heightening the tension from both sides.

1. The Kinship Sphere

Weber opens his substantive account of the relation of religion to the other value-spheres where we might expect, given his evolutionary propensities, namely, the conflict between religion and kinship.[10] "When salvation prophecy has created communities (*Gemeinschaften*) on a purely religious basis," it has devalued kinship and marriage. In the place of "the magical ties and exclusiveness" of kinship, "within the new community the prophetic religion has developed a religious ethic of brotherliness" (1920, 1:542; 1946:329).[11] What is critically important is that in the rest of the essay and in many other places as well, salvation religion and the ethic of brotherliness are synonymous for Weber, while the polarity of asceticism and mysticism is secondary.

The source of this ethic is extremely interesting in the context of an evolutionary view of religion. According to Weber, "This ethic [of brotherliness] has simply taken over the original principles of social and ethical conduct which 'the association of neighbors' had offered, whether it was the community of villagers, members of the sib, the guild, or of partners in seafaring, hunting, and warring expeditions. These communities have known two elemental principles: first, the dualism of in-group and out-group morality; second, for in-group morality, simply reciprocity: 'As you do unto me I shall do unto you.'" The idea was "your want of today may be mine of tomorrow" (1920, 1:542; 1956:329). Within the group those of wealth and status have an obligation to help the needy. What Weber is describing is very close to what Marshall Sahlins in *Stone Age Economics*

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[10] Much of the secondary literature omits kinship as one of the value spheres. This is partly because Weber's terminology is variable here. He often speaks of kinship by referring to the sib, what in American anthropology would be called the clan, and neighborhood is often treated as part of this complex. It may also be partly because Gerth and Mills do not give a title to the section discussing kinship in the "*Zwischenbetrachtung.*" The discussion of kinship has no section heading called "The Kinship Sphere," as there is subsequently "The Economic Sphere," etc. It should be noted that the German original of this essay is without section breaks and that all the section headings in the English translation were added by the editors.

[11] It would be unfaithful to Weber's text to abandon the term "brotherliness" for the sake of gender inclusiveness, but it goes without saying that "brotherliness" in this sense includes "sisterliness" as well and is synonymous, in Weber's usage, with the gender-neutral term "ethic of neighborliness."

describes as "generalized reciprocity," which may involve kinship obligations or the redistributional obligations of chiefs:

> At the extreme, say voluntary food-sharing among near kinsmen—or for its logical value, one might think of the suckling of children in this context—the expectation of a direct material return is unseemly. At best it is implicit. The material side of the transaction is repressed by the social: reckoning of debts outstanding cannot be overt and is typically left out of account. This is not to say that handing over things in such form, even to "loved ones," generated no counter-obligation. But the counter is not stipulated by time, quantity, or quality: the expectation of reciprocity is indefinite. . . . Receiving goods lays on a diffuse obligation to reciprocate when necessary to the donor and/or possible for the recipient. The requital may be very soon or it may be never. There are people who even in the fullness of time are incapable of helping themselves or others. . . . Failure to reciprocate does not cause the giver of stuff to stop giving: the goods move one way, in favor of the have-not, for a very long period. (Sahlins:194)

According to Weber, "the religiosity of the congregation transferred this ancient ethic of neighborliness to the relations among brethren of the faith" (1920, 1:543; 1946:329). This could lead to a "brotherly love-communism" and to an inner attitude of "*caritas*, love for the sufferer as such, for one's neighbor, for man, and finally for the enemy." The euphoria produced by salvation religion, related to a "direct feeling of communion with God," can incline the believers toward "an objectless world-denying love" (*einen objektlosen Liebesakosmismus*). And while the psychological tone of the ethic of world-denying benevolence can vary widely, it moves "in the direction of a universalist brotherliness, which goes beyond all barriers of social association, often including that of one's own faith"(1920, 1:543; 1946:330).[12] What has happened to the two principles of the ancient ethic of neighborliness is that the principle of the contrast between in-group and out-group has been abandoned and the principle of reciprocity has been absolutized.

Before turning to the conflict between religion and the economic, political, aesthetic, erotic, and intellectual spheres, Weber sums up what has happened when the brotherliness of kinship is transformed by salva-

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12 There is a passage in the "Sociology of Religion" section of *Economy and Society* that applies this argument specifically to Jesus: "Jesus nowhere explicitly states that the preoccupation with wealth leads to unbrotherliness, but this notion is at the heart of the matter. For the prescribed injunctions definitely contain the primordial ethic of mutual help which is characteristic of neighborhood associations of poorer people. The chief difference is that in Jesus's message acts of mutual help have been synthesized into *Gesinnungsethik* [ethic of conviction or ethic of ultimate ends] involving a fraternalistic sentiment of love. The injunction of mutual help was also construed universalistically, extended to everyone" (1978:632-633).

tion religion: "Religious brotherliness has always clashed with the orders and values of this world, and the more its consequences have been realized, the sharper the clash has been" (1920, 1:544; 1946:330). But the clash between religion and kinship differs from that with all the other spheres: kinship is not simply rejected; it is transformed and universalized so that it becomes the very principle of religion itself in the form of world-denying love.

2. World-Denying Love

We must stop and ask for the empirical reference for world-denying love, or religious brotherliness, which becomes the very definition of religion in the rest of the essay, that is, of that religion which most severely clashes with the other value spheres. In the context of Weber's typology of religious world-rejections, this definition would seem to be rather one-sided. The very notion of world-denial (*Akosmismus*) would seem to rule out the inner-worldly alternatives. Further, world-denial seems much closer to mysticism than to asceticism, to saviors than to prophets. We might remember Weber's pointing to India at the beginning of the essay. And yet there is another recurrent clue that suggests he is not only pointing to India. At certain points, often rhetorically critical points, such as once late in the "*Zwischenbetrachtung*" (1921, 1:571; 1946:357) and again twice in "Politics as a Vocation" (1946:126),[13] Weber cites the three figures of the Buddha, Jesus and Francis as archetypally religious; so there is a clear Christian reference as well. And yet in other contexts it is ascetic Protestantism that is the religious archetype relative to which everything else is compared. But ascetic Protestantism cannot be characterized by world-denying love represented by the Buddha, Jesus, and Francis. We will have to return later to this apparent contradiction.

Given the religious conflicts that are so obvious in the world today, we can hardly argue that religion, often seen as inevitably divisive in the eyes of secular intellectuals, can usually be characterized by universal brotherliness: even Christianity and Buddhism often fall short of the mark. If religion has overcome the ancient in-group, out-group boundaries of kinship, it has often given rise to new boundaries of at least equal strength. And yet the frequency with which religions of quite different historic origins have verged on universal brotherliness or even world-denying love cannot be underestimated either.

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[13] "Politics as a Vocation" was a lecture delivered on January 28, 1919, whereas the "*Zwischenbe-trachtung*" was essentially written in 1915, although revised for publication at the very end of Weber's life. The similarity of concerns and even phraseology between the two pieces suggest the continuity of his thinking in the last five years of his life.

Before looking more closely at Weber's three archetypal figures we can get a sense of their importance for Weber's idea of world-denying love by considering some defining moments in the lives of each of them. When Jesus told the rich young man to "Sell all you have and give to the poor" (Mk. 10:21), it is clear that he meant those words to apply to himself, as is evident when elsewhere he says, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Mt. 8:20). In other words, Jesus was quite deliberately homeless.

The moment in the life of the Buddha to which I want to point is, of course, the moment when this sheltered heir to the throne of a small Himalayan kingdom saw, in spite of his parent's efforts to shield him, old age, sickness, and death, and then simply walked away from his father and mother, wife and child, riches, power and pleasure, to live alone as a beggar in the forest seeking enlightenment. And the similar moment in the life of Saint Francis is when, in the midst of a quarrel with his wealthy, merchant father in the central piazza of Assisi, he takes off all his clothes, throws them at the feet of his father, and says "now I owe you nothing," as he intends henceforth to reenact the life and teaching of Jesus.

We may consider in somewhat more detail the example of the Buddha, who is not only one of Weber's three archetypal figures but who emerges in India, which Weber says produced the most consistent world-denying forms (*weltverneinendsten Formen*) of religious ethics (1920, 1:536; 1946: 523). In *The Religion of India* Weber repeatedly applies the term *Liebe-saksosmismus* to Buddhism (1921, 2:223, 248, 274; 1958:208-209, 228, 253, 367). The Buddha, as a result of his enlightenment experience, saw through the illusory nature of the "house" of this world:

> All your rafters are broken
> The peak of the roof is ruined,
> The mind is freed from its accumulations,
> It has reached the cessation of desires.[14]

G. C. Pande speaks of "the superhuman compassion that bridges the vast gulf between the eternal silence of transcendental wisdom and the preaching of the truth in the world." He goes on to say that, "Wisdom alone would have led to total silence. It is compassion that made the historic ministry of the Buddha possible" (9).

Edward Conze, however, argues for the intrinsic relation between Buddhist wisdom and Buddhist compassion:

> Normally we live in a world of false appearances, where I myself seem to be surrounded by other persons. In actual truth I have no self, nor have

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[14] *Dhammapada* 11.9, as quoted in Pande (9).

they; all that exists is an incessant flow of impersonal dharmas. True, spiritual, selfless love therefore must operate on the plane of true reality, and, selfless within, must transcend also the false appearance of a self in others, and be directed toward that which is really there, i.e. the dharmas. Since wisdom is the ability to contemplate the dharmas, selfless love is dependent on wisdom. (Conze:85)

Here indeed we get very close to Weber's *Liebesakosmismus*, world-denying love, and we begin to understand the intrinsic relation between the *Akosmismus* (world-denial) and the *Liebe* (love).[15]

There is a problem about applying the term "world-denial" to Jesus. In a biblical perspective, since God created the world, it must be good. Yet to the God-obsessed the world falls away, loses its claim, or rather, its claim is wholly derivative from its creator. Thus, we can understand the ambivalence of the New Testament toward the world. On the one hand, "God so loved the world, that he sent his only begotten son . . ." (Jn. 3.16). On the other hand, "the world knew him not" (Jn. 1.10). The connotation of "this world" is negative when the world denies God. For Jesus, whose attitude Weber characterizes as "an absolute indifference to the world" (1978:633), love of neighbor is inextricably linked with love of God. What Jesus calls "the greatest and first commandment" is the love of God, and the second is the love of neighbor (Mt. 22.37-40). And Jesus drastically extends the notion of neighbor, as Weber noted, to the stranger and the alien, as in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10.25-37), and even to the enemy as in the Sermon on the Mount: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt. 5.44). Edward Conze attempts to link the Buddhist and Christian teaching:

The Christian doctrine is quite analogous to the Buddhist and might perhaps be described as follows: spiritual love for people is entirely dependent on the love for God, and secondary to it. Since we are bidden to love all people equally, we can do so only by loving them in the one respect in which they are equal, and that is their relation to God, whose children they are. The love of God is therefore the necessary antecedent to the love of others. . . . (Conze:85)

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15 It is an interesting question whether one can have the *Akosmismus* without the *Liebe*. Parmenides is as close to *Akosmismus* as one can get in early Greek thought: the changeless realm of reason is utterly different from the changing world of appearance. (I am indebted to Schluchter [1997] for the reference to Parmenides.) We have only fragments of the writings of Parmenides, but from the fragments and later accounts of his thought there is no indication of an ethic of love. Spinoza, on the other hand, seems to have a somewhat pallid but not insubstantial doctrine of love. Part IV of the *Ethics* is famously entitled "Of Human Bondage." It is the "intellectual love of God" (remembering that in Spinoza God and Nature are the same: *Deus sive natura*) that frees us from emotional bondage in a way not entirely dissimilar to the enlightenment of the Buddha and leads Spinoza to conclude: "he who lives under the guidance of reason will endeavour to repay hatred with love, that is with kindness" (Pt. IV, Prop. XLVI).

Francis, who attempts to reenact the life and teaching of Jesus, extends the love commandment to the whole of the cosmos, to "brother sun and sister moon," etc., as in his *Cantico delle creature.* In all three, world-denying love has the further correlate of absolute non-violence. The first of the Buddha's rules for his followers is to refrain from injury to all living things (Pande:16). Jesus intensifies the commandment not to kill by saying also that one should not be angry (Mt. 5.21-22), and rejects "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" in commanding "Resist not evil" (Mt. 5.39). Not only the early church but later monastic orders, such as that founded by Francis, followed Jesus in this regard.

All three of our paradigmatic characters could be called, following Louis Dumont, "renouncers" (1980; see especially, Appendix B, "World Renunciation in Indian Religions."), that is, persons who stand outside everyday existence and question many of its most basic assumptions. It would be hard to see how a sincere believer in world-denying love could be other than a renouncer, although we shall find that a number of compromise positions are possible. From the point of view of Weber's interest in the conflict between the value spheres, it is clear that the most consistent renouncers will produce the greatest tension with the other value spheres. This is not the place to conduct a general survey of renouncers in the various traditions, but it might be helpful to suggest that the three paradigmatic figures are far from alone. India, as we might expect, has produced many renouncers: besides the Buddhists there are the Jainas, as well as many figures within the Hindu tradition. Weber specifically applies the term *Liebesakosmismus* to the *bhakti* tradition in India (1921, 2:344; 1958:313). In China the Mohists believed in "universal love," although they do not appear to have been world-denying. They were opposed to war, yet were active in defending small states against large ones. The Taoists might seem to be better candidates, although their world-denial, which might better be called partial world-withdrawal, was far from radical; and although they were opposed to aggressive action, they cannot be said to believe in universal love. On the other hand, the Confucians, who might be seen as quintessential world-affirmers, believed in a graded love (*jen*), which, while it should be felt more strongly toward close kin, should ultimately be extended to all, even barbarians; and government should be by moral example, not through compulsion or punishment. In the ancient Mediterranean world, the Cynics were clearly renouncers. They appear to have believed in non-violence, indeed in non-participation in society generally, but not in universal love. The Stoics, who owed a considerable debt to the Cynics, did believe in universal benevolence, the abolition of distinctions of gender and servitude, and universal peace, but it would be hard to argue that they were world-denying.

If we move to the immediate background of Christianity, we find Weber himself in *Ancient Judaism* identifying world-denying love among the Essenes (the community about which we would later learn much from the Dead Sea Scrolls). He says that the Essenes "pushed the old social commandment of brotherliness to the length of a full economic world-denying love (*vollen ökonomischen Liebesakosmismus*)" (1921, 3:424; 1952:407), and a few pages later he characterizes them as having "world-denying love-communism (*akosmistischen Liebeskommunismus*)" (1921, 3:428; 1952: 410). Most surprisingly, he argues that the boundary between Pharisaism and Essenism was fluid, "at least with regard to the way of life," and he indicates that the first of the features which suggest a similar mentality is the *Liebesakosmismus* that is to be found among the Pharisees (1921, 3:427; 1952:409).

We may well ask a question that Weber, surprisingly, almost never asks: how can we account for the emergence of the salvation religions in the axial age? What was there about the social and cultural conditions of the first millennium B.C.E. that could have given rise to these unprecedented developments?[16] In the major cultural centers of the old world it was a period of rapid economic and political development with unsettling consequences for older kinship and tribal solidarities and the potentiality for serious social conflict. Yet these processes were only accelerations of conditions that had been developing since the emergence of centralized state structures in Mesopotamia early in the fourth millennium, in Egypt from the end of the fourth millennium, in North China and the Indus River Valley from the late third and early second millennia. With the uncertain exception of Akhenaten[17] in fourteenth century B.C.E. Egypt, and the

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[16] S. N. Eisenstadt has considered this question in his general introduction and the introduction to the several parts of *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations*. Weber did suggest in one of his brilliant throw-away lines which he never, to my knowledge, followed up but which would be well worth pursuing, the beginnings of an answer: "Perhaps prophecy in all its forms arose, especially in the Near East, in connection with the reconstitution of the great world empires in Asia, and the resumption and intensification of international commerce after a long interruption" (1978:441).

Jürgen Habermas gives an interesting "materialist" background for the emergence of salvation religions that assert in a new and more radical way the "generalized reciprocity" of the early kinship and tribal ethic: "Social integration accomplished via kinship relations and secured in cases of conflict by preconventional legal institutions belongs, from a developmental-logical point of view, to a lower stage than social integration accomplished via relations of domination and secured in cases of conflict by conventional legal institutions. Despite this progress, the exploitation and oppression *necessarily* practiced in political class societies has to be considered retrogressive in comparison with the less significant social inequalities *permitted* by the kinship system. Because of this, class societies are unable to satisfy the need for legitimation that they themselves generate" (1979:163).

[17] Akhenaten's religious "revolution" is endlessly fascinating. Although it comes out of a background of intense mythical speculation about solar deities, speculation that does not appear to transcend the limits of archaic religiosity, Akhenaten's monistic conception of light as the fundamental reality does seem to approach an almost Spinozist acosmism: *Deus sive lux*. (After making this con-

hard-to-date figures of Moses and Zoroaster late in the second millennium, all the significant developments, including the larger implications of the teachings of Moses and Zoroaster, appeared only in the first millennium B.C.E.

A social conflict or social criticism model has been developed in several cases. The notion that the covenant, which is the foundation of ancient Israel, formed a revolutionary confederation of marginal people in conflict with Canaanite city states has gained considerable currency (Gottwald).[18] Arguments for Christianity as a proto-socialist protest movement go back at least to Karl Kautsky in 1908, but recently a considerable body of work has suggested a linkage between the multiple levels of oppression suffered by Jewish peasants under Roman occupation and the Jesus movement (Kautsky; Theissen; Horsley; Oakman).[19] The Cynics and especially the early Stoics have been portrayed as offering a fundamental criticism of Hellenistic Society (Erskine; Dawson). Chad Hanson has suggested a social critical role and a social context in the artisan class for the Mohist movement in Warring States China. Although there are problems of dating and ambiguities in the evidence, there are a number of recent efforts to clarify the social context, including elements of social conflict and protest, from which Buddhism and other developments in first-millennium B.C.E. India arose. (On early Buddhism see Wagle; Chakravarti. On the general Indian background in the first millennium B.C.E., see Thapar 1975, 1979; Kulke; Heesterman.)

If a context of social unrest only partially accounts for the emergence of the axial religions, can we consider the possibility that some of these new conceptions of reality arose primarily out of cultural reinterpretations? One possibility might be that the spread of literacy in the first millennium B.C.E. might have made possible more systematic and abstract reflection. Writing is older than the first millennium, and even then was in most places quite limited to priestly or scribal groups, but it was certainly more widespread than earlier. Unfortunately, however, writing does not appear to be decisive in many cases. Much of the speculation that led to

nection between Spinoza and Akhenaten, I learned from Jan Assmann's new book, *Moses the Egyptian* (1997:143), that eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Spinozists were making a connection with Egyptian religion even before the discovery of Akhenaten's religious revolution, a connection that can be expressed as *Deus sive natura sive Isis*.) But the fact that the truth of the one God, Aten, is available only through the divine king, Akhenaten, is thoroughly archaic (Assmann 1992a, 1992b; Allen).

18 For a less scholarly but most interesting discussion that shows the indelible connection of religion and politics in early Israel, see Walzer. It is remarkable how much of this "revolutionary" theory of early Israelite history is foreshadowed in Weber's *Ancient Judaism*.

19 Again, it is remarkable to what degree Weber's treatment of Jesus, for example toward the end of the "Sociology of Religion" section of *Economy and Society* (1978:632-633) foreshadows this contemporary view.

axial breakthroughs occurred in purely oral traditions. Zoroaster's *Gathas* and the Brahmanic *Upanishads* were not written down for centuries, nor were the early teachings of Buddhism.[20] The teachings of Confucius, Socrates, and Jesus were transmitted orally, although probably written down within a generation of their deaths. Plato, although a superb writer, was famously skeptical of writing (*Seventh Letter*) and may have transmitted his most important teachings orally.[21] The tradition of an "inner" teaching to be transmitted orally appears to survive even today among the followers of Leo Strauss.

But if writing is not the key factor, groups of intellectuals, clerical or lay, with a sufficient degree of autonomy from the established order to question its assumptions, would seem to be an essential condition for the axial breakthroughs (Weber 1920-21, 1978; Eisenstadt). And the capacity to transmit, interpret, and apply complex texts, oral or written, would be a defining trait of such groups. The transmitters of the Iranian *Avestas* and the Indian *Vedas*, out of which came the Zoroastrian and Brahmanic breakthroughs, and perhaps the status group to which Confucius belonged, seem to be priesthoods of typically archaic type, whose teachings became transformed under new conditions. Greek philosophy and Israelite prophecy, as well as Mohism in ancient China, appear to have derived from groups of lay intellectuals, though some of the Hebrew prophets may have had priestly connections. In most cases, although we have enough evidence to feel that a combination of disturbed social conditions and partially autonomous groups of intellectuals help account for the emergence of axial religions, the exact connections remain to be worked out. In many of the cases (including India) the surviving data will probably never allow more than probable hypotheses.

From the beginning, the heroes of world-denying love, the renouncers—to use Dumont's term—exerted intense pressure against the familial, economic, political, aesthetic, erotic, and intellectual value spheres. Not surprisingly, renouncers were always problematic from the point of view of political, military, and intellectual elites, as Weber's entire sociology of religion repeatedly points out. Yet in almost all traditional societies the radical implications of the axial religions were moderated by a compromise formation which Weber called "the organic social ethic."

The organic social ethic met the needs of both elites and masses. Such a compromise formation made it possible for elites to use religion for "the

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[20] Stanley J. Tambiah has discussed the remarkable capacity of the Buddhist and Hindu traditions, the latter virtually to this day, to transmit and develop teachings of great complexity purely orally (1986:458-465).

[21] Plato's anxiety about the danger of committing the most important things to writing may not be dissimilar to the anxieties of some of us about the consequences of television and computers, and in both cases the anxiety may have some justification.

taming of the masses," and for the reinforcement of their own legitimacy. On the other hand, when salvation religions developed large popular followings, among whom thorough-going renouncers, usually organized in some form of monasticism, would inevitably be a minority, it became necessary to recognize what Weber called "the inequality of religious charisma." The fact of unequal charismatic qualifications could be linked to "secular stratification by status, into a cosmos of God-ordained services which are specialized in function. . . . As a rule, these tasks stand in the service of the realization of a condition which, in spite of its compromise nature, is pleasing to God" (1920, 1:553; 1946:338).[22] That is, the organic social ethic made it possible to include in the religious community those who, for reasons of temperament or occupation, could not fulfill the radical demands of world-denying love.

Weber's two most frequently cited examples of the organic social ethic are Hinduism and Catholic Christianity. Already in the Brahmanism of ancient India, although the renouncer ideal had emerged in the *Upanishads* in the first half of the first millennium B.C.E., it was seen as only one possible role, or one stage in the life cycle, of the elite classes. This view reached its classical formulation for Hinduism, as Weber noted, in the *Bhagavad Gita,* where the renouncer ideal is fully articulated with its accompanying world-denying love. Krishna tells Arjuna that the man who is dear to him "is the same with regard to enemies and friends." He is "without hatred for any creature, friendly and compassionate, free from possessiveness and egoism, indifferent to pleasure and pain, enduring" (12.13, 18; 1994:56). Yet Krishna enjoins Arjuna to fulfill his role as a warrior, even though it means killing his own relatives. As long as Arjuna acts without attachment to the results of his action, he is fulfilling his religious obligation. In this way *Liebesakosmismus* is reconciled with an organic ethic (Weber 1921, 2:200-202, 367; 1958:189-191, 333).

Catholic sacramentalism in a quite different religious context, nonetheless also succeeded in legitimating the renunciatory role of the religious life together with the necessarily compromised obligations of the laity,

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22 Weber describes the transformation of the original charismatic "communism of love" into the organic social ethic: "Once the eschatological expectations fade, charismatic communism in all its forms declines and retreats into monastic circles, where it becomes the special concern of the exemplary followers of God (*Gottesgefolgschaft*). . . . The maintenance of the indigent and unemployed brothers becomes the task of a regular officer, the deacon. Some ecclesiastic revenues are set aside for them (in Islam as well as Christianity). For the rest, poor relief becomes the concern of the monks. As a remnant of the charismatic communism of love, Islam, Buddhism and Christianity equally consider the giving of alms as pleasing to God, despite their greatly different origins. . . . For *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; they are the residues of the old ethos of love of the charismatic brotherhood" (1978:1187-1188).

including the military. Weber describes what he calls the organic ethics of vocation as follows:

> The various callings or castes have been providentially ordained, and each of them has been assigned some specific, indispensable function desired by God or determined by the impersonal world order, so that different ethical obligations devolve on each. The diverse occupations and castes are compared to the constituent portions of an organism in this type of theory. . . . The virtuosi of religion, be they of an ascetic or contemplative type, are also assigned their specific responsibility within such an organic order, just as specific functions have been allocated to princes, warriors, judges, artisans and peasants. This allocation of responsibilities to religious virtuosi is intended to produce a treasure of supernumerary good works which the institution of grace may thereupon distribute. By subjecting himself to the revealed truth and to the correct sentiment of love, the individual will achieve, and that within the established institutions of the world, happiness in this world and reward in the life to come. (1978:598-599)

If traditional axial religions have been able to compromise, however uneasily—and with occasional rebellions and breakdowns—with the realities of an organic ethic, such compromises, according to Weber, are no longer possible in the modern world. In order to see why, it will be necessary to look more closely at each of the value spheres described in the "*Zwischenbetrachtung.*" As we have seen, Weber begins with the sphere of kinship, which turns out to be the exception among value spheres because, although there is indeed tension between salvation religion and kinship, that tension is in a way overcome by the incorporation of the "generalized reciprocity" ethic of kinship in an absolute form in salvation religion itself.

In treating the other spheres—economic, political, aesthetic, erotic, and intellectual—Weber follows the same basic pattern: he invariably begins by indicating that in the earliest, magical, phase of development, there is no tension between religion and the other spheres; they are effectively fused. Magical religion operates to bring economic well-being—rain, good harvests, successful fishing, etc.—as well as success in war; magical ritual often has an erotic aspect and is the primary sphere of aesthetic expression in simple societies; mythology provides the sole forum for intellectual speculation. The religion of brotherliness, however, finds itself at odds with each sphere, and increasingly so as each sphere is rationalized. In the economic sphere it is the "interest struggles of men in the *market*" (1920, 1:544; 1946:331) that it finds offensive. In the political sphere it is coercion, and above all the violence of war, that it finds wholly incompatible with its teachings. But in the political sphere, as well as in the aesthetic and erotic spheres, there is another source of tension. Not only is

there an intrinsic incompatibility of value: in each of these spheres a competing form of salvation actually emerges.

3. The Political Sphere

In the political sphere it is salvation through death in war. What Weber says is particularly poignant since the essay was probably written during World War I and revised shortly thereafter:

> The community of the army standing in the field today feels itself—as in the times of the war lord's following—to be a community unto death, and the greatest of its kind. Death on the field of battle differs from death that is only man's common lot. . . . Death on the field of battle differs from this merely unavoidable dying in that in war, and in this enormity *only* in war, the individual can *believe* that he knows he is dying "for" something. The why and the wherefore of his facing death can, as a rule, be so indubitable to him that the problem of the "meaning" of death does not even occur to him. (1920, 1:548; 1946:335)

What is implicit here and becomes explicit in the treatment of the aesthetic and erotic spheres is that not only does death in battle compete with brotherly religion in solving the meaning of death, it is one of the few points in our modern disenchanted world where any meaning at all can be found.

4. The Aesthetic Sphere

The aesthetic sphere is a danger to the religion of brotherliness once form becomes an object of cultivation independent of content, for formal elaboration without ethical content can only seem self-indulgent and unbrotherly to salvation religion. But the tension is greatly heightened with the development of "intellectualism and the rationalization of life": "For under these conditions, art becomes a cosmos of more and more consciously grasped independent values which exist in their own rights. Art takes over the function of a this-worldly salvation, no matter how this may be interpreted. It provides a *salvation* from the routines of everyday life, and especially from the increasing pressures of theoretical and practical rationalism" (1920, 1:555; 1946:342).

Weber points out that the tension between salvation religion and the aesthetic and erotic spheres (as well, by the way, as warfare) is that these spheres, while participating in the general process of intellectualiztion and rationalization, are basically non-rational or even anti-rational, and thus serve not only as alternatives to religion but as refuges from the increasing compulsion of a market economy and a bureaucratic state ("the iron cage") as well as from a hypertrophied intellectual sphere.

5. The Erotic Sphere

Weber's discussion of the erotic sphere is one of the most remarkable passages in all of his writings and the second longest section of the *"Zwischenbetrachtung."* One need not find in it a specific autobiographical reference, as Arthur Mitzman (1969) does, to feel that it comes "from the heart," so to speak, as much as anything Weber ever wrote. This is not the place for a full commentary on this extraordinary passage. The main point appears in the first paragraph of the section: "The brotherly idea of salvation religion is in profound tension with the greatest irrational force of life: sexual love. The more sublimated sexuality is, and the more principled and relentlessly consistent the salvation ethic of brotherliness is, the sharper is the tension between sex and religion" (1920, 1:556; 1946:343).

As in the aesthetic sphere, the elaboration of eroticism in modern life—Weber makes it clear that he is speaking of "specifically extramarital sexual life, which has been removed from the everyday"—gives it the quality of a full-scale alternative form of salvation, one particularly appealing in the face of modern disenchantment:

> Under these conditions, the erotic relation seems to offer the unsurpassable peak of the fulfillment of the request for love in the direct fusion of the souls of one to the other. The boundless giving of oneself is as radical as possible in its opposition to all functionality, rationality, and generality. . . . It is so overpowering that it is treated "symbolically": as a *sacrament.* The lover realizes himself to be rooted in the kernel of the truly living, which is eternally inaccessible to any rational endeavor. He knows himself to be freed from the cold skeleton hands of rational orders, just as completely as from the banality of everyday routine. (1920, 1:560; 1946: 346-347)

Yet for Weber, brotherly love's critique of this kind of ecstatic experience, which he so eloquently describes, is nonetheless overwhelming:

> From the point of view of any religious ethic of brotherhood, the erotic relation must remain attached, in a certain sophisticated measure, to brutality. The more sublimated it is, the more brutal. Unavoidably, it is considered to be a relation of conflict. This conflict is not only, or even predominantly, jealousy and the will to possession, excluding third ones. It is far more the most intimate coercion of the soul of the less brutal partner. This coercion exists because it is never noticed by the partners themselves. Pretending to be the most humane devotion, it is a sophisticated enjoyment of oneself in the other.[23] (1920, 1:561-562; 1946:348)

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23 In starkest contrast to this passage is the paean to married love at the very end of the section on the erotic sphere: "From a purely inner-worldly point of view, only the linkage of marriage with the thought of ethical responsibility for one another—hence a category heterogeneous to the purely erotic sphere—can carry the sentiment that something unique and supreme might be embodied in

It is worth remembering that once earlier in the essay Weber used the word "brutality," when he said that "the brotherliness of a group of men bound together in war must appear devalued in brotherly religions . . . as a mere reflection of the technically sophisticated brutality of the struggle" (1920, 1:549; 1946:336).

6. The Intellectual Sphere

Weber's final section on the intellectual sphere is the longest and most somber passage in an essay that is somber enough already. It requires far more careful analysis than I can give it here. One point worth noting is that the intellectual sphere, like the economic sphere, but unlike the political, aesthetic, and erotic spheres, offers no alternative form of secular salvation. The wisdom (*sophia*) that we encounter in Plato or in Book 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, as the way humans can approach most closely to transcendence, is for Weber not an option:

> The tension between religion and intellectual knowledge definitely comes to the fore wherever rational, empirical knowledge has consistently worked through to the disenchantment of the world and its transformation into a causal mechanism. For then science encounters the claims of the ethical postulate that the world is a God-ordained, and hence somehow *meaningfully* and ethically oriented, cosmos. In principle, the empirical as well as the mathematically oriented view of the world develops refutation of every intellectual approach which in any way asks for a "meaning" of inner-worldly occurrences. . . . [C]ulture's every step forward seems condemned to lead to an ever more devastating senselessness. (1920, 1:564, 570; 1946:350-351, 357)

Weber uses this final discussion of the intellectual sphere to sum up the consequences of the whole process of rationalization and intellectualization in every sphere. These consequences are overwhelmingly negative in two critical aspects: 1) they remove individuals from any sense of embeddedness in an organic cycle of life, and 2) they deny the ethic of brotherliness at the core of salvation religions. In making these points Weber shows the rhetorical power characteristic of his last writings. On our alienation from organic life he writes:

> The peasant, like Abraham, could die "satiated with life." The feudal landlord and the warrior hero could do likewise. For both fulfilled a cycle

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marriage; that it might be the transformation of the feeling of a love which is conscious of responsibility throughout all the nuances of the organic life process, 'up to the pianissimo of old age,' and a mutual granting of oneself to another and the becoming indebted to each other (in Goethe's sense). Rarely does life grant such a value in pure form. He to whom it is given may speak of fate's fortune and grace—not of his own 'merit'" (1921:563; 1946:350). It is worth remembering that Weber dedicated the volume to Marianne with the words "1893 [the year of their marriage] '*bis ins Pianissimo des höschsten Alters.*'"

of existence beyond which they did not reach. Each in his way could
attain an inner-worldly perfection as a result of the naïve unambiguity of
the substance of his life. But the "cultivated" man who strives for self-
perfection, in the sense of acquiring or creating "cultural values," cannot
do this. He can become "weary of life" but he cannot become "satiated
with life" in the sense of completing a cycle. . . . It thus becomes less and
less likely that "culture" and the striving for culture can have any inner-
worldly meaning for the individual. (1920, 1:569-570; 1946:356)

The denial of love in every differentiated sphere of life is equally devas-
tating: "absence of love is attached from the very root" to "the routinized
economic cosmos"; "the external order" of the state "could be maintained
only by brutal force, which was concerned with justice only nominally and
occasionally"; "the barriers of education and of aesthetic cultivation are
the most intimate and the most insuperable of all status differences";
"veiled and sublimated brutality" as well as "idiosyncrasy hostile to broth-
erliness . . . have inevitably accompanied sexual love"; and finally "the
aristocracy of intellect" is an "unbrotherly aristocracy" (1920, 1:568-569;
1946:354-355). It is the final irony that even "mystical attempts at salva-
tion . . . succumb in the end to the universal domination of unbrother-
liness." Because they are "*not* accessible to everybody . . . it [such an
attempt] is an aristocratic religiosity of redemption." But it is not just the
religious virtuosity that it requires that isolates radical salvation religion
today: it is also its external conditions: "And, in the midst of a culture that
is rationally organized for a vocational workaday life, there is hardly any
room for the cultivation of world-denying brotherliness. . . . Under the
technical and social conditions of rational culture, an imitation of the life
of Buddha, Jesus, or Francis seems condemned to failure for purely exter-
nal reasons" (1920, 1:571; 1946:357).

7. World-Denying Love in the Modern World

Thus an ethic of universal brotherliness, which first came into being
through the idea of world-denying love in the salvation religions, has no
place in the world today. This appalling conclusion has not failed to raise
objections even among Weber's greatest admirers. For Jürgen Habermas,
for example, the universalistic ethic of human rights, which derives from
the Enlightenment, and especially from Immanuel Kant, and which is
highly relevant for today's world, is itself a development out of the reli-
gious ethic of brotherliness, which therefore lives on, in altered form,
today. (1984:Ch. 2) Nor have the salvation religions accepted the irrele-
vance to which Weber consigned them.

Before we ask further about the continued viability of an ethic of
brotherliness today we must consider more carefully Weber's reasons for

denying it. (We will see that Weber did, after all, reserve one place for this ethic today: the sphere of intimate life.) His reasons are implicit in what I have said about the various spheres already. We need not discuss further the aesthetic or the erotic spheres, or even the intellectual sphere, once we realize that for Weber salvation religion inevitably requires "the sacrifice of the intellect" (1920, 1:566;1946:352).[24] But Weber's arguments for the incompatibility of the modern economy and state with an ethic of brotherliness have to be taken with the utmost seriousness.

Since Weber spent many years studying economic history in relation to religious ethics, it is not lightly that he argues for their incompatibility:

> Money is the most abstract and "impersonal" element that exists in human life. The more the world of the modern capitalist economy follows its own immanent laws, the less accessible it is to any imaginable relationship with a religious ethic of brotherliness. The more rational, and thus impersonal, capitalism becomes, the more this is the case. In the past it was possible to regulate ethically the personal relations between master and slave precisely because they were personal relations. But it is not possible to regulate—at least not in the same sense or with the same success—the relations between the shifting holders of mortgages and the shifting debtors of the banks that issue these mortgages: for in this case, no personal bonds of any sort exist.[25] (1920, 1:544; 1946:331)

Weber fears any effort to impose ethical regulation on the market because of the danger that it would undermine the formal rationality of the market mechanism itself. Elsewhere he writes that "in [the world of capitalism] the claims of religious charity are vitiated not merely because of the refractoriness and weakness of particular individuals, as it happens everywhere, but because they lose their meaning altogether. Religious ethics is confronted by a world of depersonalized relationships which for fundamental reasons cannot submit to its primeval norms" (1978:585).[26]

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24 See the parallel assertion in "Science as a Vocation" (1946:155).

25 In *Economy and Society* Weber speaks of "the 'masterless slavery' of the modern proletariat" (1978:600).

26 In Chapter 7, Part 2, of *Economy and Society*, "The Market," Weber writes: "Where the market is allowed to follow its own autonomous tendencies, its participants do not look toward the persons of each other but toward the commodity; there are no obligations of brotherliness or reverence, and none of those spontaneous human relations that are sustained by personal unions. They would all just obstruct the free development of the bare market relationship, and its specific interests serve, in their turn, to weaken the sentiments on which these obstructions rest. . . . Such absolute depersonalization is contrary to all the elementary forms of human relationship. . . . The "free" market, that is, the market which is not bound by ethical norms, with its exploitation of constellations of interests and monopoly positions and its dickering, is an abomination to every system of fraternal ethics. In sharp contrast to all other groups which always presuppose some measure of personal fraternization or even blood kinship, the market is fundamentally alien to any type of fraternal relation" (1978: 636-637).

Weber seems remarkably contemporary in viewing any effort to "interfere with" the market economy as destructive of the viability of such an economy, as his lifelong hostility to socialism also suggests. But Weber is no simple apologist for laissez-faire capitalism—he sees its human destructiveness as clearly as its harshest critics. Rather, he is giving us his own bleak picture of the irreconcilable conflict of the value spheres. He closes his discussion of the economic sphere in the "*Zwishchenbetrachtung*" by pointing out the two "consistent avenues for escaping the tension between religion and the economic world": 1) the "benevolence" of the mystic who gives whatever is asked with no thought of return; and 2) the paradox of the Puritan ethic of "vocation":

> Puritanism renounced the universalism of love, and rationally routinized all work in this world into serving God's will and testing one's state of grace. . . . Puritanism accepted the routinization of the economic cosmos, which, with the whole world, it devalued as creatural and depraved. This state of affairs appeared as God-willed, and as material given for fulfilling one's duty. In the last resort, this meant in principle to renounce salvation as a goal attainable by man, that is by everybody. It meant to renounce salvation in favor of the groundless and always only particularized grace. In truth, this standpoint of unbrotherliness was no longer a genuine "religion of salvation." (1920, 1:545-546; 1946:332-333)

In thinking about the meaning of these words of Weber's in contemporary America, it would be well to remember that American Protestantism, and to some degree American religion generally, is the lineal descendent of that Puritanism that Weber describes as having so abandoned the ethic of brotherliness that it is no longer a religion of salvation. Only in this way can religion and the capitalist economy be reconciled.

Weber's discussion of politics and ethics is complex, and it would take us too far from the topic of this paper to go into it in detail. But as far as an ethic of brotherly love is concerned, Weber has little doubt that it is as inapplicable to the modern state as to the modern economy. The state is based on power and serves the interests of power, not the commands of an ethic of conviction. Any effort to justify the coercive actions of the state with ethical or certainly with religious language seems purely hypocritical to Weber. "In the face of this, the cleaner and only honest way may appear to be the complete elimination of ethics from political reasoning," he writes (1920, 1:548; 1946:334).

If Weber denies the applicability of the radical ethic of brotherliness to the modern economy and state, we may be sure that he would similarly deny the possibility that the organic social ethic could be resurrected to meet our current need. One can imagine the skepticism with which he would greet the present effort in the United States to offer so-called private-sector volunteerism, family values, and a renewal of local com-

munity as ways of providing the safety net, such as it was, that is no longer publicly provided. The gated, guarded "communities," which have in recent years been springing up in American suburbs, nowhere more frequently than in California, would surely seem to Weber to be the complete antithesis of genuine organic community.

Yet, however somber Weber's view of the iron cage of modern society, he did not entirely despair of an ethic of brotherliness. He was fascinated by the writings of Tolstoy and Dostoevski, those modern representatives of a radical ethic of world-denying love, and enjoyed conversations with young Russians concerning these writers. His wife, Marianne, in her biography of him, tells us that "for a long time he had been planning to write a book about Tolstoy that was to contain the results of his inner-most experiences" (466).[27] She also says that "He never lost his profound reverence for the gospel of brotherhood, and he accepted its demands relating to personal life" (90). In the late address, "Science as a Vocation," Weber, while raising doubts about the religious self-understanding of "some of the youth groups [of] recent years," nevertheless says, "every act of genuine brotherliness may be linked with the awareness that it contributes something imperishable to a super-personal realm" (1946:155).[28] And his characterization of marriage (which he says is "a category heterogeneous to the purely erotic sphere") in the "*Zwischenbetrachtung*" as "a mutual granting of oneself to another," is surely an example of the significance of the love-ethic in personal life. To underscore, however, the limits of the claims of world-denying love on Weber, Marianne says that "for him, the God of the Gospels did not have any claim to exclusive dominion over the soul. He had to share them with other 'gods,' particularly the demands of the fatherland and of scientific truth" (90).

EPILOGUE

At the end of this effort to place the radical ethic of brotherly love in the context of Weber's historical sociology of religion we must ask whether

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27 There is a passage in *War and Peace* that illustrates what Weber found in Tolstoy. Prince Andrei, when facing the possibility of death, grasps "the principle of eternal love": "To love everyone and everything, always to sacrifice oneself for love, meant not to love one person, and not to love this earthly life. And the more he became imbued with this principle of love, the more he renounced life . . ." (Tolstoy:1173).

28 On the same page just a few lines down Weber writes: "Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations. It is not accidental that our greatest art is intimate and not monumental, nor is it accidental that today only within the smallest and most intimate circles, in personal human situations, in *pianissimo*, that something is pulsating that corresponds to the prophetic *pneuma*, which in former times swept through the great communities like a firebrand, welding them together."

he was right to confine that ethic to the purely personal realm in the modern world, whether in the public world we must accept the sole dominion of the "gods" of money and power unrestrained by brotherliness, and of science which cannot give us any answers to questions of meaning, even the meaning of its own endeavor. To attempt an answer to the latter question would require at least another article. To the former I will offer a brief response.

We might begin by asking whether the subsequent course of history in the twentieth century would have provided any basis for Weber to change his mind. We can imagine that much of the last eighty years of history would only have confirmed Weber in his darkest predictions: "Not summer's bloom lies ahead of us, but rather a polar night of icy darkness and hardness . . ." (1946:128). Yet we can also point to things that perhaps Weber did not imagine. At least in the figures of Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., we have seen leaders exemplifying the ethic of Jesus, the Buddha, and Francis on the public stage and with significant, if not unambiguous, political achievements. Equally if not more significant, we have seen in the years after World War II an effort in Western Europe, usually under some sort of combined effort of Christian Democrats and Social Democrats, to create what has come to be called a welfare state, one that would embody in impersonal legal and bureaucratic structures something of the ethic of brotherly love. Even in the United States there was a half-hearted and inadequate effort in this direction during the middle years of this century. The impersonality of these efforts might make them appear far from the ethic of brotherliness, but it is worth remembering Weber's emphasis on the fact that world-denying love is always impersonal, open to all who come, "no respecter of persons."

Now, of course, that effort is everywhere under attack on the grounds that we can no longer "afford" the welfare state under the pressure of "the global economy"—the "world dominion of unbrotherliness" if ever there was one. Of course it remains to be seen whether we will all succumb to this pressure and sink back into a world where only the few at the top really prosper and where everyone else either works to provide them with their luxuries or exists under carceral conditions provided for surplus and unneeded labor. Jürgen Habermas has argued for the "reanchoring" of the economic and state administrative structures in the "lifeworld," where an ethic of solidarity and normative standards of social justice would take priority over the pure incentives of profit- and power-maximization (1987:153-197). This would require rethinking the Christian Democratic and Social Democratic projects under twenty-first century conditions, a difficult but perhaps not wholly impossible project. The problems of global political order are even more intimidating. If there is some slight

moderation of the purely Hobbesian play of power interests on the international stage in recent years, it is even harder to see where there might emerge an ethic of solidarity between rich and poor nations than it is to see how we might revive such an ethic for all citizens within developed societies.

Living in a very different cultural context from that of Weber, Americans, even those of us who feel that the United States is giving the worst possible example of unbrotherliness in its economic and political policies today, have an inveterate hopefulness that leads us to believe that an ethic of universal love, is, after all, not irrelevant to our most urgent economic and political problems. But beyond hopefulness there is the realistic consideration that a society in which money and power are radically detached from ethical life may undermine the conditions of its own survival. Nor should we forget, as Weber reminded us, that the God of Jesus is not only a God of love but also a God of judgment: "It must not be overlooked, as it so often has been," he wrote, "that Jesus combined world-denying love with the Jewish notion of retribution. God alone will one day compensate, avenge, and reward" (1978:633). As the evolutionary biologists are warning us, if our proclivities toward uncontrolled exploitation of our environment and of each other go on unchecked, they could lead to the destruction of the species or even of life on our planet. In short, no one in today's world can be sure that Weber's fear of "the polar night of icy darkness and hardness" was entirely misplaced.

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