

BROTHERLINESS

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Brotherliness

Primary Disciplinary Field(s): Social Psychology, Humanistic Psychology, Ethics, Sociology

1. Core Definition and Psychological Function

The concept of **brotherliness** (often interchangeable with fraternity or universal solidarity in a non-gendered, humanitarian sense) describes a profound and encompassing feeling of psychological and social connection among human beings. Fundamentally, it represents an inherent human drive toward collective well-being and mutual support. This internal state of solidarity is not merely passive recognition of shared humanity but is outwardly materialized through active engagement and demonstrable concern for the welfare of others. Within social psychology, brotherliness is viewed as a necessary antidote to feelings of alienation and isolation, establishing bonds that transcend immediate familial or tribal affiliations to encompass the broader societal structure. This commitment manifests as ethical behavior, altruism, and the dedication of resources--emotional, physical, or material--to ensure that the common good is prioritized alongside individual needs.

Psychologically, the search for **brotherliness** is deeply intertwined with fundamental human existential needs. As elaborated by the German sociopsychologist Erich Fromm (1900-1980), this need for connection can be understood in the context of the universal search for **rootedness**. Rootedness is one of Fromm's five basic existential needs, referring to the drive to belong and feel at home in the world, transcending the accidental nature of birth and gaining stable ties. When an individual achieves rootedness through brotherliness, they move beyond the primary ties of family (the "incestuous ties") and develop a productive, voluntary, and universal kinship with humankind. This shift provides a sense of security and belonging that is independent of biological determinism or coercive social structures, fulfilling a vital component of psychological health and development.

The internal feeling of solidarity fostered by brotherliness is expansive, suggesting that the well-being of the self is inextricably linked to the well-being of the collective. This relational philosophy mandates that individual action must be guided by an ethical imperative that seeks to alleviate suffering and promote flourishing across the social spectrum. When **brotherliness** is adopted as a communal ideal, the focused concern for close associates naturally scales upward, transforming into a generalized concern for society, governmental structures, and global community health. This transition from individual empathy to universal civic responsibility is crucial for developing cohesive, functional democratic societies that prioritize justice and equity over narrow self-interest or tribalism.

2. Conceptual Origins and Philosophical Underpinnings

While the modern psychological conceptualization of **brotherliness** owes much to 20th-century

humanistic thought, its philosophical roots extend deep into antiquity. Concepts emphasizing universal kinship (or fraternity) are central tenets in numerous ethical and religious traditions, including Stoicism, Christianity (agape or neighbourly love), and various forms of utopian socialism. The Enlightenment period, particularly the French Revolution, institutionalized the concept of *fraternité* alongside liberty and equality, positioning it as a political ideal necessary for the functioning of a modern, egalitarian state. However, the philosophical challenge remains: how to translate an abstract ideal of universal affection into practical, sustainable social and political structures, and how to define this bond ethically beyond mere shared proximity.

Sociologically, brotherliness relates directly to Ferdinand Tönnies' classic distinction between *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society). While primary social bonds in *Gemeinschaft* are often characterized by inherent, affective relationships akin to familial ties, brotherliness seeks to replicate the intimacy and mutual concern of *Gemeinschaft* within the vast, complex, and often impersonal structures of *Gesellschaft*. Achieving this requires developing secondary social relationships based on rational, ethical commitment rather than organic, traditional sentiment. This is where the active involvement inherent in **brotherliness** becomes critical--it must be consciously cultivated and sustained through shared goals and mutual understanding, countering the contractual, competitive, and atomizing nature often associated with large-scale industrial societies.

Fromm's specific contribution refined this concept by integrating it into a psychoanalytic framework focused on productive character orientation. He argued that truly healthy **brotherliness** must be based on genuine love and respect, rather than symbiotic dependency or conformity. In his seminal work, *The Art of Loving*, Fromm describes brotherly love as the most fundamental type of love, characterized by its non-exclusiveness and equality. It is the experience of unity with all men, rooted in the knowledge that we are all "one." This form of love is distinct because it is based on the conscious recognition of shared human frailty, mortality, and the potential for suffering, requiring empathy and active responsibility rather than mere sentimentality or passive goodwill.

3. Key Characteristics and Manifestations

The concept of **brotherliness** is realized through a combination of internal attitudes and external behaviors. These components define the quality and efficacy of the solidarity expressed within a community or society, and are essential for distinguishing true brotherliness from superficial cooperation or coerced social compliance.

Solidarity and Unity: The underlying belief in the fundamental equality and interdependence of all human beings. This core principle rejects hierarchies of worth based on accident of birth, wealth, or power, asserting a shared fate among all members of the human species. This solidarity forms the emotional bedrock upon which practical concern is built, demanding an acceptance of shared

human dignity.

Active Concern and Responsibility: Brotherliness is fundamentally defined by its outward expression as a profound concern for the well-being of others. This is not passive pity but an active involvement that compels intervention when others suffer or are oppressed. It involves taking responsibility for the welfare of the collective, viewing another person's distress as a matter of personal ethical urgency and requiring effortful, concrete action.

Respect and Knowledge: According to Fromm, love and concern require respect, and respect can only exist where there is knowledge. True **brotherliness** demands an intellectual and emotional effort to understand the unique individual experiences, needs, and cultural contexts of others, moving beyond stereotypes or simplistic judgments. This cognitive and empathetic effort ensures that assistance and solidarity are meaningful and appropriate to the recipient's genuine situation.

Rootedness and Transcendence: Brotherliness serves as a vital psychological pathway for the individual to achieve a sense of belonging (rootedness) that simultaneously allows them to transcend the limitations of their isolated, individual existence. By connecting productively and voluntarily with the whole of humanity, the individual overcomes the existential anxiety of being fundamentally separate, thereby achieving a stronger sense of self, purpose, and integration within the broader human project.

Furthermore, the practical manifestations of **brotherliness** often occur through collective action aimed at structural change. This can range from organized political movements advocating for broad social justice, where the needs of marginalized groups are championed by the majority, to everyday acts of civic engagement, such as the formation of mutual aid networks, community governance participation, and philanthropic endeavor. In these contexts, the personal commitment to the ideal translates into concrete social structures designed to protect the vulnerable and ensure equitable resource distribution, reflecting the maxim that concern for others develops into concern for society in general.

4. The Frommian Context: Rootedness and the Productive Orientation

The linkage between **brotherliness** and the psychological search for rootedness is perhaps the most distinctive and influential aspect of its definition within humanistic psychology. Erich Fromm posited that the unique human predicament--being simultaneously part of nature yet possessing reason and self-awareness--creates fundamental existential needs that must be satisfied to avoid severe psychological distress and societal dysfunction. When individuals are separated from the protective primary ties (like family, clan, or traditional social roles) through historical processes such as industrialization, urbanization, and the rise of individual freedom, they experience deep-seated feelings of anxiety, homelessness, and alienation. They then desperately seek new,

replacement ways to belong.

If the need for rootedness is fulfilled regressively, individuals might retreat into destructive or non-productive forms of connection, such as submission to authoritarian leaders, blind conformity (the "automaton conformity"), or seeking refuge in excessive, idealized nationalism or rigid, hostile tribalism. These regressive forms of belonging, while providing a temporary illusion of rootedness and safety, inhibit autonomous individual development and lead to societal stagnation or organized conflict. Crucially, they lack the active, critical element necessary for true brotherliness. Conversely, the productive fulfillment of the need for rootedness requires the rational, mature, and universal commitment inherent in **brotherliness**--a commitment based on productive love and autonomous decision-making that seeks to affirm the life of the other rather than merely escape one's own isolation.

Fromm's broader framework of the "Productive Orientation" views brotherliness as a central characteristic of the healthy, mature individual. The productive orientation encompasses the capacity to reason, to love, and to work creatively, defining a personality structure that utilizes its inherent powers fully. A person operating with a productive orientation relates to the world actively and responsibly, using their innate powers to realize their human potential. In this context, **brotherliness** is not a passive sentiment but an active, disciplined skill, a specific form of productive love that requires effort, concentration, and commitment, countering the passive, receptive, or consumerist approach to relationships often observed in modern socio-economic systems. This dedication to universal kinship is viewed as essential for building a Sane Society--a goal central to Fromm's social philosophy, where institutions support, rather than thwart, the achievement of genuine human needs.

5. Significance in Ethics and Political Philosophy

In applied ethics, **brotherliness** serves as a crucial bridge between individual moral sentiment and universal ethical obligation. Unlike purely duty-based ethics (like strict Kantianism) or strict utilitarianism, which focus primarily on adherence to rules or calculation of outcomes, brotherliness centers on the intrinsic value of relationship and mutual care as the indispensable foundation for moral action. It grounds altruism not in abstract self-sacrifice, but in the experiential realization that the self's flourishing is interdependent with the flourishing of others. This relational ethical structure is particularly influential in fields such as care ethics and communitarianism, which prioritize the maintenance of healthy, supportive human networks and the concept of a shared moral fabric over abstract, isolated notions of individual rights.

Politically, the ideal of **brotherliness** necessitates a social structure that actively works to minimize unnecessary suffering and systemic inequality. If citizens genuinely feel a deep, expansive solidarity with one another, they are logically compelled to support social policies--such as

universal healthcare, robust public education systems, and comprehensive economic safety nets--that ensure basic human dignity and opportunity for all members of society, regardless of individual starting circumstance. The ethical mandate of brotherliness dictates that resources should be managed and distributed with a collective responsibility in mind.

The historical pursuit of institutionalizing **brotherliness**, particularly since the Enlightenment, has manifested in the slow, imperfect evolution toward robust democratic ideals, comprehensive human rights legislation, and mechanisms for international cooperation. While no society has fully achieved the utopian ideal of absolute brotherliness, the existence of international bodies like the United Nations, and the widespread adoption of human rights declarations, represents societal attempts to formalize and protect the active concern for the well-being of the broader human collective, moving beyond narrow nationalistic or ideological boundaries. The political health of a nation can often be measured by how far it has successfully translated this humanitarian ideal into legislative reality.

6. Debates, Challenges, and Criticisms

Despite its status as a humanitarian ideal, the concept of **brotherliness** faces several practical and theoretical challenges regarding its implementation and definition. One primary criticism stems from its perceived ambiguity and reliance on an affective component. Critics argue that while the feeling of universal solidarity is desirable, relying on emotional bonds alone is often too fragile to govern complex modern societies, which require robust, impersonal legal and economic structures rather than affective relationships. Furthermore, the term itself, historically derived from the gendered concept of "fraternity," has faced scrutiny for potentially excluding or marginalizing non-male identities, though in contemporary academic discourse, it is generally understood to denote universal human kinship irrespective of gender.

A more persistent and significant challenge lies in the tension between universalism and localism. While **brotherliness** ideally extends to all human beings, human cognitive and psychological structures often favor strong in-group biases. People naturally find it easier to feel active concern and solidarity for those who share immediate identifying characteristics (such as nationality, religion, or local community) than for distant strangers. This pervasive tendency toward tribalism conflicts directly with the universal mandate of true brotherliness, often resulting in "selective solidarity"--intense loyalty and care within the group coexisting with indifference, competition, or even hostility toward out-groups. Achieving genuine, universal brotherliness requires constant, conscious effort to overcome these deep-seated psychological and anthropological barriers.

Finally, there is the risk of co-optation and pathological substitution. When institutions (whether political parties, corporations, or religious bodies) superficially adopt the appealing language of **brotherliness** or solidarity without enacting genuine structural changes or demanding critical

thought, the concept can become a tool for manipulation, ideological conformity, or social control. This false sense of community, often based on rigid demands for obedience rather than mutual respect and autonomous judgment, represents the very regressive fulfillment of the need for rootedness that Fromm warned against, leading to pathological social outcomes rather than human liberation and productive engagement. True brotherliness requires freedom and critical capacity alongside love and connection.

Further Reading

[Erich Fromm \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[The Art of Loving by Erich Fromm \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[The Sane Society by Erich Fromm \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Solidarity \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Communitarianism \(Wikipedia\)](#)

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