Social and Political Perspectives in the Thought of Søren Kierkegaard

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SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES
IN THE THOUGHT OF
SØREN KIERKEGAARD

by

David Bruce Fletcher

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

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VITA

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Although the amount of recognition that has come to the social and political thought of Søren Kierkegaard has not been extensive, what scant attention has been paid to this topic has for the most part been under the assumption that Kierkegaard has contributed little to our understanding of these areas of life. The opinion appears to be prevalent that Kierkegaard is intensely individualistic in a romantic sense, glorying in the primacy of the individual's interior life and guided by a self-directed ethic that finds no basis for its decisions outside of the individual, in sharp contrast to most ethical views. According to this interpretation, Kierkegaard is an asocial thinker, ignoring the social and political aspects of human existence.

This view is expressed by the respected H. Richard Niebuhr, among many others, when in Christ and Culture he corrects what he takes to be Kierkegaard's individualistic neglect of social concerns. He asserts that "our decisions are individual, that is true; they are not individualistic—as though we made them for ourselves and by ourselves as well as in ourselves. They are not individualistic in the Kierkegaardian sense." ¹

With regard to the social aspect of Kierkegaard's thought in general, Niebuhr says that Kierkegaard's philosophy
gives up the culture problem as irrelevant to faith not because it is existentialist and practical, but because it is individualistic and abstract, having abstracted the self from society as violently as any speculative philosopher ever abstracted the life of reason from his existence as a man.2

According to Niebuhr, Kierkegaard is guilty of wholesale negligence in that he "abandons the social problem," not because his philosophy is rightly "insistent on the responsibility of the individual," but rather because it "ignores the responsibility of the self to and for other selves."5

By no means is Kierkegaard only charged with merely ignoring the social question, however. According to Marjorie Grene, in her Introduction to Existentialism, Kierkegaard "rejects philosophically and personally" any concept of community; "community means outwardness, a denial of self, and therewith falsity, hypocrisy, self-deceit."4 Grene asserts that Kierkegaard preferred "extremely simple disjunctions" between self and society; this, combined with "his antisocial temper," made him favor the view that "turning to inwardness necessarily means turning to the self as totally isolated from other selves"; Kierkegaard turns "completely away from any conception of human community," so that "there is indeed nothing but the individual as nothing before God."5

Grene's Kierkegaard would deny that a positive role for the social aspect of human life is consistent with religion and integrity. Kierkegaard, she charges, rejects community as a betrayal of the self which alone is the proper object of concern. This attitude gains him the estimation of being "a small man" in Grene's eyes.6
In a similar vein, the Dutch philosopher S. U. Zuidema writes in his book *Kierkegaard* that Kierkegaard is "an extreme individualist." Zuidema explains that for Kierkegaard "what goes beyond the individual is finite, temporal, external, and relative, and must be treated as such." Kierkegaard's attitude toward fellowship and society is one of outright rejection, and the Kierkegardian view takes exception to all social reform movements in its conservative individualism.

His aristocratic personalism caused him to look down upon the rising socialism of his time. A reform of society is not necessary, and certainly not a socialistic reform, which would abolish individuals. . . . Kierkegaard's individualism resulted, therefore, in an ultraconservative point of view with respect to all forms of society.

Not only does Zuidema's Kierkegaard reject political, secular forms of society, but he is even opposed to any notion of the church in fellowship: "Existential solitude cannot be overcome by mutual fellowship. Individuals can only encounter each other with their own hiddenness. . . . The idea of a congregation . . . is an illegitimate anticipation of the future." Zuidema's Kierkegaard resembles that of Grene: a self-absorbed philosopher in active opposition to any positive role for the interpersonal social and political aspects of human existence.

Does Kierkegaard leave himself open to such interpretations? His individualistic orientation receives ample attestation from both his mode of life and his writings. That he was aristocratic, enjoyed literary and social popularity, lived in comfortable surroundings, and was well educated, are all matters of record. The overwhelming,
seemingly obsessive emphasis that he placed on the individual both in his journals and in several published works, taken alongside his vehement polemics against modern social developments, journalism, the state church, and the "crowd" (which of course is "untruth") seem destined to cast him forever in the mold of a political conservative, opposed to any change in the Danish monarchial political society. He appears as an aristocrat, protective of class privileges, and as an individualist who is as unconcerned with interpersonal and institutional affairs as he is jealously interested in his own intellectual and spiritual situation. Since he also attests that the entire range of his literary production was intended to deal with the problem of "becoming a Christian," a condition that he placed at a "heaven wide" distance from politics, this would seem to mark him as a heavenly minded avoider of things temporal and political.

Another perspective on Kierkegaard has been offered, however, radically different from the above. Kierkegaard's positive orientation toward social and political concerns is indicated and defended by Werner Stark, who in his Social Theory and Christian Thought admitted that in Kierkegaard's writings are to be found "not many pages . . . given to a discussion of the problems of social life." Yet, Stark is quick to add that this relative lack "does not mean that he had no social philosophy. . . . If we look close enough we are sure to find Kierkegaard's social theory . . . as a set of convictions implied in all his aesthetic and edifying works." Stark also praises the "sureness of touch" with which Kierkegaard handles
social topics. 13

Similarly, James Collins, in The Mind of Kierkegaard, observes that "most of the books and articles written during the 1846-48 period reflect this orientation of Kierkegaard's thought to the problems of public life." 14 According to Collins, Kierkegaard sought to "diagnose and cure . . . through his teaching on the individual" the "widespread social malaise" of his day. 15 Collins is convinced that Kierkegaard not only had a genuine concern for the public aspect of human life, but that he sought to have a constructive and corrective influence through his literary output.

It is somewhat surprising in view of the lack of social concern that is held to characterize Kierkegaard's writings that several other commentators have considered Kierkegaard remarkably astute with regard to discerning prevailing social conditions and movements. According to these writers, Kierkegaard made astonishingly accurate, long-range predictions concerning such occurrences as the rise of totalitarianisms, the dominance of mass communications and entertainment, and the secretly "religious" character of fascism and communism. 16

What then is to be made of Kierkegaard's views regarding the social and political aspects of human existence? Is he a quietist, a hermit, and a religious recluse? Is he a politically conservative apologist for the aristocratic ruling classes and a paragon of self-centered romantic individualism? Or is he rather a social prophet, acutely aware of the nature of social life, its contemporary
derangements and their underlying causes, a thinker intimately aware of the developments of his time and engaged in his own quiet type of "social reform"?

The central purpose of this essay is to examine Kierkegaard's writings, published and private, along with secondary sources to determine his true relationship to social and political concerns. After having examined his writings, a Kierkegaard will emerge who indeed has a positive social and political perspective. Secondly, this concern with man as a social being is central to his thoughts, by Kierkegaard's own declaration. All of his discussions of the individual, which have together generated a great deal of misunderstanding in these areas, can actually be seen as having their proper meaning only in the context of his total view of the person, including man in his social and political existence.

In order to establish these contentions, I will show the development of Kierkegaard's social and political views through time, from his early days as a royalist student and conservative political editorialist through the period surrounding the 1848 "bloodless revolution" in which a constitutional monarchy was established in Denmark. Special attention will be given to the pivotal Corsair incident, in which Kierkegaard was the subject of a merciless lampooning in the popular press.

In what will emerge, there will be seen to be a toto caelo difference between Kierkegaard's actual individualism and that generally attributed to him. His writings will show that his
position is at odds with aristocratic or romantic notions. He stresses the individual not to make him the locus of *sui generis* authority, but rather to deem him a responsible agent with social and divine responsibilities. To understand Kierkegaard as an individualist in an egocentric or romantic sense is to seriously misunderstand the focus of his social theory, which is the responsibility of each individual to social institutions and to overarching norms.

I will also show that Kierkegaard's conservatism is of a novel sort in comparison to other forms of conservatism, and develops yet farther from that notion as his thought matures. He does not view the existing monarchy as having an unchallengeable claim to authority, to be preserved at all costs. Rather, his desire is to perpetuate certain traditional social relations based on recognition of derived authority and personal responsibility, without which neither an established nor a revolutionary government could prosper. Kierkegaard's view of authority is of great importance in his social and political thought.

From this study will emerge Kierkegaard's coherent theory of man in relation to society and the state, a theory integral to Kierkegaard's general view of the human situation. His sound and consistent outlook deserves serious consideration both in our estimation of Kierkegaard and in our own thinking about these crucial dimensions of human life.

Kierkegaard is a notoriously complex author, who kept his literary audience guessing as to the authorship of his books with
their prefaces and postscripts attributed to pseudonymous authors and editors. Kierkegaard entitles the first part of his literary testament, The Point of View, "The Ambiguity or Duplicity in the Whole Authorship." In addition to problems raised by this intended duplicity, Benjamin Nelson reminds us that established maxims of law and logic warn us against taking anyone's testimony concerning himself at face value. Equally familiar canons of literary criticism charge us to decide an author's artistic intention on the basis of his completed achievement rather than on his inchoate personal history or his programmatic recollections.

Thus, we may take Nelson seriously when he warns "Dare we lend credence to so provocative and paradoxical a writer?"

An examination and assessment of Kierkegaard's views on the individual in relation to society and political life will require a consultation of such principal sources as the Journals, The Present Age, The Point of View, The Individual, and Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle. His positive social ethic appears most fully in Works of Love, although it also is treated of in the Present Age, and the Journals.

The problem arises in how we are to discern the genuine Kierkegaard in view of such doubts as we have raised regarding the prudence of trusting the personal attestation of such a dialectical and complex author in his personal "report to history," The Point of View.

In order to discern Kierkegaard's position, it will be necessary to accept The Point of View as representing Kierkegaard's true central position throughout his works. To do this of course requires that we exercise rational faith in his claim that "the contents of
this little book affirm, then, what I truly am as an author, that I am and was a religious author, that the whole of my work as an author is related to Christianity."^21 The acceptance of The Point of View will justify acceptance of the likeminded religiously oriented social and political remarks throughout the other works. The Point of View purports to give perspective to the entire corpus of Kierkegaardian authorship; positions in this work, such as the primacy of the religious concerns in his thought, the importance of the individual, and the dangers of the crowd, are amply represented in his other works as well, as evidenced in this remark: "This is what I... have consistently fought for... against every tyranny, including that of the numerical... this is Christianity, and love for one's neighbor."^22

On the other hand, what would follow if, to take the less daring path, we denied acceptance to Kierkegaard's own testimony concerning the central emphases of his own authorship? It would then not only be impossible to discern the direction of his sociopolitical thought, but we would also be at a loss to determine in general whether the true Kierkegaard is "a would-be Don Juan, a crippled Oedipus, an endogenous manic-depressive with an atypical career... an enemy of the liberal spirit of '48, a monarchist ideogogue, (or) a reactionary obscurantist."^23 As Nelson counsels,

evidence can be found to sustain many variant versions of his life but we shall never move with any assurance in the universe Kierkegaard so cunningly contrived unless we have attempted the experiment of regarding his Point of View as the decisive
word on his life and authorship.  

Thus, if one hopes to make any sense of Kierkegaard's thought in general and of his social and political perspective in particular, it will be necessary to take him at his word, tentatively at least, as to his own intentions and emphases. As I shall demonstrate, our acceptance of Kierkegaard's interpretation of his own works, especially the focus on the individual-social dialectic within the religious context of life, will indeed yield light. Kierkegaard's positions attested to in The Point of View, and recurring in the Journals and other works, when taken together, exhibit a consistent, developing view on the relation of the individual to groups and to the state. His positive view of community, so overlooked by critics, is developed in full form in Works of Love, but is found explicitly in The Point of View. As will be seen, the evidence of Kierkegaard's views and their consistency throughout his works compels us to accept these attestations as corroborating similar views in his more dialectical works.
CHAPTER II

THE DEVELOPMENT OF EUROPEAN SOCIETY

AND OF KIERKEGAARD'S THOUGHT

Kierkegaard's views on European historical development can be found both in journal entries and in the book we now have as *The Present Age*. In these writings, Kierkegaard speaks of "world-historical stages" as part of the "bringing up of the human race," which function in the growth of a people in much the same way as educational and developmental stages function in the growth of an individual. Although Kierkegaard speaks generically of the human race, it is clear that he in fact means to exclude from his analysis Oriental civilizations.

The world-historical stages of what Kierkegaard calls "the dialectic of community" or the "dialectic of society" can be thought of as four distinctive periods of Western history, each with its own characteristic view of the place of the individual in the life of society and the state. Each stage is seen to contain within it the germ of its own dissolution and of the genesis of the next successive stage until the fourth stage is reached, the teleological terminus of history characterized by a society of individuals in reciprocal community.

The first stage Kierkegaard calls the "dialectic of antiquity." Kierkegaard says of this stage that it is one in which
"the individuals who relate to each other in the relation are individually inferior to the relation," as are bodily members to a body or planets to a solar system. The whole is qualitatively superior to the sum of its constituent members, which derive their significance from the larger whole. The hallmark of this period in Western history is the leadership of the great individual, the leader who expresses in himself the significance of the people as a whole.

In a journal entry, Kierkegaard speaks approvingly of the view that the king is an individual who "must be regarded as the people . . . an intensified state-consciousness"; such a king can in utter truth use the royal "we" as he expresses the state within himself.

At the time of Kierkegaard's description of it, he apparently viewed this first stage as the highest and most exalted form of government, at least from the secular point of view; in 1839 he said that "ordinary human evolution has monarchy as the intrinsically highest (form), as that to which every other form of the state strives."

A second stage was in the offing, however, a stage which Kierkegaard calls "the dialectic of Christendom." Of this stage, Kierkegaard says that "the dialectic of Christendom tends toward representation." The majority sees itself in its representation and is "set free" by the consciousness that the government exists to represent all the people. The Christianizing of Europe has rendered the older form of monarchy obsolete; people now have achieved a new measure of dignity given them by the content of
Christian teaching no longer to see themselves merely as embodied in a political entity or great leader. In this stage, "the individuals who relate to each other in the relation are individually equal in relation to the relation"; as an example, Kierkegaard cites the partners in a love relationship who remain separate entities, each one equal in the relationship and bound equally to it by mutual interest. In such a relationship the whole is simply the sum of its parts. Although technically a monarchy, the Danish government as it existed before the bloodless revolution no doubt qualified or had begun to qualify as a representative government in this sense. People saw their relation to the state not as that of serfs to a great man, but as that of persons of individual worth who were represented by a government serving their interests.

Kierkegaard by 1839 had come to prefer this perspective on the monarchy when he maintained that the king is not a being we should worship; he is a weak, fragile human being like the rest of us, but he is king by the grace of God, and it is this religious boundary which limits and terminates the state, and thereby all that abstract nonsense about the wisest individual of all is demonished. Divine governance calls and designates the individual.

The first two stages, the dialectics of antiquity and of representation, are both monarchial, although it is in the former that monarchy is the most imperial. It is of the demise of both of these stages that Kierkegaard speaks when he asserts that the dialectic of monarchy is in the world-historical sense both practiced and established. Now we are in the process of beginning somewhere else, that is, with the intensive internal growth of the state. Then comes the category "the
single individual". . . . in the future we will have internal disturbances. . . . It all fits my theory perfectly.40

This third stage Kierkegaard calls "the dialectic of the present age."41 Whereas the representative age of Christendom manifested a change of a primarily political nature from the period of antiquity, the change to this third period is more of a change in the social fabric, but with political implications. In the dialectic of the present age, people have become "too reflective to be content with merely being represented."42 The dialectic of the present age is marked by a tendency toward achieving social equality, a legitimate aim except that it seeks to achieve this equality by means of forming associations, engaging in mass movements, and otherwise resorting primarily to external enforcement. Social policies of this nature lead to what Kierkegaard has termed a merely "mathematical equality."43 Whereas in the first two stages people were united by a common participation in social life, the unifying principle of this dismal period is a "negative unity of the negative reciprocity of individuals"; social cohesion derives not from an identification with a leader or with the body politic, but from mutual "envy."44 This age is one of a "self-combustion of the human race,"45 in which social life becomes pathological and political activity tends more and more to demagogical forms. Kierkegaard describes this period as one in which "the human race will become an ocean where it will be impossible to distinguish between the hordes of infusoria who previously formed isolated existences."46
In this age of mass association, there is an elimination or submergence of "the individual" as an ethical category.

The "people" or the "folk" have always served as "the dialectical factor in the development of the human race," asserts Kierkegaard; they have been a group constantly manipulated by various interests to "demolish kings and emperors ... nobility and clergy." Finally, however, "the people" shows itself to be a monstrous category in its own right which in turn is itself destroyed. In the "last and final development, the concept 'the people' itself becomes dialectical. It is now the people which must be demolished." The destruction of this entity is the fourth and final world-historical stage, the age of the single individual in community, which comes about as a result of the leveling process which destroys individuality, responsibility, and all positive social bonds.

Kierkegaard, after chronicling his grim predictions regarding the prospects of leveling, claims that this process will in turn yield to a new force, that of the single individual. Leveling serves to help the individual to attain "an essentially religious attitude"; it is "the starting point for the highest life," one of ethical seriousness, community, and neighbor love. In this coming period, the "individuals who relate to each other in the relation are individually superior to the relation."

As a result of leveling, individuals can once again become persons "in the complete equalitarian sense" with all the social
implications that true equalitarianism contains. Community is attained as "the individual is primarily related to God and then to the community." In this period, "social life must again play its role to the utmost degree," one in which political and religious communities "must return richer and fuller with all the content that the residual diversity of individuality can give the idea." A community of individuals is formed in this stage by the action of conscience and divine spirit as the individual learns to dominate himself rather than dominate others.

Kierkegaard has thus delineated the four major world-historical stages of European history: the dialectic of antiquity, the dialectic of Christendom (or of representation), the dialectic of the present age, and the age of the individual in community. As these stages are akin to the developmental stages of an individual person, in the stages of Kierkegaard's own personal intellectual development regarding society can be seen parallels as to these historical stages.

To examine this contention, we may think of the four world-historical stages as two major eras, each with two stages. The first era is oriented toward the established order and social harmony and the second is oriented away from this previous condition and toward something new. The first era consists of the dialectic of antiquity and the dialectic of representation; both are monarchial, oriented toward orderly social life in which the king rules either as a qualitative superior or as a divinely constituted representative.
The dialectics of the present age and of the age of the individual in community comprise the second major era and are similar in that they represent a move away from the established social and political order and toward a new and different structuring of social relationships and political authority. The leveling which is characteristic of the present age is clearly in opposition to the established order, not only politically but also socially and religiously. In demolishing the existing order, however, the present age betrays itself into the hands of the new age of the individual in community.

The examination of Kierkegaard's life and writings to follow in this study will show that he personally underwent two major periods, which like the world-historical periods, represent respectively an establishment-oriented and a progressive orientation. In the first major era of his own thinking, 1830-1846, Kierkegaard maintained monarchist, state-supporting convictions. The first stage of that era covers the student period of 1830-1839. His monarchial orientation and other affinities with the first stage of the first world-historical era are evidenced in his 1841 dissertation *The Concept of Irony*, especially in his criticism of Socrates for failing to regard the state highly enough as the sole ground of true virtue.56 Also expressing this orientation are his conservative newspaper articles, his proroyalist student activities, and his expressed views that the king represents an intensified state-consciousness,57 as well as his maintenance of a view similar to the Greek ideal of the *polis* and his attacks on liberalism in his
The second monarchial stage can be said to extend from 1839 until 1846. Here Kierkegaard is more inclined to speak of the king as having his authority delegated by God, not his by virtue of merit, to intimate the coming danger of the crowd, and to express a high view of representative government, one in which officials and subjects take their respective responsibilities seriously to make for harmonious social relationships.

The ideals of this second monarchial stage persist in the second major era, 1846-1855, now serving as a foil to display the characteristic reigning faults of the age. Kierkegaard is now increasingly pessimistic about the willingness of existing European society to submit to self-reform. This second era is notable for Kierkegaard's critique of social movements that have defected from the ideals of what we have called the second monarchial stage. This second era is marked by the Corsair incident and the publication of Works of Love and several edifying works, numerous journal entries, and the critical treatment of the times in The Present Age. In the first stage of this second era, he discusses the mounting evidence of social decay and political folly; in the second stage, he foresees the coming of an age of community.

Whereas expressions of the ideal of community can be found as early as 1836, this second stage of the second era is distinguished in that the community ideal comes to be viewed as a genuine alternative form of social organization to the now-decadent ideals of
the monarchial era. Whereas previously he had spoken of community both as an ideal and as a coming sociopolitical stage, in this fourth stage Kierkegaard more clearly conceptualizes community as the outcome of social forces already at work, namely, leveling.

The hallmark of the second stage of this anti-establishment era, then, is the vision of a new social situation predicated on the realization of true individuality, genuine equality, and social cooperation. The intimations of the sort of society liberated individuals can create are to be found both in the otherwise pessimistic Present Age and in Works of Love. Of Works of Love, Edna Hong and Howard Hong have said "that which makes it Christian ethics is . . . its being ultimately the mature indicative ethics of Christianity rooted in and motivated by the love of God for men, for a man, for every man." The socially significant love of which Kierkegaard speaks empties social and economic distinctions of their significance, vanquishes the corrosive envy of the "present age," and seeks the good of others in practical ways.

The distinction between the two stages of this second era of Kierkegaard's thought must be thought of primarily as conceptual rather than as chronological. The first stage is distinguished by negative criticism and the second by a positive orientation toward a new type of society. Although the age of community period of Kierkegaard's thought follows conceptually from the negative critique rather than chronologically, there nonetheless can be noticed, beginning in the pivotal 1848, a greater emphasis on the individual
and equality and despair for the existing order, perhaps best expressed in the journal entry: "One solitary man cannot help or save an age, he can only express that it is foundering." 

Four stages of Kierkegaard's own development can thus be seen in his social and political thinking, and these stages appear to correspond to the stages of the world-historical process, much as those stages of developmental processes were supposed to correspond to the development of an individual. It now remains to be seen just how Kierkegaard's thought in these periods comes to terms with social and political concerns.

THE DIALECTIC OF ANTIQUITY:
KIERKEGAARD'S ROYALISM, 1830-1839

In Kierkegaard's earlier thinking can be seen a monarchial conservatism based on an organic, Greek notion of society and the state. Kierkegaard in this period accepts what he takes to be the Hegelian view of the state as the embodiment and the necessary condition of all human virtues, as well as rights. In his dissertation, The Concept of Irony, Kierkegaard concurs with what he takes to be Hegel's assessment of Socrates in viewing the primary significance of Socrates in his seeking to identify the rights of individuals solely in the context of the larger state. Kierkegaard also agreed that Socrates had rightly shown that true virtue is manifest only in that context. The early Kierkegaard faulted Socrates, however, for seeing people primarily as individuals rather than as
members of a political totality. In the dissertation Kierkegaard expressed a Hegelian and Greek-inspired political philosophy in which the individual is seen as secondary in moral significance to the state. Although in his own time Kierkegaard believed that the proper significance of the state was not fully realized, a Hellenic ideal tantalized him so much that he could say in the Journals (1836) that "when the state acquires its proper significance, to be exiled will become--as it was with the Greeks--the most severe punishment."

Kierkegaard valued Hegel's notion of historical continuity between social developments exhibiting a normal and stable social evolution, as opposed to the rash and revolutionary spirit that had been visible in France and even, in only incipiently, in placid Denmark. Kierkegaard viewed the social evolution which leads to "monarchy as (achieving) the intrinsically highest, as that to which every other form of the state strives." Divine governance controls and conditions the development of history to such a point that the king might use the traditional plural "we" not merely as a convention, but as signifying an actual plurality, since within the monarchy resides the "intensified state-consciousness." The king's authority is seen to reside both in his human distinctiveness and in his personal embodiment of an historically evolved, advanced, and organic state.

In the years 1846-1867, the king of Denmark, Christian VIII, was yet an absolute monarch. Long interested in Kierkegaard, he had appreciated the writer's help in dissolving an antiroyalist
demonstration while he was a student. In 1835, Kierkegaard had been involved in a student meeting which had threatened to decide an issue against the conservative position. By adjourning the meeting, Kierkegaard effectively averted what he considered an undesirable political incident.

Although frequently to be faulted for his lack of interest in public affairs even in his own day, Kierkegaard also published three strongly conservative political articles in the *Flying Post* in the 1835-1836 period.  

King Christian admired Kierkegaard's acuity in discerning the Danish mind, and found his independence and humor both admirable and intriguing. Strongly desiring to be Kierkegaard's literary patron, he was rebuffed by Kierkegaard, who cited two reasons. First, his lack of desire to sacrifice his financial independence owing to his substantial inheritance from his father, a wealthy merchant. Second, he felt that he must reserve his ultimate allegiance for God alone, notwithstanding his political loyalty and strong conservatism. Kierkegaard at this time, and despite his royalism, nevertheless recognized that political and religious allegiances could be at variance, even in a "Christian" nation that appeared to be both religiously and politically secure.

Kierkegaard's strong conservatism is evidenced clearly in the virulent antiliberal remarks made in his *Journals*. He wittily observed in 1837 that "hatred of monarchist principles has gone so far in our day that people want to have four-part solo parts."
This indicates that a romantic individualism had arisen in the ranks of the politically liberal populace, so that no longer could they view themselves "merely" as members of the body politic and subordinate to a king, but rather they wished to picture themselves as meriting far greater autonomy.

In 1838, Kierkegaard attacked the liberal, antiroyalist politicians of his day for their lack of historical sense and respect for continuity which, he charged, led them to recognize only two of the "three marks of the validity of the public spirit, consensus and universalitas, . . . but (to) completely overlook the third--antiquitas." He derided them for their lack of individual integrity and for their propensity to assemble to reinforce one another's negative qualities. Their baneful ubiquity in public life exercises "a certain vigilance and watchfulness over everything," being everywhere "like bad pennies." He had received their notice as well; they had charged him with continually contradicting the received political wisdom. However, he believed that they had by far outdone him on that score, by virtue of their constant engagement in self-contradiction; constantly talking without a background of knowledge about their subject, they resembled, he remarked, "the tongue in a church bell."

It is generally conceded that Kierkegaard was conservative, especially in this early period, but it is important to discern the exact nature and background of the views which have earned him this designation. Hermann Diem rightly observes that Kierkegaard's
conservatism was a position of the conservation of the moral law upon which the very nature of civilization rests. Although Kierkegaard was "conservative" to the end, he long realized the fact that in the contemporary social and political environment, conditions had become untenable and in need of redress. Writing in the *Flying Post* articles of 1835-1836, however, he saw Denmark flirting with the revolutionary ideas which had culminated in the French Revolution. He was intractably set against the cross-cultural importation of foreign political ideas, maintaining that social reform movements would predictably lead to catastrophe if they were to follow abstract ideas without regard to the concrete realities of the traditions and constitutions of a country. In his views he followed the social philosophy of Burke, a philosophy that he held to substantially, although adapting it to his own purposes for the rest of his career. These Kierkegaardian views would persevere in his social thinking life a "subterranean stream," reappearing, for example, in *The Present Age*, in which according to Walter Lowrie, "all the trends of his thinking find their ultimate and most adequate expression."  

In place of mob rule and the unthinking, overhasty application of foreign political philosophies to the Danish situation, Kierkegaard emphasized the importance of national custom and of the place of the individual. However, as Lowrie notes, Kierkegaard's individualism is not a selfish concern for the individual with disregard for the rest of society; it is not "romantic."
Rather than support such an egotism, Kierkegaard's view sees the true individual as socially responsible, and this shall be the basis of his more positive social thought. Neither was Kierkegaard's conservatism a class egotism, for although he identified himself as an aristocrat, he came more and more to fault this class for shirking the responsibility which came with their privilege. Also, as we have noted, he could not ignore the serious social and political problems festering in conservative, placid Denmark.

THE DIALECTIC OF CHRISTENDOM: KIERKEGAARD'S REPRESENTATIVE VIEW, 1839-1846

Corresponding to the period designated the dialectic of Christendom (representation) is a stage of thought which upholds the ideals of this stage as those of a highly developed state of society. Although he would later develop beyond his allegiance to this high value placed on secular authority, it was only because he saw this admirable stage as losing its hold, being dissolved by a new spirit of the age, and because he could see a yet higher form of social life beginning to appear. The ideals of the age of representation belonged to a noble, if doomed, stage of European development based on an elevated view of humanity.

In the age of representation at its height can be seen Kierkegaard's view of the state, in which individuals and institutions support each other in a mutually beneficial, harmonious relationship. The social relationship on which political society
was based was the voluntary submission of individuals to their representative, whom they saw as qualitatively their equal under God (a view resulting from the Christianizing of Europe), but yet superior in the eminence and distinction due him by virtue of his office.  

Kierkegaard strictly held the line between religion and politics, and reserved for political life its proper purview in which it enjoys authority "with respect to everything secular, including art, scholarship, and science." Kierkegaard recognized a "remarkable connection" between Protestantism and "the modern political point of view," as they both represent struggles for popular, decentralized sovereignty. This similarity between religious and social trends indicates a causal relation between these movements. Kierkegaard also came to maintain that the centrality of the political life of the Greek polis as the proper sphere for the full exercise of human capacities had given way in Christendom to the centrality of the religious life for that purpose.

Diem has noted that K. E. Løgstrup contended that Kierkegaard denied the divine basis for the authority of the state and that Kierkegaard granted the state no underived authority which would belong to it intrinsically. While this charge contains truth, it misses the point of Kierkegaard's view on authority. For Kierkegaard, the question of the metaphysics of authority was not central; he was far less concerned with theories
about the origin of the state's authority, so popular among many philosophers, than he was with its responsible use. Kierkegaard believed that the king had genuine, but derivative, authority. Kierkegaard's thought does not recognize any unchallengeable, absolute political authority. On his view, political authority is derived from divine authority, but is not delegated to the extent envisioned in classical divine right monarchialism, in which it is a divinely granted and absolute right. On the contrary, political authority is challengeable, but only by taking utmost responsibility before God Himself.

The king's authority, while plausibly described as absolute, is absolutely derivative. To regard a king as having authority involves having the "accent fall qualitatively on the authority," and not on the personal characteristics of the king. For this reason, it is positively detrimental to authority for the king to be clever, artistic, or otherwise to be distinguished for his personal qualities. His authority comes "from elsewhere," and empowers a merely human, perhaps indifferent individual. Authority, then, does not belong properly to the king or other officials, but is rather a "passing factor" which is theirs as they serve a certain political function in the life of the state. No longer is authority seen to derive from the king's being an "intensified state consciousness."

In the period of representation there is an authority that does not derive merely "from the consent of the governed," but which
is delegated by God to the existing regime. Proper social life is one in which individuals see themselves related in submission to the rule of authorities, not because of the latter's special human characteristics, but because of their authority proper. Obedience is the proper response to such authority, while those occupying such positions of authority must realize that they are to act consistently with the realization that their authority derives strictly from their social and political role, and not from themselves.¹⁰⁸

Kierkegaard believed that he had inadvertently played a part in causing social change in the very publication of his aesthetic works. Viewing himself as an aristocrat, he believed himself to have brought criticism to his own class with his urbane and apparently frivolous aesthetic works, thus contributing "to the movement which was impairing power and reknown in general,"¹⁰⁹ although he was quick to claim that he had been "always conservative" with respect to "paying to the eminent and distinguished the deference, awe, and admiration due to them."¹¹⁰ He believed that the aristocracy, as an elite ruling class, was owed this admiration and deference as their due. Significantly, this is clearly related to their responsibility in the use of authority, which they have proved too cowardly to bring to bear on the crises which were beginning to face Denmark.

Kierkegaard's political position at this time could be accurately described as an Augustinian dual-citizenship role. He saw himself at once to be a political subject under a divinely
derived political authority, and more essentially as a citizen of heaven who owed a greater allegiance there. Nonetheless, in sum, he took seriously the authority of the rulers; "authority is the decisive quality" that marks the declaration of the king against that of the most talented individual. The king's command, by virtue of its authority, is not to be judged or challenged by ordinary human standards of criticism. Kierkegaard's divinely sanctioned monarchy must be seen in context with his insistence on the absolute equality of the king and the citizen qua men; there is no superiority in the king as a person. This view has the merit of dismissing a conservative notion that the kind of authority the king has is based on his superiority to other men from a qualitative standpoint while granting him decisive authority.

The two stages of Kierkegaard's monarchial era, as we have called it, both flourish before the Corsair incident and exhibit continuity with regard to basing the relation of the individual to the state on fundamental social relations, themselves depending on a proper religious relationship and intellectual orientation. Even his later, post-Corsair views indicate that he holds this earlier strain of thought as an ideal, from which Europe lamentably is seen to be turning. He views the dialectic of the present age, the inevitable leveling process in which individual characteristics are driven out of society, as making social life impossible, and yet, almost paradoxically, as leading to an age of community in which these early emphases will again have preeminence.
It is important to notice at the outset of this discussion that Kierkegaard was indeed concerned greatly for the social and political welfare of society throughout his career, and we must agree with Herbert Marcuse that a deep-rooted social theory is present throughout Kierkegaard's literary corpus. This theory, or social philosophy as Werner Stark has called it, "underlies Kierkegaard's aesthetic and edifying works... it is there and it is definite as a subterranean stream" of social thought. Recognizing the presence of a definite social theory throughout Kierkegaard's works enables one to find continuity in his thinking, even in the seemingly contradictory antisocial pronouncements of the post-Corsair period.

It is generally recognized that a conservative spirit dominates Kierkegaard's social and political pronouncements, the conservatism which we have found in his early journalistic efforts and which rests on his recognition of the tendency of the demos to become a fearsome mob, in which the crucial quality of individual responsibility becomes lost. There is a threat to personhood resident in the "public." Kierkegaard's position does not selfishly regard the individual as separated from and placed above the rest of society; Kierkegaard's individual, as has been noted, is socially responsible. This social responsibility is expressed in among other things, political and social fellowship.

When Kierkegaard claims that his entire authorship exhibits continuity by being characterized by religious concerns, this
must be viewed in connection with such social concerns, the danger of the crowd, and the crucial notion of neighbor love, which is the essential ingredient in his social thought's positive aspect. It must also be seen in context with religiously derived authority and voluntary obedience. 122

There does exist, however, a definite and significant break in continuity between his early, Greek notion of the state derived from his Hegelian training and the views corresponding to the age of Christendom and beyond. Popular philosophy emphasized the universal rather than the particular, and had attempted to show that man's true essence is realized only as he is immersed in the universal, whether it be state, social and economic class, humanity in general, or the Absolute. 123 Obedience to authority thus had become the result of people's own reflective judgment that the authority has superior qualities entitling it to obedience. 124

The antihegelian movement which marks the bulk of Kierkegaard's philosophy parallels his growing opposition to his own early, self-styled Hegelian view of man in society. In an 1847 writing, Kierkegaard faults Hegel for doing away with obedience and authority by making them contingent on distinctively human qualities. 125 Kierkegaard also breaks with what he takes to be Hegel's representation of human essence as "the race," because this is now seen to be "a misunderstanding" and a "new paganism." It is however a paganism directed away from Christianity, rather than towards it, as the earlier Hellenic and Roman paganisms had been.
Kierkegaard had come to believe that every individual is more than the race, and that to relate oneself to God is greater than to relate oneself to the crowd, because the highest self-actualization of the individual is in his relationship to God rather than to a universal, whether race or Absolute or society. 126

As a result of social changes taking place in the 1845-1846 period, appropriately brought into personal focus in the Corsair incident, Kierkegaard began to write under his own name in the role of a social prophet. 127 He mentions in his Journals that his "description of the future" which appeared in the 1846 Present Age was "quickly and exactly . . . fulfilled two years later in 1848," although at the time of its writing, "everyone believed that everything was secure, that both 'the system' and the states were just about at the height of perfection." 128

In 1848 Kierkegaard recorded in his Journals that God was maturing him for "something higher," and declared that

if I go on living, and even if I have but one hour to live--I will use it to the best of my ability for that for which I have up to now used it--to work against the stronghold of evil--the crowd, the unholy blather between man and man, the unholy contempt for being an individual human being. 129

In this remark we can see Kierkegaard outlining his project for the rest of his career on the basis of what had gone before, enabling us to see the continuity between his earlier works and the puzzling strident attacks pitting the individual against the crowd which marks his later work. Anything but surprised by the seemingly abrupt social and political development which startled peaceful
Denmark in 1848, he was rather quite well prepared for such developments with his already established doctrine of the individual singled out by the God-relationship, on which legitimate political authority must rest, as well as with his philosophical analyses of the crowd and of the breakdown of authority.

The era marked by the dialectic of the present age might also be called the "age of dissolution." In this period, the moral and political life of Europe had begun to disintegrate "due to the abandonment or the distortion of central Christian truths." Very early, in 1838, he had begun to discern the signs of this development in the work From the Papers of One Still Living, lending credence to his claim he made for himself that he was entitled to be thought of as a "prophet" in the predictive sense as well as in the sense of being the deliverer of divine moral warning. Kierkegaard believed that he had been given this role, which became more prominent after the Corsair incident.

The year 1848 was pivotal in the development of Kierkegaard's social and political thought. In that year, the "shrill note of chaos" was heard; major political and social changes took place that shook even complacent Denmark with its "market-town mentality."

As summarized by Walter Kaufmann,

in 1848 a revolution in France overthrows the monarchy and establishes a republic, while revolutions also sweep Germany and Austria and Italy; Denmark annexes Schleswig-Holstein . . . a revolt flares up in Hungary, wars sweep through Italy, Prussian and Austrian troops expel the Danes from Schleswig-Holstein, the Communists in Paris rise against the new republic and are beaten down in bloody street fights, the emperor has to flee Vienna, more bloody revolts are fought
out in Paris, the emperor of Austria is forced to abdicate in favor of his nephew—all in 1848.133

Kierkegaard had long been discerning the spirit of the age. We have already noticed his farsighted predictions in the 1846 work, The Present Age, and how he saw them fulfilled two years later, when most of Europe was taken by surprise by the developments.134 His remarkable attention and discernment is evidenced by his noting in an 1846 Journal entry that at the time, "everyone (had) believed that everything was secure." 145 Again, in 1847, Kierkegaard noted that "the dialectic of monarchy is in the world-historical sense both practiced and established," and that "now we are in the process of beginning somewhere else, that is, with the intensive internal growth of the state. (That is, the dialectic of the present age.) Then comes the category 'the single individual.'"136 (Parentheses added.) Kierkegaard believed that this historical theorizing was validated by the European bread riots then taking place, which, Kierkegaard maintained, served to demonstrate "how exactly I have understood the age."

Kierkegaard believed that the office of the prophet was ordained by Providence to discern the age in order to help preserve the very possibility of social and political life: "Now in 1848 and afterward it is very clear that if Providence is going to send prophets and judges in the future it must simply be to help the government, to assist so that there may be governing at all."137

Kierkegaard believed that the prophet could be of service in assisting to maintain the social bonds which are the foundation
of the possibility of political life. In an age such as his, when the "significance of the 1848 catastrophe . . . explains why eternity dropped out," the role of the prophet is to call people away from their headlong rush into secular solutions and their denial of the roles of both God and of the individual, while appealing to what could be accomplished by mass action.

In spite of this aspect of his prophetic role, in 1849 Kierkegaard remarked that "one solitary man cannot help or save an age; he can only express that it is foundering." This view accords with his developing view that the social process taking place in the age of dissolution is inevitable though terrible, and that even the fact of the masses turning away from "eternity" is providential in a larger, world-historical sense.

Gates has pointed out that Kierkegaard accurately foresaw three great changes in society which would be brought about in the age of dissolution on the intellectual level. In education, there would be an impersonal, pragmatic, and scientific emphasis which would neglect the realms of meaning and value. There would be, secondly, a preoccupation with detached theorizing and reflection, an intellectualism which would lead to the abandonment of creative enthusiasm and action. In addition, there would be the development of the abstract "mass man," engendered by humanity's fascination with association and with the numerical, and this would exclude the real man as responsible individual. Foreseeing these great but subtle changes, Kierkegaard determined to "work against the
stronghold of evil" and to continue his lifelong struggle "against every tyranny, including that of the numerical," which he saw as his religious duty and prophetic role.

Kierkegaard saw the advancing, negative social and political changes of his day as occasioned by "the advance of civilization, the rise of large cities, centralization, and what corresponds to all this and essentially produced it--the press as a means of communication [which has] given all life a completely wrong direction. Personal existence vanished." (Parentheses added.) Sociological forces at work for some time in Europe were bringing about an environment which in conjunction with the decline of essential religious truths about man were to usher in a calamitous age. The question of reform was now being pursued in an entirely wrong manner, since "all reforming, insofar as there was any, now took a one-sided direction against the government."

Kierkegaard was aware of the need for political and governmental reform, but far more fundamental in his eyes was that reform be carried out "according to a proper standard," and that the reform would first direct itself against the crowd; this is "the genuine idea of what it means to reform." Instead, the crowd with the aid of the press "reformed" the government in the peaceful but mob-induced political changes which brought Denmark to constitutional monarchy.

Thus, Kierkegaard's thought was clearly responsive to the social and political dissolution he saw around him, as he fought at first to correct these changes, and then later to continue to
discern them in hopes of being instrumental in ushering in a future world-historical stage, the category of the single individual.
CHAPTER III

THE CORSAIR INCIDENT

Kierkegaard's phase of social thought which corresponds to the world-historical dialectic of the present age was ushered in by the lampoonings of a frivolous but vicious satirical journal, the Corsair. The Corsair had for a few years been satirizing the king, public officials, and others in the public eye under the secret direction of Kierkegaard's old friend from student days, the aesthetician P. K. Möller. Möller, who aspired to the chair of aesthetics at Copenhagen, shared the operation of the Corsair with Goldschmidt, a gifted writer of fiction.

The absence of Kierkegaard's name from the derisive pages of the Corsair was conspicuous in view of his prominence in Danish literature and philosophy. Both Möller and Goldschmidt held him in high regard for his aesthetic works, praising him in the Corsair under his pseudonyms.

Kierkegaard was upset by what he viewed as shameful immorality in the Corsair's constant vilification of public figures, a position he shared with the genteel public at large. He was also opposed to its liberalism and objected to being praised by so disreputable a journal. He publicly identified the hitherto anonymous Möller as being behind the Corsair, thereby blocking Möller's academic ambitions. Möller subsequently left Denmark in dejection.
for France, but Goldschmidt turned the journal against Kierkegaard in a prolonged series of attacks here described by Peter Rohde:

Instead of publishing any written attack on him, Goldschmidt let his caricaturist, Klaestrup, take charge of the matter, and the latter, in the months that followed, week after week let his somewhat primitive draughtsmanship satirize Kierkegaard's rather easily recognizable peculiarities: his slightly deformed body, sharp-pointed profile, and comically asymmetrical trousers, of which--due probably to the physical disproportion--one leg was always shorter than the other, and in addition, the umbrella he always carried, his top-hat and tight-fitting frock-coat. Kierkegaard was portrayed in all kinds of ridiculous situations: having fights with various (named) public figures; inspecting his (somewhat disabled) troops; presenting his books to people as gifts (because no one would buy them); even as 'training his girl-friend' (by riding piggy back on her shoulders). It is hardly surprising that Kierkegaard, in a period where such caricatures were a novelty, was upset.148

Kierkegaard referred to the personal abuse that he received as his being "trampled to death by geese," as he subsequently became an object of public derision on the streets.149 Nonetheless, Kierkegaard's political thought was stimulated by the abuse, which gave him the vision of making clear the true nature of Christianity and its relevance for the social and political institutions which he saw as dangerously slipping.150

Kierkegaard came through this incident to realize his difference from other people, to gain a new appreciation of the importance of the status of the individual, and to dedicate himself all the more to religiously based writing on social concerns. He claimed the incident gave a "new string" to his "bow," a deepened faith, a deeper tone, and a broader compass of concern.151 He came to identify the baneful influence of the press as contributing
to the demoralization of society. In opposing anonymous writers as representatives of public opinion, he attacked the great irresponsibility of journalistic writing.  

The *Corsair* incident did more than torment Kierkegaard; it enabled him to see more clearly than ever before the workings of the dialectic of social decay in the present age. Irresponsible journalism lowers the publicly acceptable standards of mutual respect of persons for one another, and this destroys respect for political authority, eroding the social bonds upon which political society must rest, and thereby leading to further social degeneration.

The malignant work of the press aids and is aided by the phenomenon of "envy," which expresses itself through the press in tearing down those persons who enjoy personal, political, or social eminence. Kierkegaard was convinced that the personal abuses he suffered came to him because of his commitment to "the dangerous business" of "witnessing against demoralization," that is, of opposing journalistic assaults on innocent people and ultimately on society itself. While the irresponsible press as represented in the *Corsair* received outward condemnation from polite society, the public inwardly rejoiced in the gratification of their envious lust.

Kierkegaard attempted to retain his equanimity in the midst of the abuse he received:

if someone is going to be a persona publica these days, then taking exception to being overwhelmed occasionally with abusive language is like taking exception to . . . what it means for an officer in the fire brigade to be splashed . . . the spray
gets on his coat . . . no closer than that. 154

Nonetheless, Kierkegaard regarded the daily press with moral contempt admixed with social and religious concern. The press is "cowardly secular-mindedness," eroding the religious basis of social organization and wrongly directing attacks on the government, failing to admit that with the change of world-historical categories it is now the crowd in the position of tyrant which should be challenged. 155 Kierkegaard believed that like himself as an individual, the "whole of public life" was "feverishly tossed about" by the press. 156 Journalists incite social unrest by inspiring the lower social classes to irresponsible rage and by otherwise causing mutual interclass bitterness. 157

Journalism contributes to the demoralization of public life in the age of leveling by "intellectually-spiritually buttering up the middle class" as bread and circuses "buttered up" Rome's masses. 158 The public is a "hungry monster" which "hungered with a desperate passion 'to get something to chatter about.' The journalists are animal keepers who provide something for the public to talk about . . . the public devours someone tastefully prepared by the journalists." 159

The press exists to provide the public's requirement for empty and aimless, but vicious, chatter. Chatter is a perversion of God's gift of speech to man, which was intended to be used to "talk, each man with his neighbor, the lover with the beloved, friend with friend, also several men with each other." 160 However,
as Kenneth Hamilton has remarked,

[Kierkegaard] concluded that the press existed to stimulate the negative passions (envy in leading place) that prevented people from becoming individuals. Without inwardness and passion, men's minds were occupied with talkativeness, gossip, formlessness, superficiality, flirtation, and reasoning (as opposed to dialectic).161

Kierkegaard said that the public lusted for "self-pollution by talking . . . which it indulges with the help of the journalist . . . chattering about our meaningless lives, particularly the trivialities of our lives."162 This desire for chatter which the press satisfies is both a cause and an effect of the press. Kierkegaard's own relation to this phenomenon is unequivocal: "... if I have but one hour to live ... I will use it . . . to work against the stronghold of evil . . . [including] the unholy blather between man and man."163 In this context can be appreciated the seriously intended jest that "if I were a father and had a daughter who was seduced, I would by no means abandon her; but a son who became a journalist I would regard as lost."164

Significantly, it is not only the vicious content of journalistic writing but also the form that serves the demoralization process. Journalism as a whole is a "corrupting sophism," and far more fundamental than the occasional error in the newspaper is the basic falseness of this "whole basic form of communication."165

Because "almost everything is communicated by the press," impersonality permeates public life, resulting in the creation of the crowd.166 The crowd is at least partly a creature of the impersonal nature of the form of the mass print medium. The various
technologies which had made such things as the mass print medium possible have all had the same result; "all of mankind's great inventions (railroads, telegraph, etc.)" and "the speed of the printing press" tend toward demoralization.

The format of the daily press, playing on the public, contributes to demoralization in that an anonymous author can speak as an authority about intellectual, moral, and religious matters, getting thousands to mimic him, while never having to take responsibility for his own opinions. The disregarding of proper authority by the press is directly causally responsible for the emergence of mass men who claim the right to be able to judge truth as though they were experts, eroding the basis of government in proper social relationships. The newspaper, in its mode of communication, does not consider the nature of the subject it is communicating; whether it be politics or criticism, it "presumes that it is the many, the majority that is informed."

Kierkegaard seriously believed that the press is "deeply implicated" in the demoralization of public life by disregarding distinctions between the knowledgeable and the competent, on the one hand, and the ignorant and the meddlesome, on the other.

Perhaps the most significant lesson Kierkegaard gained from the Corsair incident was that because of the press, men no longer have a sense of proper political authority. The disruption of public life by the press makes government virtually impossible, founded as it is on the notion that in politics, "there are
a few individuals who are more insightful than others and for that 
very reason are able to see so much farther that they are able to 
pilot." Kierkegaard maintained that "whatever the subject or 
sphere, it is the minority, the very few, some few individuals who 
know; the many are ignorant." The daily operation of government 
would best be left to those who have made it their business to 
acquire the skills of the craft. There is to be a rational division 
of labor based on the recognition that "every one of us has his own 
subject"; unless that were true, Kierkegaard maintains, "one would 
have to conclude that every man knows everything." Government 
depends on individuals who due to their experience, training, skill, 
and sensitivity are able to discharge their responsibilities as 
experts in governing. This activity lies beyond the competence of 
the many, the illusions of the press notwithstanding.

No less of course does government depend on obedient sub-
jects. The relationship of governor to governed is rooted in the 
religiously based concept of respect for those in authority. The 
press virulently dissolves this relation, secure in its notion that 
"everybody should 'govern.'" Kierkegaard suggested that the 
press has surreptitiously suppressed its motives, that "the press 
really wanted to dispose of 'government'--and then it would itself 
govern."  

The daily press changes public life, making it "basically 
untruth," a far more serious crime against society than theft. 
Kierkegaard was not optimistic as are many who maintain that."the
"truth will out." As he states, "we do not say that the truth can overtake the lie and error" because "the truth is not so fast on its feet." Kierkegaard believes that such a position is naive in that it ignores the psychological fact that the crowd would rather accept the press' palatable lies than stern, unpalatable truths, and once having done so, would prefer to remain in error rather than admit to having been duped. Truth is at a genuine disadvantage against untruth in the media in an age of leveling. Truth, on the other hand, cannot effectively use the press because of a basic "untruth" or distortiveness of the media as directed towards great numbers of unknowledgeable people. Truth's spokesman must be the single individual, who can in turn communicate only to another single individual.
CHAPTER IV

THE PROCESS OF SOCIAL DECAY IN THE

DIALECTIC OF THE PRESENT AGE

As the Corsair incident forcefully brought home to Kierkegaard, his was an age of accelerating dissolution of the bonds of respect and responsibility that bind people together in a well-ordered society. Central to the Kierkegaardian concept of social order is the dual-sided notion of authority and responsibility. Consequently, in a period of social decay, at the heart of this development is the loss of responsibility on the part of the governed classes complemented by the abdication of authority on the part of the rulers. Kierkegaard's writings show that in the dialectic of social decay both of these undesirable tendencies are operative in the social and political spheres. Such a development, though abhorrent to Kierkegaard and thoroughly in opposition to his ideals, is nonetheless inevitable and unopposable, and ultimately bears within the seeds of a qualitatively higher social situation.

Although it is difficult in the mutually reinforcing set of social phenomena to find a beginning point, the dialectic of social decay seems to begin with an intellectual development at the personal, "grassroots" level of individuals in society, which then collectively leads to widespread social change. Kierkegaard
believed that the great coming social changes already underway in his day had originated in a seemingly politically insignificant intellectual phenomenon which he calls "reflection." In The Present Age, Kierkegaard characterizes the age of dissolution as follows: "Our age is essentially one of understanding and reflection, momentarily bursting into enthusiasm, and shrewdly lapsing into repose."180

The intellectual characteristic of the age of dissolution is that the situations of human life are seen as merely intellectual problems. The cognitive aspects of human existence come to predominate over all others in being brought into play not only in traditionally intellectual concerns, but also in human interpersonal problems in which the proper response would not predominantly be analysis and evaluation, but rather action and responsibility.

Kierkegaard illustrates the problem of reflection by means of a parable of a pond on which is seen a valuable gem. Skaters, realizing the thinness of the ice, prudently skate towards the gem with great flourish as far as is deemed safe, and then retreat. The decisive action of risking safety to retrieve the jewel is called for, but the skaters prefer the onlookers' applause to any real risk, and so they get only as near as they safely can. Onlookers would fail to appreciate or understand an individual who is willing to make a sincere, dangerous attempt to skate to the gem where the ice is thinnest; true, venturesome action is scorned, while reflective, prudent, merely apparent action is applauded.181
As this parable shows, in the reflective age, daring and enthusiasm are transformed into a feat of mere skill.182

The overly reflective age of dissolution threatens all authority relationships, beginning at the mundane, personal levels of home and school. In what must have seemed peevishness or at least undue alarm in the situation in which he wrote, although a quite understandable attitude today, Kierkegaard argued that over-reflectiveness on the part of the child in the school and in the home was a harbinger of the breakdown of social bonds. The erosion of authority relationships in education is seen in situations in which

a disobedient youth is no longer in fear of his schoolmaster—the relation is rather one of indifference in which schoolmaster and pupil discuss how a good school should be run. To go to school no longer means to be in fear of the master, or merely to learn, but rather implies being interested in the problem of education.183

Whereas in the traditional authority relationship the child is in school to obey and learn, the reflective child feels himself entitled rather to evaluate the educational situation itself in terms of his own intellectual criteria. Similar precociousness is found in the home, where the "tension" also exists. This tension is not a "tension which strains the forces to the breaking point, but rather a tension which exhausts life itself and the fire of that enthusiasm and inwardness which makes the fetters of dependence and the crown of dominion light."189

In the home, a tension exists in the relationship of father and child:
A father no longer curses his son in anger, using all his parental authority, nor does a son defy his father, a conflict which might end in the inwardsness of forgiveness; on the contrary, their relationship is irreproachable, for it is really in process of ceasing to exist, since they are no longer related to one another in the relationship; in fact it has become a problem in which the two partners observe each other as in a game, instead of having any relation to each other, and they note down each other's remarks instead of showing a firm devotion.185

This relationship between the authority figure and the person who is to obey is characteristic of an age in which the desire is not to do away with authority in its outward trappings, but rather wishes to abolish it in its inward significance which is based on the attitudes of both the governor and the governed.186

Unlike a revolutionary age in which authority is recognized, defied, opposed, and perhaps destroyed, in the age of reflection, "the inward reality of relationships" is "cunningly emptied of significance," even as the outward forms are left to stand.187

In a reflective age, educational and familial bonds erode while the outward forms are retained as empty shells.188 The process, however, does not cease after destroying everyday relationships, but proceeds to consume religious and political institutions. In such a period, people "no more desire a powerful king than an heroic liberator or religious authority."189 Even the normative authority of language is destroyed; chatter replaces true speech in which genuine commitment is to be expressed; religion too falls victim in that in religious contexts, reflection empties language of its significance while leaving the terminology untouched.199

Similarly, on the political level, "no one wishes to do away with
the power of the king, but if little by little it could be trans-
formed into something purely fictitious, everyone would be quite
prepared to cheer him." This form of attack on political
authority is extremely complicated and subtle; "against a rebellion
one can use force," but in the reflective age are faced "dialectical
complications [which] are difficult to root out."

In the case of eminent individuals, the aristocracies of
position or attainment, the process does not publicly attempt to
cast them down, but is content merely "to show their distinction
... to be purely fictions," in which case "everyone would be pre-
pared to admire it." The relationship between the admirer and the
eminent, whether king or aristocrat, is ended when

  the admirer no longer cheerfully and happily acknowledges great-
ness, promptly expressing his appreciation, and then [rebels]
against its pride and arrogance. ... The admirer and the
object of admiration stand like two polite equals, and observe
each other.

In a revolutionary age, an antagonistic relationship exists
between the king and his subjects. However, far more destructively
in the reflective age,

  a subject no longer freely honors his king or is angered at his
ambition ... the subject ceases to have a position within
the relationship; he has no direct relation to the king but
simply becomes an observer and deliberately works out the
problem; ie. the relation of a subject to a king.

As a result of such subtle changes, "the established order of things
continues to exist," although emptied of all significance by the
reflective tension.

Kierkegaard assumed that every social organization requires
a principle of association, fulfilling the need for a factor to unite individuals in the relationship. In the passionate age, which Kierkegaard finds to have certain moral advantages, people are associated by enthusiasm. In the coolly reflective age, however, envy serves as the "negative unifying principle." Envy is the desire to "live by comparisons," a life in which one's fortunes, behavior, faith, and opinions must be "just like the others." A common descriptive standard emerges for the "proper" styles of life and opinion, to which each person is "entitled." This standard also becomes normative, and an offense to violate. Envy provides a sort of social cohesion as it unites people in their desire for a common and mediocre form of life, keeping them comfortable in the knowledge that no one is one's "better," while refusing to admit the right of others to deviate from the standard. Leveling is clearly the natural outcome of such envy.

Although envy perversely fulfills to some extent and for a time the political need for social cohesion, it ultimately brings about the demoralization of public life and ultimate political dissolution. "Men are disintegrated [as] when a book has become old and shabby, the binding separates and the pages fall out." Society and public life, consisting as they do of individual participants, cannot long survive individual demoralization. Outward forms of public activity remain, but their existence becomes more and more precarious. Although "public life is carried on," Kierkegaard warns, "it is we ourselves who are internally disintegrating" by lack of
The state thus becomes ungovernable, "a small market-town" where "every government is an impossibility, because envy keeps a watch on everything that is something, so that only contemptibility can have a kind of power." Government must falter because its constituents have sacrificed true citizenship to privatistic reflection, which is arrogant and "too independent to be able to be content with merely being represented."

In Kierkegaard's view, the phenomenon of envy is closely related to the activity of the press because of journalism's role in facilitating envy's demoralization of social life. The relation of the newspaper operator to envy "is like [that of] the cholera fly to cholera; it cannot be said that it is he who produces the demoralization (and everybody else is good) . . . but . . . he is and remains the characterless instrument of envy and demoralization." Itself impervious to attack or envy, the press fuels the "idée fixée" of the whole age," the desire to get "beyond" the next man. The daily press works together with the public in anonymity to say what it pleases, while "no one has responsibility." The irresponsible press creates a climate of further irresponsibility on the part of the public.

In 1848's bloodless revolution in Denmark, the perceptiveness of Kierkegaard's observation was validated. Rather than being deposed or executed, the king had his authority removed from him in the establishment of a constitutionally limited monarchy. Whereas this change was no doubt considered less than earth-shattering to
the majority of his contemporaries, including many conservatives, Kierkegaard himself perceived in it a verification of his thesis that Denmark had suffered a progressive loss of authority on the social and political scenes and a corresponding loss of the obedience which had been dissolved in the acid of reflection, and that such changes would bring about far-reaching political consequences. Kierkegaard remarked that "in '48, the strands of worldly wisdom broke,"⁵ that the political upheaval validated his claim that severe social demoralization and disintegration had long been at work in externally placid Denmark.⁶

The first error lay with the government in its reliance on attempting to outperform the opposition in worldly shrewdness. The government was to have been honored on account of its position of authority, and not by virtue of the cleverness of its officers.⁷ The king was to have borne his authority, not by virtue of some alleged superiority which was his as an individual, but rather because his authority was delegated from "the One who calls and designates" the king.⁸ The king erred in failing to claim the authority pertaining to him qua official and to rule by means of it; he rather ignored this authority and attempted to rule by cleverness.

Kierkegaard's main complaint against government was that "it does not govern," it "does not use its power as it should" because it has abdicated its own genuine authority.⁹ Unlike governments of old run by true statesmen, contemporary rulers fail to take "the reins with vigor and a keenness for decision."¹⁰
Similarly, the aristocracy has forsaken its responsibilities; the aristocrat has taken "his distinction in vain," rather than properly using his responsibility to lead, even when this would involve opening himself to public censure. \footnote{211}

Thus, according to Kierkegaard, there has been a breakdown in the traditional notion of statesmanship. Statesmanship had previously been based on authority, while in Kierkegaard's day on the contrary, "politics" rules, which bases decisions on what is calculated to please the crowd. The concern has shifted from "how to be a cabinet minister" to "how to become a cabinet minister."

This dangerous trend can only lead to "the disintegration of states, for there is really no governing or ruling." \footnote{212} Political authority has been abdicated by those to whom it was entrusted, with disastrous political consequences. In a like vein, Kierkegaard pointed to a lack of earnestness in political circles as evidenced by the proposal of a "temporary" income tax. The appeal to temporariness indicates a lack of seriousness in government, in that the tax was proposed as a temporary measure merely in order to sidestep the genuine issue of whether the tax measure itself was indeed desirable. \footnote{213}

Corresponding to the errors of the government, the opposition fundamentally ran afoul on the same question of authority. \footnote{214} Those who rebel against authority are forgetful of the meaning and "dialectic" of authority; authority is the "specific quality that comes from elsewhere" and lights upon an otherwise undistinguished
individual, giving his utterances the force of commands. Thus, the authority in question is not something to be grasped as if it conferred some benefit on the individual, but is rather a transitory factor to enable its possessor to fulfill a special social function. The opposition's lack of insight on this matter was reflected in the fact that the new officials set up by the revolutionary constitution were unable to understand the nature of their own newfound authority. Kierkegaard observed in a melancholy spirit that the ruling novices had previously been much less successful at obeying their superiors than those old officials would now be.

While we have today become accustomed to declamations of the faceless Das Man, the mass man, by such figures as Martin Heidegger, Ortega y Gassett, and Gabriel Marcel, Kierkegaard was the first to discern the great processes towards association, its resultant demands for social uniformity, its secular religiosity, and its tendency toward tyrannical "people's governments." Not only did he delineate the features of the coming mass man, but he showed how his advent was an inevitable result of social forces long underway, of reflection which had turned human relationships into speculative problems, and of the general breakdown in people's willingness to submit to authority or to be represented. The paternity of the mass man could also be laid at the door of mass media and their irresponsible pronouncements which set the abstract crowd as an autonomous arbiter of art, scholarship, and religion, as well as of government.

No saying of Kierkegaard's is more famous than that "the
crowd is untruth."216 Within the meaning of this slogan is the core of Kierkegaard's social criticism in this period. It describes the movement away from monarchy to representation, and further away from representation to the threatening mass social movements which enforce "equality" by removing all social distinctions among men in favor of a faceless uniformity.

In 1848, Kierkegaard had made clear both that the crowd is thoroughly evil and that his own teachings on the individual must be seen as being at least partially a corrective to the crowd-exalting tendencies of his age. Historical categories have changed, so that whereas in the past, kings, nobles, and other elements of the established order were to be opposed on behalf of the people, now it is precisely the "people" who are the enemy. The evil crowd is now hailed as "the authority"; the crowd is "untruth, the crowd is power and honor."217

Everything that the crowd does, the most horrible cruelty, is good; it is the will of God. No eastern despot has been as obsequiously served and flattered by cringing courtlings as the crowd by journalists, by all the men of the moment.218

Kierkegaard held that the crowd's untruthfulness involves suppressing the single individual, who alone can accept responsibility under God and who alone can truly judge according to his lights in intellectual, spiritual, and religious fields. Ironically, although the crowd renders the individual irresponsible and assumes the responsibility itself, it is still unquestionably the individuals within the crowd who do the harm--the crowd itself "has no hands." Similarly, it can only be the individual crowd member
who has the "courage" to attack what is truly worthwhile, or in Kierkegaard's potent example, to "spit on Christ," for the "crowd" itself is "cowardly."\textsuperscript{219} The individual indeed persists in the crowd, and is only deluded in thinking that he exists only as a member of that greater entity.

Following Aristotle, Kierkegaard believed that "man is a social animal, and what he believes in is the power of association."\textsuperscript{220} The associative element is natural to humanity; "man is by nature an animal creation" who therefore runs together "in a herd."\textsuperscript{221} Yet, Kierkegaard does not conclude that the very naturalness of "running together in a herd" proves that there is no higher norm for human behavior. In defense of these higher claims, he remarks that "the truth is that in the herd one is free from the criterion of the individual and of the ideal,"\textsuperscript{222} which lamentably are the truly human ideals.

The principle of association and its attendant dangers becomes strongest when men become less confident in what it is that makes them unique, their relationship to God and the consequent infusion by this relationship of autonomy and dignity into human life. On an innocent level, he notes in his own period that "establishing parties, forming schools, togetherness, etc., is precisely the error of our times."\textsuperscript{223} Although he admits that there are ethically sound reasons for joining together, too often people band together to avoid their appropriate suffering as individuals.\textsuperscript{224} Ruefully, Kierkegaard foresees a day when men will lose themselves "atomistically in
life's social throng ... even to the experienced eye the human race will become an ocean where it will be impossible to distinguish between the hordes of infusoria who previously formed isolated existences."²²⁵ The natural principle of association corresponding to the human social impulse, when separated from the notions of human individuality and responsibility, leads to a situation in which the crowd becomes "everything" and the individual as such simply evaporates.

In a social "ocean" such as Kierkegaard has described, whatever is considered "truth" is determined by the crowd; the "view of life" is followed "which holds that where the crowd is, there also is the truth."²²⁶ Kierkegaard's point is not that the crowd happens frequently to judge wrongly, but that the crowd is essentially untruth. Truth is related necessarily to the individual, and is impossible to be attained in the crowd situation. If a situation were imagined in which each member of a group individually possessed the truth, the very fact of their entering into a crowd to ratify their convictions, such that "the 'crowd' comes to have any deciding, balloting, noisy, audible significance, untruth would nevertheless be present at once ... since the crowd either produces impenitence or irresponsibility."²²⁷ When decisive significance is attributed to the crowd, the crowd actually transforms into falsity what had, when held individually, been truth.²²⁸

In Kierkegaard's view, it is strictly impossible for a crowd to be led or governed properly, for by definition, the "crowd is
"always misled"; if a crowd were truly to be led, it would no longer exist qua crowd. Thus, the crowd is essentially ungovernable, which makes it less desirable and stable than even the most mediocre ruler, and must yield to either anarchy or totalitarianism.

Their alternative manners of discerning truth are essential to understanding individuals and groups, Kierkegaard believed, and this casts light on the now sacrosanct practice of voting. Because of the pervasiveness of the principle of associativeness, it comes naturally to man to see truth as "directly recognizable by way of the majority." Kierkegaard avers that the idea of deciding truth by majority does have its proper legitimacy, but only within a strictly circumscribed area of concern. In policy or politics, narrowly conceived, voting enjoys a certain justification, but it can have no place in ethical, intellectual, or religious contexts. The truth that the crowd is in opposition to "eternal truth, which has nothing to do with policy." So, if there do exist matters having purely to do with policy as distinct from the practice of government, which has ethical content, then voting is legitimate. Kierkegaard clearly maintains that

in relation to everything finite and temporal, in relation to eating, drinking, etc., in relation to all kinds of secular activity and commerce in this world, no trustworthiness superior to that of number is needed. . . . In relation to the temporal, sensible, and finite there is (in the very nature of things) no eternal trustworthiness; consequently the trustworthiness of number is entirely trustworthy.

Similarly, Kierkegaard grants that by means of voting, "street lighting and clothes, and with all due respect, the sanitation
department can be reformed." 233

A brief journal quotation by Schelling exemplifies Kierkegaard's own deep seated, Platonic apprehension of the crowd's deciding truth: "When it has come to the point where the majority decides what constitutes truth, it will not be long before they take to deciding it with their fists." 234 So while Kierkegaard is prepared to admit that "all finite matters are suitable by voting," he is clearly committed to the doctrine that "nothing infinite can be decided by voting." 235 Matters of politics and prudence can be decided by vox populi, but "truth" cannot, remembering that this truth is qualitatively higher and is concerned with the questions of man's relationship to God and to his ethical stance in relation to other persons. 236 To decide questions of truth by voting is as inappropriate as using "a steelyard for weighing gold." 237

The notion that the crowd is essentially untruth is expressed in the remark that "we ought to become most suspicious precisely when there get to be millions and millions, suspicious that this enormous number simply points to something wrong." 238 Kierkegaard's views in the "present age" show the sharp discontinuity with his earlier views inspired by Hegel or the Greeks, in which man en masse, in the group or state, is considered to be humanity in its most elevated form. In his dissertation, he had held that the state has moral significance, and that true virtue is only possible within the state, an institution having among its functions the moral improvement of men. As Kierkegaard began to observe firsthand the characteristics
of political life, he came to utterly repudiate his earlier position. In the "present age," he had come to view the state as "a necessary evil, in a certain sense a useful, expedient evil, rather than a good."

The state attempts to substitute an abstraction for true community, which can only be formed by individuals who are individuated by their relationship to God. On the popular level, this abstraction is known as "public opinion." It finds philosophical expression in what was taken to be the Hegelian notion of objective spirit. Kierkegaard believed that the system of Hegelianism had already become dead in Denmark, and he could but wish the same fate for the correlative "public."

The state is fundamentally "human egotism on a large scale and in great dimensions," rather than the place to observe the virtues "writ large," as Plato has held. Since the state is "human egotism in great dimensions," and "cannot go beyond this," Kierkegaard came to believe that the notion of the state having moral significance and existing for the improvement of men was a perverse illusion. Although the state is capable of success in making individuals "shrewdly prudent" in pursuing their self-interest, genuine moral improvement in the state is "just as doubtful as being improved in a prison." Similarly, to advocate the state as the environment for becoming virtuous "is just as strange as would be the claim that the best place for a watchmaker or an engraver to work is aboard a ship in heavy sea." Clearly, then, by this period of Kierkegaard's thought, the locus of moral
development has shifted from that of the earlier period; the relation of the state to the moral development of the individual is now seen as antithetical, whereas previously the state had been held to be a necessary condition for individual virtue.

As noted, Kierkegaard believed that the age of the crowd would lead to totalitarianism, to the tyranny of a "people's government." Of all tyrannies, that of a people's government is especially unbearable, Kierkegaard held, whereas an individual tyrant has at least the virtue of being an identifiable person to be avoided or defied; a tyranny of the people is inescapable. Kierkegaard notes that, in a people's government, "in a sense every man is the tyrant." Far from being remote, he is the next-door neighbor. As envy serves as the negative unifying principle of this age, any deviation from the accepted norm of fashion or thought may be viewed as treasonable by the tyrant of the present and coming age, "'the many,' 'the crowd,' 'statistics.'" Kierkegaard observed that in the age of dissolution, Christianity is disappearing and a new religiousness is appearing in its place, which may or may not parade under the previous banner. He remarked with prophetic insight that whereas previous religious reformations turned out to be in fact political, in the upheavals to come, movements would appear to be political but really be religious. Kierkegaard noted that during Denmark's bloodless revolution, "not a word about religiousness has been heard--not a single one," all the more surprising because Denmark was officially "a
Christian country." Secularity had become the ruling ideology of the day, people having lost the conception of duty which was based on obligation to God. Kierkegaard attributes the moving force behind the entire decline of the age to the lack of that content which had once been derived from a Christian view of duty. Men now consulted with each other "instead of each one individually consulting with God." As a result of the neglect of true religious duty to God first and then to the other, religious, social and moral traditions "of a vanished past" can be but mere husks on which the present generation must feed, not to be replenished by any "new infusion from on high." The society for a time will keep its external religious forms, while internally becoming secular in the extreme.

This religious void is soon to be filled, however, the world of the spirit abhorring a vacuüm as does the world of physics. The new religion is demonic and idolatrous, "a new paganism." The tendency of the crowd is to wish to "be God, to want to be feared more than God." The self-deifying crowd is "like a pagan worshipping the god he himself has made--it is about the same as worshipping oneself." The diabolical crowd demands worship. Remarkably astute was Kierkegaard's observation that "the idol . . . of our age . . . is 'the crowd,'" exemplifying the tendency to create a new demonic religion rather than to settle for no religion at all.

Kierkegaard ironically suggests as a title for a book about the age of the crowd, "'Possession and Obsession in Modern Times.'"
Kierkegaard sees striking parallels between medieval witchcraft and the modern tendency of crowd gatherings in which people affiliate "so that natural and animal rage will grip a person, so that he feels stimulated, inflamed, and ausser sich." Participation in a crowd provides an intense emotional, quasireligious experience, to which the witches' sabbaths pale by comparison. In such an experience, not necessarily restricted to the gathered crowd, the sense of being an individual is lost and man becomes "outside of himself," not fully knowing or in control of his actions, a participant in pagan frenzy. This religico-emotional counterpart to the more metaphysical and sociological dimensions of Kierkegaard's concept of the age of the crowd would have seemed overly dramatic in the context of bourgeois Denmark in the mid-nineteenth century, though it was recorded in private journals, but in view of such twentieth century phenomena as the nighttime rallies in Nazi Germany, the accuracy of Kierkegaard's observations appears to be unquestionable.

The phenomenon of leveling follows upon the demand of the crowd, fueled by envy, to make everyone alike. The desire "to be like the others," to reduce everyone to copies, is an expression of the degradation of envious mankind. As man seeks the situation which will be "coziest and most convenient," he pours out "ever-vigilant envy ... upon any person who differs from the others." Kierkegaard satirizes this view by remarking that although the invention of photography has now made it within everyone's reach to have his own portrait made, leveling makes everyone look alike,
so that now "only one single portrait is needed."  

Kierkegaard traces the social decline from the previous age in which individuals were represented by a few eminent persons to the leveled state in which the quality of the whole race is reduced. In the earlier time, people envisioned themselves represented by a "few eminent individuals," the aristocracy of merit. However, "gradually the inferior element in the race triumphed; envy ascended and came to the top." Using the brute power of numbers, the crowd strove to eliminate eminence while simultaneously trying to raise their own status. As a result, a degradation of the whole human race ensues in which the very notion of being an individual human being potentially related to God has become lost. Man has become dehumanized, stripped of his essential human qualities of responsibility, duty, self-directedness, and religious solitude. Kierkegaard saw the need for men to take action to "make the end fast" by each individual relating himself to the unconditioned source of values. This source of their humanity itself lies outside of mankind and provides a permanent reference point. Without this relation to the unconditioned, men and movements become "swirling whirlpools," notwithstanding their sometime surface stability.

In the period of leveling the relation to the unconditioned, and along with it the concept of what it is to be a human being, has been lost and mankind is indeed thrust into the whirlpool. Power-craving leveling eliminates all authority; it "cannot tolerate character" and "cannot stand to have anyone stand at the head."
The concept of the ethical in public life, which is necessarily person-centered, is doomed.

The principle of association, which has a rightful place in material interests, lends a certain strength to the individual by "numerical collectivization" but is destructive of morality. The progressive annihilation of the human essence destroys social virtues, since no one exists to take responsibility.

Kierkegaard foresaw the political and social situations that leveling would bring forth, that all authority and distinction would be ground down in an unstoppable process of disintegration in which the virtues of the earlier historical stages would be forfeit. Since persons in authority had made use of their qualitative distinctions qua individuals rather than relying strictly on their genuine authority, they made themselves vulnerable to the leveling which destroys personal distinctions and assisted in bringing the social and political disintegration on themselves and society.

Kierkegaard believed himself to live in "dangerous times" in which "the world tide is turning." Although leveling and the rise of the crowd had become so far advanced by 1850 that he believed that the crowd had actually already been the dominant force in the state for some time, he believed that at least one generation's time would be required for this fact to become public knowledge.

Leveling is an historical process, a historical dialectic through which Providence works. Kierkegaard could see his role as neither in opposing nor in supporting the process; he rather saw...
himself as a witness to what was transpiring, staying on the scene intellectually to encourage any survivors to be recalled to individuality after being singled out by the leveling process.\textsuperscript{272}

The public abstraction leaves the insignificant person living contentedly while it seeks out the outstanding individual. This process, although recognized as occurring as early as 1850, Kierkegaard also saw as "the battle of the future."\textsuperscript{273} By doing away with the individual, the leveling power eliminates intellectual and moral ideals, since only an individual can be the bearer of ideals.\textsuperscript{274} That Kierkegaard saw himself as an individual singled out for leveling in the \textit{Corsair} incident is apparent from the journal entries; he is the one singled out for minutely detailed examination in the popular press.\textsuperscript{275} He too is the "religious person" who "comes to be hated as proud, aristocratic, and the like" for his religiously centered contempt for the mass movement. It is he whose task is "to free the individual."\textsuperscript{276}

Within the leveling process, the "equal" rules, dictating public habits and ideas. Kierkegaard saw a period of "market-town mentality" and "mutual petty cantankerousness" going to the absurd extreme of people's loyalty being questioned because of their dress.\textsuperscript{277} Equality in this context is not based ontologically on the individual's status that derives from the God relationship, but is a numerical, false equality.\textsuperscript{278} In the leveling process the abstract public comes to set normative standards, not only for fashions, but even for areas requiring specialized knowledge, such
as scholarship, for example. The false democracy of leveling as
carried out through the press absurdly encourages tavern keepers
to regard themselves as critical authorities on works of Latin
grammar. 279

When the crowd is treated as authoritative on matters of
truth, justice is an impossibility. 280 Leveling can seek but a
false equality, and as essentially worldly, it seeks to enforce
this equality by such secular means as political maneuvering and
numerical association. 281 This "egalitarianism" must result in a
leveling down of all distinctive individuality. 282 Kierkegaard
believed that religion alone, as the true humanity, can fully express
equality properly so called, and this condition would destroy world-
leness. 283 The attempt to found an egalitarian society on the
denial of the only true and fundamental basis of equality can only
result in totalitarianism and numerical abstraction, which in turn
must deny the individual by subordinating him to the group.

Upon intellectual and spiritual decay must follow social and
political unrest. Religious leadership is lacking in consequence
of the clergy's abdication of spiritual leadership for political
opportunism. 284 The radical age of leveling seeks to eliminate
the genuine, "venerable old traditions" which stand in the way of
any social change which is based on a reductionist view of man.
However, Kierkegaard astutely observed that "tradition" can also be
of service to revisionists; "as soon as possible," they "themselves
substitute traditions, traditions established by artificial means,"
such as the press, "which suit these benefactors of the human race."²⁸⁵

Due to such false equality and to envy, the political developments of the age of leveling take a decided turn from those of other periods. In addition to political controversies, the age of leveling sees internicene social upheaval as well, "disturbances in the state similar to those in a house where the residents of the various floors begin to fight—not with the caretaker but among themselves."²⁸⁶

Because "historical categories have changed," political reform can no longer focus on overthrowing monarchs. History is now "turning back again to the ancient forms" in which it was plainly seen that the crowd is more disruptive than any single despot. Consequently, warfare will no longer be the predominant form of upheaval and strife, but rather "constant internal disturbance" as in ancient times of internal decay when the plebians were pitted against the patricians.²⁸⁷ Internal political unrest in this period follows upon the disruption of social order. Kierkegaard saw this observation verified in his own time in the 1848 revolution, founded not on firmly held convictions but on mob sensibilities when 15,000 people advanced on the king's castle. This "brutish cowardice" was a prime example of the lack of responsibility in the age of leveling leading to political change.²⁸⁸

True government becomes impossible in the age of leveling, because relations between the government and the subjects have
become a relation of reflection. In the demoralized condition of modern society, the public has become the tyrant, although not "in office." The mass tyrannically "rules" the state with the cooperation of the press, who assists evil with "the great means of communication." Among its fearsome tools is chatter, idle gossip about personal characteristics and idiosyncracies of leaders which at once satisfies idle curiosity, indulges envious sentiment, effectively silences dissent against the tyranny of the public, and invests any decisive action on the part of any government leader with fearsome personal consequences.

In view of Kierkegaard's polemic against the crowd and leveling's mass man, it is frequently maintained that he was a misanthropic thinker. Supporting this view, as held by Marjorie Grene, is such a quote as this from the journals:

No, I have wanted to get to know men, and I could not have been more strategically placed to gain a knowledge of men, which has had infinite value for me, although at the same time it teaches me, I must say, that there is very little value in men.

It is essential to view such a remark in context, however; Kierkegaard does not deny the value of persons as individuals. Rather, he argues that naive men have been deluded and corrupted by the press. Seen individually, there is a great deal about men that is lovable and worthwhile. Man present their loathsome side only as they become "the public." On his own attitudes towards others, Kierkegaard reports that "I cannot stop being fond of the common man, even though journalistic scurrility has done everything to confuse him in his relationship to me and spoils from me what I
loved so unspeakably ... living together with the common man."²⁹⁷

For one who took genuine pleasure in associating with everyday people, this rather conciliatory remark is all the more to be viewed with surprise, since after the Corsair incident, Kierkegaard had become an object of ridicule to the public. Even mundane tasks had become difficult to perform in peace. From the religious aspect, he viewed living together with the common man on a peer basis to be his Christian duty. It was his high regard for humanity which led him to decry the modern social situation which had based society on a proletarian class, "a substructure of men who are totally ignored and excluded from personal association."²⁹⁸ Kierkegaard continued to see both religious and personal significance in his relations with the common man, towards whom he felt not antipathy but continued affection.²⁹⁹ Viewing men's complicity in the social deterioration process as stemming more from ignorance than from willful evil, he regarded his own literary work as an educational corrective intended to increase awareness of how greatly the common man had been bewildered by those who ought to know and act better, by the press and the liberal establishment who led the way into the leveling process.³⁰⁰

Kierkegaard continually saw himself as a religious writer, so it is not surprising that he saw religious significance in the social and political changes which he discerned in Europe. Kierkegaard thought of social responsibility as being expressed in religious love and in political, social, and religious fellowship. The
connection between social and political concerns and the religious dimension is central in Kierkegaard's social thought. In Herbert Marcuse's opinion, Kierkegaard restored religion to its revolutionary force as a potent social force. The fact remains, however, that Kierkegaard maintained a sharp distinction between the roles of church and state, and between one's respective duties to each. A subject has a duty to honor and obey the rulers out of love for God, although essentially one is a citizen of heaven. Christianity differs from politics in the respect that the former receives its vital content from divine infusion, whereas political novelty is derived from "the street," from prudence and public opinion. Christianity is unconcerned with nationalism; for the Christian, "politics" must be considered irrelevant. As was Christ himself, Christianity must be indifferent to every specific form of government. Whereas Christians have dealings with the secular world, in the religious sphere their dealings are exclusively with one another. Religion thrives in a religious subculture, "a little society of its own" composed of people who are "polemical to the utmost toward society in the usual sense." Christianity per se cannot be formed into a political party, for to form an organization in such a way would be to put faith in numbers. Christianity is untrue to itself when it pays attention to the crowd and ignores the individual: "From a Christian point of view I do not have the right to ignore existentially one single man. I have the right to ignore . . . the public, . . . but not actual man." Rather than to
ignore the crowd, however, Kierkegaard believed that Christianity ought to reform this social monstrosity.\textsuperscript{310}

It is a disastrous situation when Christianity has become established by government; "the emperor has no right to what belongs to God."\textsuperscript{311} The notion of a Christian state is "a self-contradiction,"\textsuperscript{312} because "God's cause" cannot be served by secular assistance.\textsuperscript{313} The union of church and state is the ruination of both parties, of the church because of its fundamental aloofness from things political, and of the state because that institution actually needs the heterogenous mixture of religious "infinity" beside its own "finitude" to serve as a moral and spiritual counterweight to the state's stance of practical policy in order to maintain a positive "dynamic tension."\textsuperscript{314} A politically domesticated church, for all of its short-term benefits to the state, unwittingly conduces to revolution and serves to advance the public's moral disintegration.\textsuperscript{315}

Kierkegaard blamed the clergy even more than the rulers for the social disintegration of which 1848 saw the outcome.\textsuperscript{316} Rather than having taught Christianity as politically indifferent, thus serving their counterweight function, they became involved in actual politics.\textsuperscript{317}

In the concrete, however, political "powers that be" would not be served if genuine Christianity came to be preached. In fact, "Christianity in the eminent sense [is] dangerous to the state,"\textsuperscript{318} and the moral emphasis of Christianity stands ever vigilant to challenge political expediencies. Yet, what often may pass for
Christianity, a compromised institution, can do a genuine disservice to the state by leading to its demoralization. The church alone can fulfill the need to reform individual social constituents of the state: the need for this reformation is greater than that for changes of policy. True reform requires a proper standard which religion alone can provide.
CHAPTER V

THE AGE OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY

Leveling, the great social breakdown following upon the age of reflection, inevitably destroys all distinctively individual traits among men in society leading to a great uniformity in human characteristics. This process is not really the doing of any person or group but "the work of reflection in the hands of an abstract power." It is a social movement which can be calculated much as an economist can plot trends and make predictions, or "in the same way that one calculates the diagonal in a parallelogram of forces."321 No "heroes" can arrest its progress, and any association which may be formed to oppose it must become an unwitting ally of the leveling power merely by virtue of relying on numbers.322

Kierkegaard's pessimism regarding social movements does not lead to despair, however, because although the leveling process proceeds "like an all consuming trade wind," the process will lead to the eventual establishment of a new entity, the individual, which Kierkegaard believes will initiate a new social development. Through the leveling process, "each individual for himself may receive once more a religious education," becoming singled out once again as individuals before God, so that "for them, it will indeed be an education" to live in the age of leveling.323 By experiencing the trauma of this period, such individuals will develop their
personal characteristics anew in religious, aesthetic, and intellectual fields. A new enthusiasm will be theirs as they come to see the individual and social potential of realizing their true humanity, of being "a man and nothing else, in the complete egalitarian sense." 324

In the age of dissolution the "people" abolishes the royalty, nobility and clergy as social and political aristocracies. 325 Then in the age of leveling, a "self-combustion of the human race" is evident in which the dominant category of the "people" must yield to the dialectical principles of its own destruction it bears latently within it; "it is now 'the people' which must be demolished" by "the single individual." 326 This emergent single individual is now efficacious in "chopping up this enormous abstraction, the people." 327 Writing in 1848, he remarked that "it will be a long time before world history arrives at the single individual." 328 Before the age of the single individual will have arrived, political disintegration must break up the great nation states into smaller political entities. 329

The age of the individual, the last world-historical event described by Kierkegaard, will be qualitatively superior to the ages which have passed before. The individual's appearance makes possible the reparation of the failed authority, having collapsed when people had lost sight of the human religious dimension which alone can render man socially responsible. 330 In this age, the value of every person will be recognized. 331 Man in his associations will cease to be viewed as superior to man as an individual. 332
Widespread misinterpretation of Kierkegaard as an antisocial philosopher has been engendered by a misunderstanding of the emphasis on man as individual. This emphasis is not unsocial, however, because it is precisely as an individual that man's social responsibility truly becomes a possibility. The individual who emerges in this age does not merely speak of justice while refusing to perform it, as the crowd has done. Rather, the individual will risk his personal stake in life to make a contribution to social life.

What is radical about Kierkegaard's position is that even as regards social concerns, the great need is not for political action and what it can bring about, but for what the solitary individual can achieve through developing the religious dimension of his life. The truth, or the "idea," which the "people" en masse could never attain and which is necessary to build the bonds of social life, is available to every single individual. The single individual, which of course might be any individual or even each one of them, can achieve the "truth," to which God stands as a middle term. Included in the content of this truth is a clarification of what is involved in being a human being, the God-relationship which can alone truly equalize men. Secular attempts to enforce "equality" by external social manipulation lead inevitably, in Kierkegaard's view, to mass dehumanization. Only religion alone is entitled to the claim of "true humanity."

Kierkegaard believed that the highest development of the relationship of individuals to one another would be a stage in which
each "individual is primarily related to God, and then to the community." Clearly, in Kierkegaard's view, the individual's relation to God is the primary or "highest" relation in which man is engaged, and yet the individual "does not neglect the second" relation, community. A clear perspective on the notion of community as Kierkegaard presents it will resolve the difficulty seen by such authors as Niebuhr who believe that "cultural societies do not concern Kierkegaard," that Kierkegaard has "abandoned the social problem" in "cultivating the exclusive Christianity of the hermit." Kierkegaard opposed the tendency to associate, it is true, but the associativeness that he opposed was of a specific, degenerate type; it was a gratification of herd instincts and a craven desire for security in which the distinctively human is forgotten. Kierkegaard's ultimate philosophical contribution is a well-considered concept of community in which the shortcomings of the previous movements, those which had come under his fiercest criticism, are overcome.

Hermann Diem has accurately characterized Kierkegaard's position in stating that for Kierkegaard it is "not till an individual has won an ethical bearing in the face of the whole world" will he be strong enough to truly unite. In Kierkegaardian community, the individual, and not the community, is the highest element. As a spiritual being, man has a need "for a kind of certainty other than numbers," that is, to be primarily related to God, and then related to one another in community.
Kierkegaard's social analysis predicted that world-historical progress would establish the age of community. After the age of individuality in which the distinctively human begins to reappear, "social life must again play its role to the utmost degree." There will be a return to social life reminiscent of the Greek ideal of the polis, with the important difference that no individual by virtue of social status or talents needs to be excluded from full participation. Whereas in an earlier age, a premature forerunner, a witness, to the longing for this sort of association was found in the founding of groups and parties, the genuine community of which Kierkegaard speaks is one in which the notion of community "must of necessity return richer and fuller," in that social life now has the benefit of "the diversity of individuality." The single individual is the presupposition for the forming of community. The bond which lends social cohesiveness is derived from the nature of the individual. The community is a "sum of ones," each one responsible for and "guaranteeing" the community. Here as for Plato, the single individual is viewed as "a microcosm who qualitatively reproduces the cosmos." As the individual gains responsibility before God and other men, genuine vitality and progress are possible in the social realm.

The prototype of community for Kierkegaard, as for Plato, is the family, although for Kierkegaard its emergence had been divinely instituted, rather than occasioned by economic needs. Like the family, larger communities display "a unity" in which
disparate individuals unite "in the most intimate interrelation." Indeed, in the family, the bonds which the acid of reflection had corroded are again reestablished, the child and the adult each realizing "its own eccentric possibility" and providing "a corrective for each other" in the family unit.

Social action in the age of community begins with the fundamental principle that "all men are equal before God, therefore essentially equal." Such equality is established by partners in the relation, an equality, which secular movements such as communism had "made such a big fuss about." Social reform in the age of community, according to Kierkegaard, is a natural outworking of ontological equality, based on voluntary cooperation between equal individuals who gladly perform "works of love" on one another's behalf. This practical neighbor-love makes a great difference in society.

With regard to the distribution of society's benefits, Kierkegaard held that Christianity does not abolish distinctions, but wills them to hang loosely. Now it may be natural to think of an ideal society as one in which the possession of these goods is equalized. Kierkegaard quotes Fichte as noting that in the French Revolution, the ideal of fraternal love was that "property, marriage, family, and even the diversity of talents and capabilities are supposed to disappear." This is clearly not the sort of social reform that Kierkegaard believes is to be the result of equality in the age of community: rather than being based on love
and a recognition of the humanity of the other, reform of that sort was founded on an egotism that demanded that "if I do not have this advantage, then on one else ought to have it either." 363

For Kierkegaard, social reform is not disregarded as Zuidema supposes, but is seen within the parameters of the inevitability of interpersonal differences in possessions as well as capacities. 364 The external enforcement of uniformity is "politics," which is mere "egotism dressed up as love." 365 True equality recognizes the neighbor as "the absolutely true expression of human equality." 366

Convinced then of the absolute worth of the other, human social equality, the practical outworking of neighbor love, is to be achieved in one of two ways, each involving self-denial. 367 For the less fortunate, the individual who has less external goods, the recommendation is to remove the distinction "essentially" by "patiently [reconciling] yourself to the fact." 368 For the individual who finds himself with more, a conviction of equality and neighbor love should issue in a forfeiture of privilege, in "a resolve to give up something or everything." 369 This involves not only a desire to let distinctions hang loosely, but to manifest disregard for "differences in earthly life" by actively and sacrificially engaging in material aid to the less fortunate. In both of these ways, social change issues "from the good," from the recognition that secular differences are unimportant in contrast to the absolute value of neighbor love.

Neighbor love then is the "true equality," "universal,
unconditional, and derived from and motivated by God. This must issue in genuine action on the part of those who have more of the world's goods. There is an inescapably practical social involvement in the Kierkegaardian notion of neighbor love; it is an active principle rather than a sentimental posture. Love for one's neighbor does not specifically intend to "establish democracy, promote social legislation, or dethrone kings"; while love does not render all individuals into copies of one another, it does indeed treat them alike as equals individuated by the God relationship.

Kierkegaardian reform faces the age-old dilemma of religiously based social movements that faced, for example, the Buddha: is emphasis to be given to political and external change, or to internal reformation? Unlike the activist, Kierkegaard embraces the latter, the reformation of the person as the presupposition of social improvement.

In Kierkegaard's view, both the eminent and the lowly must relinquish their specific advantages and disadvantages, "lifting themselves above" their social distinctions based on accidents of birth, position, circumstance, and education. Nonetheless, he insists that such distinctions are an indelible feature of earthly life; these must be voluntarily emptied of significance rather than attacked directly. This process is a strikingly reverse parallel to the "tension" by which one emepties other people's positions of their significance while leaving outer structures intact, although the moral difference between these concepts is as great as
that between theft and charity.

The worldly approach to living with distinctions is to grant them a decisiveness between persons, allowing that the distinguished should rightfully relate only to others of their classes while maintaining a superior attitude toward those of lower station. Similarly, in the "tension" lowly are expected to envy and resent the distinguished. Kierkegaard prudently surmises that his suggestion of the ethics of neighbor love will be viewed as scandalous: he advocates forsaking one's own privileges to the extent that one comes to truly identify with others regardless of their station, living out the perspective of equalitarianism, and casting one's lot with "human likeness," The ethic demands that "honour, power, and glory lose their worldly gloss: in company with God you cannot rejoice over them."376

In a higher sense, Kierkegaard sees religious and political concerns as unified, albeit with religion predominating in the mixture and providing the direction. Social concern must not be confined to worldly, activistic "doing good"; while not ignoring this important function, the reformation of the person logically must come first.378

Nonetheless faith is action, and Kierkegaard sees the great coming conflict within religion to be not primarily doctrinal, but a question of life commitment: "The problem will become that of loving the 'neighbor,' attention will be directed to Christ's life, and Christianity will also become essentially accentuated in the
direction of conformity to his life." The social unrest generated by legitimate grievances of the oppressed calling for action on the part of Christianity finds satisfaction in the age of community. Thus, as put by one writer,

for Kierkegaard the central issue . . . is that a person, while continually relating absolutely to the absolute, is to practice his love within the relative world of the social and political. But here can never be absolute solutions . . . in the relative situations, because they belong to finitude and have their limitations.

Kierkegaard thus believed that community, a future world-historical stage, as well as a present possibility to a lesser extent, is achieved by the voluntary association of individuals united intimately in common bonds of respect, cooperation, and love. Community is predicated on the ontological status of each person as an equal singled out by God, rather than on politically contrived equality.

Social problems are of great concern to community, which is guided by its social ethic, the performance of good works to benefit others arising from neighbor love. Further, there is in this concept a return to a situation somewhat reminiscent of the Greek political ideal, an aristocracy of merit, in which each individual regardless of external circumstances or personal abilities is capable of full participation in a vital, organic society. This concept of community is not intended, however, to be regarded as an unrealizable utopian ideal, although a full realization of the concept is not expected in the foreseeable future. Kierkegaard sees community as a guiding principle to be followed in groups of individuals, as well as an
actual future situation resulting from world-historical processes which were already underway in Kierkegaard's time.

Although Kierkegaard would strenuously resist such a line of approach, it must be asked how closely the notion of community is bound to the Christian faith per se. Is it possible to accept the Kierkegaardian ideal of community without and apart from a specific commitment to the Christian religion which Kierkegaard embraced? This is to inquire how well the community ideal applies outside of the particularly religious orientation prescribed for it by Kierkegaard. In response, it would seem that to qualify, any intellectual-spiritual commitment must successfully meet the needs for establishing genuine ontological equality for each individual, establishing a basis of authority and submission, and providing for neighbor love. Some agency is required to establish equality based not on merely external features of human life such as social class or economic status, and not enforced by means external to the individual. Further, if this commitment were also able to fully ground an ethic in which each person seeks the other's good as much or more than his own, then it could meet the high standards of Kierkegaardian Christian community without necessarily tying it to a particular religious commitment. Whether any other commitment, religious or secular humanist, could in fact fulfill these functions is beyond the scope of this analysis.

James Collins, however, believes that any such attempt to secularize Kierkegaard's social perspective is fundamentally
anti-Kierkegaardian:

Kierkegaard's thought runs counter to the naturalistic effort to dissociate the doctrine of equality from its basis in religion and to support it solely by scientific and utilitarian arguments. The latter cannot stand alone, because they cannot supply a normative reason for respecting every man or a sufficient foundation for equality, in view of the obvious and important inequalities between men.381

Collins indicates that for Kierkegaard it is God who is "at once the well-spring of individuality and the source of human community," and in this role He is irreplaceable.382

In evaluating the Kierkegaardian social and political outlook, it is evident that nowhere in it is to be found a definite program for reform of the sort that could inspire politicians. Kierkegaard's position focuses on the underlying ethical positions and views of human nature which ontologically ground various social and political organizations, rather than suggesting definite plans of action. This lack of a reform program does not derive from a satisfaction with the status quo. Kierkegaard is not a class-oriented conservative seeking to preserve aristocratic social and economic interests. As we have noted, he recognized that the social conditions of his time had deteriorated severely, in that a large proletariat of unrecognized, neglected, and dehumanized men had been created, a group upon which the state rests economically while simultaneously denying them political expression. Kierkegaard strenuously maintains that such a situation is immoral. The question facing the Kierkegaardian perspective is whether his program of speaking to the individual in his ethical solitude, while eschewing active political involvement, is adequate as a response to existing social and political evils. His
approach might appear to be a quietistic philosophy of resignation to concrete realities which focuses impotently on the inner life.

A proper response to this question must begin by admitting that Kierkegaard's social and political thought is perhaps distressingly noncommittal in terms of necessary activity in the political realm. The indifference with which the spiritually oriented citizen is supposed to regard political authority certainly appears not to be an adequate basis for a truly well-rounded political philosophy, no matter how much necessary emphasis Kierkegaard gives to such considerations as the ontological basis of equality, which it seems has been regularly ignored by other political philosophers. It may then be argued that in the final analysis, Kierkegaard has offered us a political perspective that is severely defective in its minimization of the essential ingredient of activism.

To clarify Kierkegaard on this point, it must first be remarked that he never expressly offers a fully developed social and political philosophy as such, but that as we have termed it, there is a social and political perspective throughout his philosophical thought. The significance of this difference is discernible when Kierkegaard's purpose in his authorship is recognized. Closer in spirit to Nietzsche than to Hegel, Kierkegaard never proposed to provide a full-blown systematic philosophy; rather, he saw his role as being a philosophical and spiritual corrective, and called himself a "spy" in the service of God, likening himself to "the shoes that pinch."

Kierkegaard did not repudiate committed
concern for specific and concrete social policy, though such concerns
did not occupy the center of his vision. He deplored the formulation
of social and political concerns into questions of sheer political
policy which place efficiency and economy above philosophical and
spiritual scruples, precisely because he saw a more fundamental reform-
ation to be necessary within modern man's philosophical and spiritual
perspectives on himself.

An illustration of Kierkegaard's peculiar personal relation to
social and political concerns can be found in the more familiar terri-
tory of his relation to state religion in Denmark. Kierkegaard
certainly believed a great deal to be amiss in the state church,
much of it owing to the fact that it was politically established.
Since every native Dane was considered a member of the government
patronized church, the church had consequently become a safe and
delapidated "ploughhorse," rather than the vigorous steed that it
rightly should have been. To Kierkegaard's contemporaries, it
seemed transparently obvious that his support could be expected in
the free church movement in Denmark. By means of this external
reformation of church structure, it was believed that a great many
of the problems of the state church were remediable. In view of
Kierkegaard's stringent opposition to the state church, surely he
could be expected to support those programs for external change
which were seen as particularly efficient means of reform.

Kierkegaard's response to such free church spokesmen as Dr.
Rudelbach was quite different from the expected reaction, however.
Objecting that Rudelbach and others seriously misunderstood his position, Kierkegaard affirmed that his concern was not for the policy-oriented option of disestablishing the church, but rather to call for an inner reformation on the part of Danish Christians. He objected strenuously to the use which had been made of his writings to support the free church movement because he refused to be cast in the role of a reformer of external circumstances, thus obscuring his real concern. He saw himself dialectically related to state Christianity, not seeking to destroy the external and political situation of the church, but rather to preach against what men had allowed themselves to become within it.

As we draw the analogy to his general relation to political reformation from his relation to church reform, we see Kierkegaard as having defined his role in terms of the attempt to elicit inward change, as one whose relation to society is such that he "risks everything to contribute something so that it might become better and good might come." His self-appointed task was not to work out a complete theory of political authority, but rather to call individuals to responsibility in the social and political situations in which they found themselves, always with the belief that appropriate policy decisions can only result from proper inward orientation. Perhaps a deficiency can be found in this approach to concrete political and social problems in that it is idealistic and impractical, but this is at any rate Kierkegaard's position.

There is nonetheless a great deal of positive content to
Kierkegaard's social and political thought. Having left the door open for activity of a political nature by granting that appropriate decisions of policy can be legitimately made by associations of concerned individuals, his own role complements this practical activity by providing social change with a "soul." Kierkegaard saw his task as pointing out the centrality of the relation of the individual to society and to political authority. His position has the unique strength of seeing genuine equality and individual responsibility as the metaphysical grounding of any well-ordered sociopolitical entity. Within his notion of community is a principle of social cohesion which locates the interpersonal bond within both man's own nature and the relation of the person to the unconditioned. This view stands in exalted contrast to purely secular social theories, such as contractual theories which view social bonds as essentially formed on economic self-interest rather than on intrinsic bonds of fellowship between individuals.

In conclusion, it will be well to mention Werner Stark's discussion of the relative merits of the social programs of activists (he is speaking particularly of Marx) and of Kierkegaard. From Stark's discussion, it is evident that contrary to appearances it is Kierkegaard rather than the activist whose analysis is the more thoroughgoing and whose program is the most "realistic." For Kierkegaard, "individualism and egalitarianism are ... fused together into a higher unity. An ideal society presupposes both: the stronger the individuals the firmer also the social bond."
The unified egalitarianism which Kierkegaard believed to be "the very idea of religion" is found when individuals learn to practice domination of self rather than domination of others. Stark credits Kierkegaard for realistically holding that social equality would never be realized until men could vanquish their urge toward self-preference, a victory which would require true self-denial. As Stark believes, and is also the conclusion of this thesis, far from being a "dreamer," Kierkegaard was "in the last analysis . . . a realist."
NOTES


2. Ibid., p. 244.

3. Ibid.,


6. Ibid., p. 40.


8. Ibid., p. 19.

9. Ibid.


11. Ibid., p. 107.


13. Ibid., p. 176.


15. Ibid.

17. Collins, p. 35.

18. Kierkegaard, Point of View, p. 10.


20. Ibid.


22. Ibid., p. 158.


28. Ibid., 4067.

29. Ibid., 4122, 4123.


33. Kierkegaard, Journals, 4098.

34. Ibid., 4099.

35. Kierkegaard, Present Age, p. 52.

36. Ibid.

37. Kierkegaard, Works, p. 84.

38. Kierkegaard, Journals, 4110.
39. Ibid., 4097.
40. Ibid., 4116.
44. Ibid., pp. 52-53.
45. Ibid., p. 55.
47. Ibid., 4128.
48. Ibid.
53. Ibid., 4070.
54. Ibid., 4109; *Present Age*, p. 57.
58. Ibid., 4087.
59. Ibid., 4097, 4102.
60. Ibid., 4109, 4116.
61. Ibid., 4070.
62. Ibid., 4070, 4073.
64. Howard Hong and Edna Hong, "Translators' Introduction," in Kierkegaard, Works, p. 15.


66. Ibid., p. 253.

67. Ibid., p. 251.

68. Kierkegaard, Journals, 4131, 4148, 4153.

69. Ibid., 4134, 4138, 4144, 4149.

70. Ibid., 4157.


73. Kierkegaard, Journals, 4073.

74. Arbaugh, Authorship, pp. 43-46.

75. Kierkegaard, Journals, 4099.

76. Ibid., 4098.

77. Ibid., 4098, 4102; Kierkegaard, Present Age, p. 104.

78. Lowrie, Kierkegaard, p. 359.

79. Ibid., pp. 90-91.

80. Ibid.


82. Kierkegaard, Journals, 4083.

83. Ibid., 4077.

84. Ibid., 4090.

85. Ibid., 4085.

86. Ibid., 4086.
87. Ibid., 4087.
88. Ibid., 4088.
89. Diem, Dialectic, p. 129.
90. Ibid., p. 131; Kierkegaard, Journals, 4185.
92. Ibid., p. 80.
93. Lowrie, Kierkegaard, p. 293.
94. Hamilton, Promise, pp. 67-68.
95. Arbaugh, Authorship, pp. 239, 259.
96. Kierkegaard, Point of View, p. 51.
97. Kierkegaard, Journals, 4113, 4164; Diem, Dialectic, p. 131.
98. Kierkegaard, Journals, 4070, 4097.
99. Ibid., 4168.
100. Ibid., 4061.
101. Ibid., 4107.
103. Kierkegaard, Point of View, p. 156; Journals, 4205; Diem, Dialectic, 125-126.
104. Ibid., 126.
105. Kierkegaard, Present Age, p. 100.
106. Ibid., p. 96; Kierkegaard, Journals, 4097.
108. Ibid., p. 100.
110. Ibid.
112. Ibid., p. 94.
113. Ibid.
114. Ibid., p. 98.
115. Gates, *Life and Thought*, p. 120.
121. Kierkegaard, *Point of View*, p. 5.
122. Ibid., pp. 156, 158.
125. Ibid.
127. Gates, *Life and Thought*, p. 120; Arbaugh, *Authorship*, p. 239.
129. Ibid., 2938.
130. Ibid., 5071.
132. Kierkegaard, *Present Age*, pp. 85-86; Gates, *Life and Thought*, p. 120.

134. Kierkegaard, Journals, 4167.

135. Ibid.

136. Ibid., 4166.

137. Ibid., 4156.

138. Ibid., 4242.

139. Ibid., 2938.

140. Ibid., 4157.

141. Gates, Life and Thought, p. 120.

142. Kierkegaard, Journals, 2938.

143. Kierkegaard, Point of View, p. 158.

144. Kierkegaard, Journals, 4166.

145. Ibid.

146. Ibid.

147. Ibid., 4237.


149. Gates, Life and Thought, p. 115.

150. Ibid., pp. 116-120.


152. Lowrie, Kierkegaard, p. 364.


154. Ibid., 4125.

155. Ibid., 2950.
156. Ibid., 4181.


158. Kierkegaard, Journals, 4119.

159. Ibid., 2995.

160. Ibid., 2955.

161. Hamilton, Promise, p. 77.

162. Kierkegaard, Journals, 2995.

163. Kierkegaard, Journals, 2938.

164. Ibid., 2972.

165. Ibid., 4119.

166. Ibid., 4160.


169. Kierkegaard, Journals, 4119.

170. Ibid., 4115.

171. Ibid., 4149.

172. Ibid., 4192.

173. Ibid., 4119.

174. Ibid.

175. Ibid., 4192.

176. Ibid.

177. Ibid., 2932.

178. Kierkegaard, Point of View, pp. 117-118.

179. Ibid., p. 118; Kierkegaard, Journals, 2938, 4237.
180. Kierkegaard, Present Age, p. 33.
181. Ibid., 37-38.
182. Ibid., p. 37.
183. Ibid., p. 45.
184. Ibid.
185. Kierkegaard, Present Age, pp. 44-45.
186. Ibid., p. 46.
187. Ibid., p. 42.
188. Ibid., pp. 46-47.
189. Ibid., p. 47.
190. Ibid.
191. Ibid.
192. Ibid., p. 46.
193. Ibid., p. 47.
194. Ibid., p. 44.
195. Ibid.
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197. Ibid.
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