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# INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNITY IN KIERKEGAARD'S THOUGHT

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

J. Michael Tilley

The Graduate School  
University of Kentucky

2008

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THOUGHT

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Arts and Sciences At the University of Kentucky

By J. Michael Tilley

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. J. Daniel Breazeale, Professor of Philosophy

Lexington, Kentucky

2008

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNITY IN KIERKEGAARD'S THOUGHT

Kierkegaard is generally regarded as a quintessential individualist who leaves no room for social or political engagement. This interpretation is the dominant lens through which many scholars view Kierkegaard, and it also shapes the way Kierkegaard's thought has been received by his followers and critics. Many recent works have significantly challenged the traditional interpretation of Kierkegaard, but they have not examined the topic systematically. In order to remedy this deficit, this study provides a holistic account of Kierkegaard's social thought. First, it challenges the dominant view that society as represented by the crowd is simply a foil for Kierkegaard's individual by: (a) articulating a general approach for understanding how Kierkegaard's negative comments about society and community do not constitute a rejection of sociality as such, and (b) demonstrating that Kierkegaard's well-developed ideas on faith and religiosity are compatible with an account that emphasizes a broader social dimension in his thought.

Second, I present a framework that outlines a positive theory of community, a 'Dialectic of Community,' which explains the importance of the Kierkegaardian single individual in the formation and development of community. This framework provides an interpretation of the social period of Kierkegaard's authorship and its importance for the entirety of the authorship. Even though the interpretation is helpful for understanding Kierkegaard and his relationship to 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century European moral, social, and political thought, Kierkegaard never explicitly describes how his conception of the self is consistent with his social thought. I address this problem by developing a narrative model of selfhood that illustrates the importance of subjectivity and the single individual for an adequate account of intersubjective selfhood. More specifically, I argue that narratives are important intersubjectively for becoming a person and a moral agent, but the concept of self is not exhausted in narrative. That is, having a self-narrative presupposes that the person is a subject who has a set of principles that organize one's experiences and activities. This framework not only shows how Kierkegaard's concept of subjectivity can be understood in a social context, but it also addresses a significant problem in narrative identity theory.

KEY WORDS: Søren Kierkegaard, G.W.F. Hegel, Community, Narrative Identity Theory, 19<sup>th</sup> Century Denmark.

J. Michael Tilley

June 17, 2008

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNITY IN KIERKEGAARD'S  
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DISSERTATION

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The Graduate School  
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2008

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DEDICATION

To Rebekah  
without her help, I would not have been able to accomplish this task

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There is not enough room to properly thank all those who deserve my gratitude for their help in completing this project. I want to express my gratitude to Craig Hinkson, my undergraduate advisor, who first exposed me to Kierkegaard's thought.

This particular project began while I was a Master's student at Texas A&M: it was initially inspired by John McDermott's passion for existentialist philosophers and his emphasis on the place of community in philosophical inquiry, and without Theodore George's guidance I do not think the project would have advanced beyond my initial interest.

Of course, this project only fully came to fruition as a result of my experiences at the University of Kentucky. I would like to express my utmost gratitude for the support and help provided by Daniel Breazeale. He has instilled a deep sense of the important role of careful historical study into the culture and intellectual milieu of a particular thinker. Although it is hoped that the insights a thinker reaches will be applicable well beyond that context, historical scholarship is essential if we are to discover what those insights are. I would also like to thank all of my other committee members for their support throughout the completion of my thesis: Theodore Schatzki, Ronald Bruzina, Anna Secor, and Robert Rabel.

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Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family. They have always provided encouraging words, thoughts and prayers on my behalf, but my deepest gratitude is for Rebekah. Her support throughout this process has been a source of encouragement and strength. She has been a patient interlocutor as I worked out my ideas, and she has particularly been supportive during the final stages of the writing process.

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## ABBREVIATIONS FOR REFERENCES TO KIERKEGAARD

All references to Kierkegaard will identify the English translation first followed by the original Danish.

References to English Editions of Kierkegaard's Works:

*BA: Book on Adler*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

*C: The Corsair Affair and Articles Related to the Writings*, ed. and trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.

*CUP: Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, vol. 1, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

*CI: The Concept of Irony*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

*EPW: Early Political Writings*, trans. Julia Watkin. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.

*EO1: Either/Or*, v. 1, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

*EO2: Either/Or*, v. 2, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

*FT: Fear and Trembling and Repetition*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

*JP: Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, vs 1-7, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967.

*LD: Letter and Documents*, ed. and trans. Henrik Rosenmeier. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.

*MLW: The Moment and Late Writings*, ed. and trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

*SLW: Stages on Life's Way*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

*SUD: The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

*TA: Two Ages*, ed. and trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.

*UDVS: Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, ed. and trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

*WL: Works of Love*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

References to Danish Editions of Kierkegaard's Works:

*B&A: Breve og Aktstykker vedrørende Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. N. Thulstrup, v. 1. Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1953-1954.

*Pap: Søren Kierkegaard's Papirer*, ed. P.A. Heiberg, V. Kuhr, E. Torsting, N. Thulstrup, vs. 1-13. Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1968-1970.

*SKS: Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, vs. 1-28, ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, et al. Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 1997-.

*SV: Søren Kierkegaards Samlede Værker*, v. 1-14, ed. A.B. Drachmann, J. L. Heiberg and H. O. Lange. Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1901-06.



## Chapter One: Introduction

Kierkegaard is generally regarded as a quintessential individualist who leaves no room for social or political engagement. This interpretation is the dominant lens through which most scholars view Kierkegaard, and it also shapes the way Kierkegaard's thought has been received by his followers and critics. This general characterization of Kierkegaard has come under fire in recent years from a variety of angles. First, there have been a number of works that have considered the social aspect of Kierkegaard's project; this work is primarily focused on Kierkegaard's texts and it shows that, at least in particular works, Kierkegaard is not an apologist for the asocial, apolitical, atomistic individual.<sup>1</sup> Second, some recent scholars, notably Martin J. Matušík and Jürgen Habermas, have moved beyond merely interpreting Kierkegaard's work, and they have developed some of the concepts in Kierkegaard's writings which can contribute, directly and indirectly, to contemporary discourses within social philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Third, in Bruce Kirmmse's *Golden Age of Denmark* and Jon Stewart's *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, Kierkegaard is presented in his immediate historical context, and

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<sup>1</sup> All of the following books focus on the importance of human relationships and community in Kierkegaard. M. Jamie Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); George Connell and C. Stephen Evans (ed.), *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community: Religion, Ethics, and Politics in Kierkegaard* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1992); George Pattison and Steven Shakespeare (ed.), *Kierkegaard: The Self in Society* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998). Ferreira's work reveals the ethical dimension of Kierkegaard's thought in *Works of Love*, while the latter two works are a compilation of essays that address a variety of topics related to Kierkegaard and social and political issues.

<sup>2</sup> Martin J. Matušík, *Postnational Identity: Critical Theory and Existential Philosophy in Habermas, Kierkegaard, and Havel*. (New York & London: the Guilford Press, 1993); Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (Oxford & Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003); and Jürgen Habermas, "Individuation through Socialization: On George Herbert Mead's Theory of Subjectivity," *Postmetaphysical Thinking* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992) pp. 164-170.

Kierkegaard's awareness of and response to the social issues of his day is evident even though these works do not explicitly deal with the social dimension of his thought.<sup>3</sup>

Each of these approaches has significantly challenged the traditional interpretation of Kierkegaard, but they have not examined the topic systematically and they have failed to develop a Kierkegaardian understanding of community. In order to remedy this deficit, this study will provide a holistic account of Kierkegaard's social thought. First, it will challenge the dominant view that society as represented by the crowd is simply a foil for Kierkegaard's individual by: (a) articulating a general approach for understanding how Kierkegaard's negative comments about society and community can be understood as a 'corrective' that does not constitute a rejection of sociality as such, and (b) demonstrating, in particular, that Kierkegaard's well-developed ideas on faith and religiosity are compatible with an account that emphasizes a broader social dimension in his thought.

Second, I will present a framework that outlines a positive theory of community, a 'Dialectic of Community,' which will explain the importance of the Kierkegaardian single individual in the formation and development of community. This framework will provide an interpretation of the social period of Kierkegaard's authorship and its importance for the entirety of the authorship. Even though the interpretation is plausible and helpful for understanding Kierkegaard and his relationship to 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century European moral, social, and political thought, Kierkegaard never explicitly or clearly describes how his conception of the self is consistent with his social thought. I address this problem by developing a Kierkegaardian narrative model of selfhood that will

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce Kirmmse, *Golden Age of Denmark* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

illustrate the importance of subjectivity and the single individual for an adequate account of intersubjective selfhood.

In order to understand why this study is needed, I will describe and examine how Kierkegaard's contemporaries and those figures he influenced throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century treated Kierkegaard's social thought. I will suggest that there are important cultural and historical reasons for their negative portrayal and these reasons explain the reactions of his immediate contemporaries and the reception of his thought throughout Europe in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Then, I will provide a short summary of the structure of this project and a brief description of the contents of each chapter, which will ultimately provide an indication of the implications and contributions of this project for Kierkegaard studies, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century European social philosophy, and narrative identity theory.

### ***The Traditional View of Kierkegaard's Social Thought***

The traditional view of Kierkegaard's thought is that he rejects any possibility of a genuine social philosophy. Kierkegaard is thought of as simply a champion of the single individual. This view is not altogether inaccurate as it relies on a number of ideas and positions that Kierkegaard explicitly develops, which I will discuss and address in chapter two, but it is also conditioned by historical events including the contingencies of Kierkegaard's reception in Europe and the United States as well as the standard way Kierkegaard is taught in the English-speaking world. In order to justify my claim that many scholars have overlooked an important social dimension to Kierkegaard's works, I will indicate explicitly what the traditional view is and indicate historical events that have contributed to the predominance of this particular interpretation of Kierkegaard's thought.

The traditional view is that Kierkegaard's philosophical and religious views commit him to a view of the individual which either is incompatible with any conception of community, or, as some of the more moderate scholars may suggest, only allows for a seriously defective view of community. This basic position has been a mainstay of both the reaction to Kierkegaard and Kierkegaard scholarship itself since Kierkegaard's death. This interpretation has impacted not only the immediate reaction of his contemporaries, but also his reception among critical theorists, existentialists, and theologians. The predominance of this view continues today among contemporary philosophers and Kierkegaard scholars<sup>4</sup>, as well as in many of the primary texts used in introductory classes on Kierkegaard.

Grundtvig and Martensen, two of the most prominent targets of Kierkegaard's critiques, thought Kierkegaard rejected the possibility of community. Grundtvig wrote, "Kierkegaard was careful not to write that he, either by his own insight or out of the New Testament, had gained a light and a power to live a real Christian, spiritual, and eternal life which he could transmit to others."<sup>5</sup> Grundtvig's claim is that Kierkegaard's view of the individual or religion gleaned from the "New Testament" is so radically unique that it cannot be taught or communicated to others. A commentator on Grundtvig concurs and claims that for Grundtvig, "Christianity is not a matter of individual concern alone; it is a community life which finds its earthly home in the human forms of common values that have grown in various parts of our created world. This corporate aspect...was absent in

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<sup>4</sup> A large number of contemporary Kierkegaard scholars are sympathetic to views that emphasize the social dimension of Kierkegaard's thought.

<sup>5</sup> N.F.S. Grundtvig, *Selected Writings*. Ed., trans. and introduction by Johannes Knudsen (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p.64-65.

Kierkegaard's agonizing search for Christian living."<sup>6</sup> Although both the commentator and Grundtvig focus on Kierkegaard according to his religious implications, the point is clear: for Kierkegaard the most important aspects of life are a matter of "individual concern alone." According to H.L. Martensen, another Danish contemporary, Kierkegaard denied all forms of association. He wrote, "He [Kierkegaard] did not want to found a congregation or establish any new society. He totally denied every notion of society or associations, and he looked only to individuals...."<sup>7</sup>

This interpretation is also prominent within critical theory. Georg Lukács was an early student of Kierkegaard and his thought profoundly influenced the direction and tenor of not only Lukács's early work but his subsequent work as well. In his first book, *Soul and Form*, Lukács deals with Kierkegaard explicitly, and much of his early work can be read an attempt to bring much of Kierkegaard's thought to bear on social problems in pre-World War I Europe.<sup>8</sup> One could argue that it is Lukács's appropriation of Kierkegaard which allows him to anticipate and predate the humanist interpretation of Marx before the publication of the 1844 Political and Economic Manuscripts in 1932.

Despite Lukács's appreciation of Kierkegaard, he ultimately finds him morally responsible for the "fetishized inwardness" and complacency of the "bourgeois intellectuals" of French existentialism. Both Adorno and Marcuse view Kierkegaard along the same lines. Adorno wrote explicitly about Kierkegaard on three different occasions including his first published philosophical work *The Construction of the*

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<sup>6</sup> Johannes Knudsen in the Introduction to Grundtvig, *Selected Writings*, p. 5-6.

<sup>7</sup> Hans Lassen Martensen in Bruce Kirmmse, *Encounters with Kierkegaard*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 203.

<sup>8</sup> Georg Lukács, *Soul and Form*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1974). For an insightful discussion of Kierkegaard influence on Lukács see Alastair Hannay *Kierkegaard: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) pp. 428-436 .

*Aesthetic* (1933), a lecture titled “Kierkegaard’s Doctrine of Love” given in New York at a seminar organized by Paul Tillich (1940), and finally a study of Kierkegaard’s final view of Christianity as exhibited in the attack titled, “Kierkegaard One More Time” (1966).<sup>9</sup> Despite Adorno’s familiarity with Kierkegaard’s overall thought, his understanding of Kierkegaard was formed by the way in which Kierkegaard’s thought was received in Germany in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first thing to note about Kierkegaard’s reception is that his thought was first appropriated by theologians ranging from Paul Tillich to Karl Barth to Emmanuel Hirsh. Second, he was philosophically identified as a forerunner to the existentialist philosophers (e.g., Karl Jaspers and Heidegger) even though he had just as profound an influence on a number of critical theorists including Lukács and Adorno. Kierkegaard’s thought was understood as being individualistic and asocial largely as a result of this early reception of his thought by existentialist theologians and philosophers – some of whom were associated with National Socialism. He was identified, on the one hand, with the rise of existentialism in theology and philosophy and on the other, with being either unresponsive to social crises in the Third Reich or even worse expressing views that justify and undergird its moral, social, and political failings. Rather than addressing the particular issues that Adorno raises for Kierkegaard’s thought which has been done elsewhere,<sup>10</sup> I merely want to suggest that there is some reason for thinking that the reaction against Kierkegaard

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<sup>9</sup> Theodore Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Theodore Adorno, “Kierkegaard’s Doctrine of Love,” *Kierkegaard: Critical Assessments by Leading Philosophers* ed. Daniel Conway (London: Routledge, 2003). The third work is, as far as I know, unpublished in English, and all three are published together in Theodore Adorno, *Kierkegaard Konstruktion des Ästhetischen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1966).

<sup>10</sup> See Marcia Morgan, “Adorno’s Reception of Kierkegaard: 1929-1933” *The Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter* 46 (September 2003). For an evaluation of Adorno’s interpretation of Kierkegaard and see Ferreira, *Love’s Grateful Striving* for a compelling and clear refutation of Adorno’s critique of Kierkegaard’s ethics of love.

among social and critical theorists derives from the historical and cultural association of him with figures that they were more directly critical of, i.e., Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Hirsch among others.

This view is perhaps most evident in Herbert Marcuse's comparison of Hegel and Kierkegaard in his *Reason and Revolution* where Marcuse explicitly identifies Kierkegaard as the champion of the "isolated individual" in contrast to Hegel's socially-constituted individual.<sup>11</sup> According to Marcuse, Hegel "demonstrated that the fullest existence of the individual is consummated in his social life," and that the "critical employment of the dialectical method tended to disclose that individual freedom presupposes a free society, and that the true liberation of the individual therefore requires the liberation of society."<sup>12</sup> But Kierkegaard's "fixation on the individual alone... amounts to adopting an abstract approach..." which is antithetical to any social or cultural criticism.<sup>13</sup> Although this interpretation is clear in each of the critical theorists mentioned, Marcuse's account is the most explicit. He specifically contrasts Hegel's view of the social, which is important for Marx and the critical theorists, to Kierkegaard's anti-social individualism.

This interpretation among the critical theorists is likely the result of a variety of factors, but at least one factor was that many of the critical theorists understood themselves as opponents of existentialism, and they identified Kierkegaard as an important precursor to the movement, which is often characterized as lacking a social or political dimension. This view of Kierkegaard was not limited to the critical theorists.

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<sup>11</sup> Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941) pp. 262-263.

<sup>12</sup> Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*, pp. 262-263.

<sup>13</sup> Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*, p. 263.

Karl Jaspers, for instance, directly and explicitly appropriates Kierkegaard for his own purposes. He writes, “It is therefore possible to understand Kierkegaard’s basic thoughts and to appropriate them as “the primal text of individual, human conditions of Existenz,” completely divorced from Christianity.”<sup>14</sup> Although an emphasis on individuality does not explicitly deny community, Jaspers continues, claiming that to interpret Kierkegaard’s purpose as “the revival of the community spirit” is to appropriate his “concepts dishonestly” in a manner which is “alien to him”.<sup>15</sup> Jaspers finds Kierkegaard’s individual to be antithetical to the formation of a community.

Furthermore, there are a number of existentialists who were critical of Kierkegaard precisely because he lacked a social and political dimension to his thought. Even though Sartre was deeply appreciative of Kierkegaard’s emphasis on the fundamental importance of the singular individual who is instantiated in history and made the universal, he was equally critical of Kierkegaard for ignoring political thought and activism.<sup>16</sup> As one scholar has noted, “[T]he later Sartre’s orientation turned increasingly in a direction that many commentators claim not to find in Kierkegaard himself, the socio-political... [F]reedom in the later Sartre is above all the freedom of *praxis*, human activity within a social milieu, hence no longer as individualistic as Kierkegaardian freedom is typically thought to be.”<sup>17</sup>

This basic idea is also expressed in Martin Buber’s *Between Man and Man*.

Although he is quite appreciative of Kierkegaard’s insights in general, Buber offers a

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<sup>14</sup> Karl Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers*, v. IV (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1995), p. 290.

<sup>15</sup> Jaspers, p. 289.

<sup>16</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, “Kierkegaard: The Singular Plural,” *Between Existentialism and Marxism* (New York: New Left, 1974).

<sup>17</sup> William McBride, “Sartre’s Debts to Kierkegaard: A Partial Reckoning” *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity* (ed) Martin J. Matušík and Merold Westphal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) p. 29.



similar criticism of Kierkegaard's concept of the individual. Buber claims that Kierkegaard's view focuses too much on the uniqueness of the individual and her exclusive relation with God, thereby undermining any possibility for genuine community. Buber cites two passages from *Point of View*, "Everyone should be chary about having to do with 'the others', and should essentially speak only with God and with himself" and "[O]ne should be, 'regarding the highest concerns, related solely to God.'"<sup>18</sup> This explicitly states that everyone ought to be wary of entering into relationships with other people because those relationships can undermine one's relationship with God. According to Buber, Kierkegaard thinks that the individual relates solely and essentially to God. Buber claims, "This relation is an exclusive one, the exclusive one, and this means, according to Kierkegaard, that it is the excluding relation, excluding all others..."<sup>19</sup> For Kierkegaard, there is a conflict between one's relation to creation and one's relation to God. God's relation to the individual trumps an individual's relation to the world to such a degree that the individual must resign everything of the world including relationships and possessions among other things.

The traditional interpretation, however, is not merely limited to philosophers and social theorists. Many theologians who are deeply sympathetic with Kierkegaard's overall project question his view of the community and/or church. Jaroslav Pelikan, a Lutheran theologian, who is very sympathetic to Kierkegaard's philosophical theology says, "There are several blind spots in [Kierkegaard's] thought, notably the individualism

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<sup>18</sup> Buber, "The Question to the Single One" *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: MacMillan, 1948), pp. 50-51. 'Essentially' in this context means that the relationship to God is an exclusive relation. Buber's quotations are from *PV* 106 / *SV* 13, 593. That Buber quotes from the *Point of View* indicates that he was quite familiar with Kierkegaard's corpus since *Point of View* was not as accessible as some of Kierkegaard's other works.

<sup>19</sup> Buber, *Between Man and Man*, p. 50.

and subjectivism which have prevented most of his followers from articulating an adequate doctrine of the Church.”<sup>20</sup> This sentiment is echoed by another theologian,

Howard Johnson:

One of the ways in which the Kierkegaardian stress on ‘the individual’ has been misunderstood... is in the contention, constantly recurring, that Kierkegaard had no essential place in his thought for the Church. I too maintain that, measured by the New Testament conception of the Church, Kierkegaard’s ecclesiology is defective. But to assert that his doctrine of the Church is defective is different from asserting that he had no doctrine at all.<sup>21</sup>

Although Johnson views himself as defending Kierkegaard against those who deny any “essential place in his thought for the Church,” he still finds Kierkegaard’s view to be defective. To label Kierkegaard’s view of the church or community as a “blind spot” in his thought, or as being “defective” is an example of the traditional view of Kierkegaard’s view of community.

Although all of the examples given above are historical examples with the latest quote from 1968, this interpretation is still alive and well in the present. Bruce Kirmmse, a very well renowned Danish historian and Kierkegaard scholar, wrote, “In the last part of his life it looked as if Kierkegaard opposed not only the Danish State or People’s Church, but also the very concepts of Church and congregation as such.”<sup>22</sup> This quotation comes from an article where Kirmmse provides a very detailed defense of the claim that Kierkegaard’s emphasis on a private, individual religiosity is antithetical to any form of community.

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<sup>20</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *From Luther to Kierkegaard*. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 118. Pelikan is referring to Emil Brunner when referring to Kierkegaard’s ‘followers’.

<sup>21</sup> Howard A. Johnson, “Kierkegaard and the Church” as an introduction to Søren Kierkegaard, *Attack Upon Christendom*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. xix.

<sup>22</sup> Bruce H. Kirmmse, “The Thunderstorm: Kierkegaard’s Ecclesiology,” *Faith and Philosophy* v. 17. (Wilmore, KY: The Society of Christian Philosophers, 2000), p.89.

Likewise, in *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard*, Mark C. Taylor says that for Kierkegaard, “the journey to selfhood cannot culminate in spiritual community but must be a solitary sojourn that separates self from other.”<sup>23</sup> According to Taylor, Hegel’s approach to becoming a self is much more coherent and philosophically defensible because Hegel’s notion of self is inherently relational and social whereas Kierkegaard’s notion is fundamentally disconnected from any other(s). Taylor’s view echoes Marcuse’s view that Kierkegaard and Hegel represent antipodes regarding the relationship between the relative importance of the individual and the community.

Additionally, the standard textbooks used to introduce and teach Kierkegaard to students have also reinscribed this basic interpretation. In his introduction to Kierkegaard in *Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre*, Walter Kaufmann interprets Kierkegaard as an individualist and claims that Kierkegaard is “a befuddled thinker, yet a writer who intrigues and fascinates by virtue of his individuality” and that Kierkegaard “not only *was* an individual but tried to introduce the individual into our thinking as a category.”<sup>24</sup> He also claims that although some thought Hegel was not liberal enough and too authoritarian, “For Kierkegaard, Hegel was too rational and liberal.”<sup>25</sup>

But perhaps the most important textbook for introducing Kierkegaard to English-speaking students is Robert Bretall’s *A Kierkegaard Anthology*. In this work, Bretall explicitly pits Kierkegaard as a key figure in the “revolt against Hegel”. According to Bretall, Kierkegaard “had been one of the very first to react against Hegel’s intellectualism and to launch the counter-movement in the direction of temporality,

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<sup>23</sup> Mark Taylor, *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard* (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1980) p. 179.

<sup>24</sup> Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre*. (New York: Meridian, 1975), p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> Kaufmann, p. 16.

concreteness, and the “individual.”<sup>26</sup> Bretall further reinforces the traditional view in his introduction to his selections from *The Present Age (A Literary Review)*. He claims (in stark contrast to the actual content of *A Literary Review*) that Kierkegaard was apolitical, and that “the value of individuality was for him supreme and could neither be enhanced, nor on the other hand impaired, by any change of social organization.”<sup>27</sup> Although both Kaufmann and Bretall hold views which are far from universally accepted among contemporary Kierkegaard scholars, their influence on the traditional way Kierkegaard is taught and understood in the English-speaking world is unquestioned. Their views serve as an indicator of the generally accepted view of Kierkegaard. I do not, however, mean to suggest that this traditional view is without any textual support in Kierkegaard’s authorship. On the contrary, this interpretation is based on a number of quite explicit texts where the single individual is pitted against not only the community but against any relation whatsoever (except for the relation to God). I will address these texts in chapter two and three where I will show that these texts alone are insufficient to justify the traditional view of Kierkegaard, and this claim will further support my argument that historical and cultural influences play a significant role in 20<sup>th</sup> century and contemporary interpretations of Kierkegaard as a defender of asocial individualism.

### ***Chapter Summaries***

My project challenges the view of Kierkegaard that arises from this historical milieu. In the four chapters of this project, I will show (1) that Kierkegaard’s thought does not preclude sociality as such (chapters two and three), (2) that there is, in fact, a

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<sup>26</sup> Robert Bretall, “Introduction”, *A Kierkegaard Anthology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946) p. xviii.

<sup>27</sup> Bretall, “The Present Age”, *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, p 259.

positive theory or account of the social and that this account has important implications for our understanding of Kierkegaard and 19<sup>th</sup> century social philosophy (chapter four), and (3) that Kierkegaard's view of the self can be articulated as a narrative theory of selfhood that illustrates how his emphasis on subjectivity and the individual is related to the intersubjective and social features of his thought (chapter five).

In chapter two, I will show that Kierkegaard's understanding of his own work as a 'corrective' provides a hermeneutical framework for finding features of Kierkegaard's social thought that are, at the very least, implicit in his authorship. The corrective is not simply reacting against the status quo, but it is a strategy that Kierkegaard self-consciously employed in order to account for and address particular problems in his own society and culture. Since this strategy itself is aimed at ameliorated social ills, then it is reasonable to think that Kierkegaard does not universally eschew the social sphere. More importantly, however, if Kierkegaard's (or various pseudonym's<sup>28</sup>) negative comments

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<sup>28</sup> The "pseudonym problem" is a significant problem in Kierkegaard scholarship, and it is one that every scholar must address and consider. There are a variety of different positions that scholars have taken regarding Kierkegaard's use of various pseudonyms. The most extreme position, perhaps, is Roger Poole's expressed in *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993). In the work, Poole makes a sharp distinction between the views expressed by the various pseudonyms (particularly those that are used prior to 1848 in *Repetition*, *The Concept of Anxiety*, *Stages on Life's Way*, and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* among others) and Kierkegaard himself. This strategy rightly acknowledges that Kierkegaard often developed specific personalities and styles for a significant number of his pseudonyms and in many cases, he employed them in a particular way for a particular purpose; but one need not accept the extreme view in order to acknowledge this fact. First, a variety of themes are repeated and expressed similarly in various pseudonyms. In such cases particularly if those views are collaborated in non-pseudonymous writings, it is permissible to consider Kierkegaard's view in relation to a particular pseudonym's views. Thus, I do not think that the pseudonym problem means that one is unable to discuss similar themes from various pseudonyms. Second, contemporary exegetical studies provide a compelling reason why the extreme response to the pseudonym problem is mistaken. For example, there are a number of works that were written under the guise of a particular pseudonym, but the pseudonym was only added after the manuscript was completed and Kierkegaard sometimes failed to correct certain passages and references to himself as the author. Søren Bruun has convincingly shown that this is the case with *The Concept of Anxiety*. See Søren Bruun, "the Genesis of *The Concept of Anxiety*," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*. 2001, pp. 1-14. It is also well-known that *The Sickness Unto Death* was originally planned as a work under Kierkegaard's own name, but it was at the last minute changed to the pseudonym Anti-Climacus. There are also cases where Kierkegaard will use the same materials in both pseudonymous and non-pseudonymous works. Jon Stewart discusses one case in *Prefaces* in his

about community, the congregation, and other people in general are best understood as correctives, then there is good reason to look deeper into the issue and not take these claims at face value. It will not suffice to simply examine a handful of texts that portray the individual in opposition to other people, the community, and the Church while thinking the issue is settled. My claim in this chapter is not that there is a social dimension to Kierkegaard's thought; rather, I am only claiming that a more thorough investigation of the issue is needed in light of Kierkegaard's self-understanding of his own work as a corrective. As my analysis of Kierkegaard's use of the term the 'corrective' will show, only when one has properly identified what Kierkegaard's is attempting to correct and accurately portrayed an image of what his alternative is – only then, is one able to adequately understand the role of interpersonal relationships and community within his thought.

Chapter three examines three prominent Kierkegaardian themes and topics – the primacy of inwardness and subjectivity, the one-to-one God relation, and final attack on the Danish church – that are generally thought to preclude a social dimension to Kierkegaard's thought. I address the first two themes as they arise in the figure of Abraham in *Fear and Trembling*. The figure of Abraham is the father of faith, and his

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*Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, p. 41. These instances show that varying degrees of weight should be placed on Kierkegaard's use of a pseudonym, and in many cases it is perfectly reasonable to infer a connection between Kierkegaard's views and a particular pseudonym's views on a subject. My own view is sympathetic to those scholars who recognize the pseudonym problem as something worthy of consideration, but I reject the extreme view. Nevertheless, how one addresses the pseudonym problem is largely irrelevant to my broader project. First, I use the standard practice of referring to pseudonyms rather than Kierkegaard himself when I discuss particular pseudonymous works. The only exception is when I discuss the view of self presented in *The Sickness Unto Death*. I alter my usual presentation there for ease of presentation, but since my task is not to elucidate or describe the arguments in *The Sickness Unto Death*, it is not important for my purposes whether or not the views represented there are wholly identical to Kierkegaard's or the hyper-Christian thinker Anti-Climacus. Second, the three most prominent works that figure in my study (*A Literary Review*, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, and *Works of Love*) are non-pseudonymous work, and I am not aware of any scholar who views any of these three works as ironical or as works that ought not be taken at face value. Thus, the pseudonym problem does not threaten the integrity of this project, even if one adopts the extreme position.

sacrifice of Isaac is thought to set him against ethics, community, and even his own family; but I present an interpretation of the work that shows how Abraham, in order to actually be the knight of faith, must fully embrace the finite world including his relationships with Isaac, Sarah, the community as a whole, and the ethical. Furthermore, my interpretation of “the absolute relation to the absolute” (ordinarily understood as a reference to the one-to-one God-relation) referenced throughout *Fear and Trembling* does not preclude social relationships, though it indicates the importance of the single individual and inwardness in the development of oneself as a social individual.

I will also show how the attack on the Church is not an attack on the concept of community as such, and I will indicate how there is an implicit concept of a community even during Kierkegaard’s polemics against Denmark’s most important social institution. In both *Fear and Trembling* and the attack on the Danish Church, there is an implicit subtext that points toward Kierkegaard’s social thought that is only fully articulated in the middle period of Kierkegaard’s authorship in 1846-1847. In this chapter, I am merely showing how three of the most “anti-social” aspects of Kierkegaard’s work are not, in fact, anti-social. This approach, on the one hand, lays the foundation for chapters four and five where I will show that there is a positive social dimension to Kierkegaard’s thought, and on the other hand, it illustrates how the social dimension of Kierkegaard’s thought can be incorporated into his already well-developed views of the single individual, faith and religiosity.

In chapters four and five, I will show that there is a social dimension in Kierkegaard’s thought that can be conceptualized in philosophically interesting ways. In the fourth chapter, I develop a Kierkegaardian theory of community by means of a close

analysis of the three texts that comprise the social period of Kierkegaard's authorship in 1846-1847 – *A Literary Review*, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, and *Works of Love*. These views are situated within Kierkegaard's immediate intellectual and cultural context, and I examine them in light of Hegel's and some of his student's views on the subject. I show that Kierkegaard has, in fact, appropriated a "dialectic of community" that is in structure and content closely tied to Hegel, which he adopted from Hegel's student Karl Bayer. All three figures maintain that individuals and communities develop only in relation to one another, and it follows from this that there is an implicit social dimension to Kierkegaard's defense of the individual and subjectivity. Kierkegaard's dialectic of community outlines a framework that sheds light on his social views, the relationship between the three works of the social period, and the relationship of the social period of the authorship to its earlier and later counterparts.

Although it is clear that Kierkegaard sees a direct connection between the subjectivity of the early authorship and the social character of life in the middle period, he never explicitly clarifies how the two are related. In order to illustrate how the two might be related, in chapter five I present a narrative theory of selfhood as a framework for understanding the relationship between subjectivity and intersubjectivity in the self. This issue has become a prominent issue in Kierkegaard scholarship in relation to MacIntyre's criticism of *Either/Or* in *After Virtue*. I argue that MacIntyre's narrative theory has significant problems in comparison with competing views and that Kierkegaard's understanding of self in the *Sickness Unto Death* is amenable to being understood in narrative terms. Such an account shows how subjective notions of self are related to the social dimension of human existence. I also indicate how Kierkegaard's



characterization of self can ameliorate some problems in otherwise promising narrative identity theories.

As I demonstrate in chapters four and five, this project contributes to relevant scholarly fields by (1) proposing and defending a new and more comprehensive interpretation of Kierkegaard's efforts as an ethical and social thinker, (2) establishing a clear and unmistakable debt to Hegel concerning interpersonal relationships and the relationship between the individual and community, and (3) developing a Kierkegaardian narrative theory of selfhood that incorporates the subjective, intersubjective, and objective dimensions of selfhood in such a way that both (a) shows how one can reconcile the Kierkegaardian emphasis on subjectivity and inwardness with the social dimension of his thought and (b) demonstrates the value and limits of narrative identity theory.

## Chapter Two: The Corrective, Community, and Culture

As a Kierkegaard scholar, one commonly hears the old adage that one gets what one wants out of Kierkegaard. The evangelical Christians find a defender of the faith, while the person who despises organized religion finds a fellow radical. The Lutheran theologian finds a great thinker who recovers Luther's original insight, while the Catholic finds a troubled Protestant about to swim the Tiber. The Marxist finds a bourgeois individualist, while the 19<sup>th</sup> century Danish commoner finds a friend. The character of Kierkegaard's overall authorship is such that textual support can be marshaled for a variety of contradictory viewpoints, and there is good reason to think that Kierkegaard meant for his readers to be confronted with these different viewpoints so that the reader would be forced to make a choice among them. This component of Kierkegaard's authorship is sometimes characterized as Kierkegaardian irony, but it is also regularly described as a "corrective." The concept of the corrective is an important one for Kierkegaard, and he employs it throughout much of his authorship. In this chapter, I will analyze what Kierkegaard means when he claims that his work is a corrective, and I will argue that reading Kierkegaard as a corrective, at least in some situations, does not lend itself to the old adage about finding whatever one wants in Kierkegaard. Reading Kierkegaard as a corrective is particularly important, since his activity as a corrective illumines both his relationship to many of his contemporaries and his understanding of sociality and community. If some of Kierkegaard's more extreme statements about the Danish Church or the solitary life of the Christian are best understood as a corrective, then there is good reason to think that human relationships play a more important role in Kierkegaard's thought than is ordinarily assumed.

The concept of corrective is prominent in Kierkegaard's characterization of his own project in both published and unpublished writings. The term itself – *Correctiv* – is not a Danish word but is derived from the Latin *correctio*. Kierkegaard does occasionally use more traditional Danish words for correction (e.g., *Berigtigelse*), but Kierkegaard reserves the Latin word as a technical term. The first use of the term occurs in 1844 relatively early in Kierkegaard's authorship<sup>1</sup>, and the final use of the term is in February 1855 well into the attack on Christendom.<sup>2</sup> The concept is most fully developed in a number of journal and notebook entries in 1849-1850, and it is perhaps one of the most important concepts for understanding Kierkegaard's self-representation of his prior and subsequent work.

Although the term plays a prominent role in Kierkegaard's thought, there have been relatively few systematic studies of its use.<sup>3</sup> Most often, the concept is just taken to mean that Kierkegaard simply emphasizes the opposite of the prevailing tendencies of his culture.<sup>4</sup> This understanding of Kierkegaard's project is pervasive in many domains of Kierkegaard scholarship. Just as Kierkegaard's culture emphasized the union of Church and State, so Kierkegaard posited a sharp split between the two. Danish Protestantism focused on Christ as sacrifice, so Kierkegaard focuses on Christ as example. Hegelianism

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<sup>1</sup> *JP* 3, 3299 / *SKS* 18, JJ:236. Although the term 'corrective' is first used in 1844 in the journals, the basic idea is present in Kierkegaard's thought from the very beginning. In 1836 he wrote, "When the dialectic period [the age of individuality]... has been passed through in world history... social life must again play its role to the utmost degree, and ideas such as the state (for example, as the Greeks knew it, the Church in the older Catholic meaning of the word) must of necessity return richer and fuller--that is, with all the content that the residual diversity of individuality can give the idea..." *JP* 4, 4070 / *Pap* I A 307.

<sup>2</sup> *MLW* 41-42/ *SV* 14, 47-48. This passage uses the more traditional Danish word interchangeably with its Latin counterpart.

<sup>3</sup> The best treatment of it up to this point was a short section in Elsebert Jegstrup's dissertation: *Kierkegaard on Citizenship and Character* (Chicago: Loyola University Chicago, 1991) pp. 185-204.

<sup>4</sup> Joel Rasmussen uses the concept in this way in his "The Pitiful Prototype," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* (New York:De Gruyter, 2007), p. 274. He suggests that Kierkegaard's emphasis on suffering and martyrdom is a "corrective" to the "easy grace" of 19<sup>th</sup> century Denmark.

values objectivity and reflection, so Kierkegaard values subjectivity and passion. There are two different responses that a person can have to these dyads. On the one hand, a person could adopt one perspective and deny the other. One could adopt either the Kierkegaardian position that genuine faith is opposed to the ethical or the view that faith must be incorporated and understood with a system that is ethical and rational.

On the other hand, a person could try to mediate between the two views and maintain that neither view is complete in itself, but both views present aspects of a complex situation. One could argue that Kierkegaard's claim that true Christianity results in suffering adequately counteracts the claim that sickness, suffering and poverty exhibit a lack of faith but at the same time think that it goes too far and makes suffering a requirement for being a Christian. Neither of these two responses understands Kierkegaard's notion of the corrective, and this misunderstanding obscures key elements of Kierkegaard's thought. In light of this deficiency, I will clarify the concept of the corrective by analyzing Kierkegaard's use of the concept. I will describe the three essential characteristics of the corrective using Kierkegaard's reactions to his contemporaries as models for understanding the concept. I will then apply Kierkegaard's concept of the corrective to his polemics against some of his contemporaries in order to elaborate the concept more fully. I will also defend the practice of reading Kierkegaard as a corrective, and I will argue that this allows for the possibility that social and political concerns play a more important role in his thought than is ordinarily admitted.

### ***2.1. Kierkegaard's Concept of the Corrective***

Kierkegaard uses the concept of the corrective in three related ways – as a philosophical corrective, an existential-corrective, and as a corrective to the established

order. The last of these uses is the most important and it encompasses the other two. The corrective in this sense refers to a counterbalance to the establishment. This use of the concept expresses the essence of what it means to be a corrective, and both of the two other characterizations presented below fall within the confines of this way of using the term.

In the first, Kierkegaard refers to his own work as an intellectual or theoretical corrective to speculation and idealism. He claims that his own contextual approach, in which one “will not begin with nothing or without any presuppositions,” is a “necessary corrective” to “German philosophy.”<sup>5</sup> Despite the explicit reference to German philosophy, Kierkegaard is most likely identifying H.L. Martensen, a Danish philosopher and theologian who was influential in the popularizing of Hegelian philosophy in Denmark, as the target of his criticism.<sup>6</sup> In another passage, Kierkegaard presents Socratic ignorance as “what the speculation of our time needs as a corrective.”<sup>7</sup> The final reference to a philosophical corrective is when he mentions that Martensen would prefer to “ignore the corrective [Kierkegaard],” rather than engage with his arguments.<sup>8</sup> In each

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<sup>5</sup> JP 3, 3299 / SKS 18, JJ:236.

<sup>6</sup> Most of Kierkegaard’s knowledge of the German philosophical tradition is from Martensen’s lectures on the topic. Furthermore, Martensen played a significant role in the Danish debate about beginning philosophy with “no presuppositions.” For both of these reasons, there is strong evidence that Kierkegaard was referencing Martensen directly when he claims that it “begins with nothing” and indirectly when he describes “German philosophy,” since a great deal of Kierkegaard’s knowledge of the German tradition comes through Martensen. Stewart, *Kierkegaard Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, pp. 490-491. Although Martensen was influential in the initial development of Hegelian thought in Denmark, he was not an uncritical sycophant. Particularly after Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity* and Strauss’s *On Christian Doctrine* were published, Martensen began to distance himself from Hegelian philosophy. Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>7</sup> JP 3, 3567 / SKS 22, 224, NB12:134.

<sup>8</sup> JP 6, 6574 / Pap X-6 B 121.

of these three references, Kierkegaard is identifying implicitly or explicitly Martensen's views as the object of his correction.<sup>9</sup>

In the second, Kierkegaard describes his "task" as an "existential-corrective." He provides the existential-corrective "by poetically presenting the ideals..." which in turn incites "people about the established order..." while at the same time "criticizing all the false reformers and the opposition."<sup>10</sup> I do not think that this use of the concept is distinct from the general way of using the term, even though the terminology is different. Both of these further uses of the concept – the philosophical corrective and the existential-corrective – are subsets of the larger concept of the corrective in general. Kierkegaard's philosophical corrective shows the deficiencies of established scholars and professors, and his existential-corrective is explicitly described as a response to the established order. In my further elaboration of the concept, I will focus on this more general use of the term.

## ***2.2. The Three Essential Features of the Corrective***

There are three primary features to Kierkegaard's concept of the corrective. It is one-sided, aimed at reforming the whole, and it cannot become normative. All three of these features are essential for understanding Kierkegaard's use of the concept. In this section, I will describe each of these three features, and I will illustrate them by describing the way Kierkegaard reacted to some of his contemporaries. In particular, Kierkegaard's indirect criticism of Martensen will illustrate how a critique can reform the whole by being expertly one-sided.

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<sup>9</sup> Kierkegaard's relation with Martensen is particularly important for understanding the nature of the corrective. I will return to their relationship when I discuss the first feature of the concept of the corrective.

<sup>10</sup> *JP* 1, 708 / *SKS* 24, NB23:15. Kierkegaard also uses the term "existential-corrective" in his "Open Letter" to Rudelbach. *C* 56 / *SV* 13, 441.

### 2.2.A. *Reforming the Whole*

The most important feature of the corrective is that it subtly alters the functioning and understanding of the whole, thus bringing about the possibility of genuine reform. Kierkegaard says that the corrective will “cast a humorous-edifying warmth over the whole”<sup>11</sup> and that it will incite “people about the established order.”<sup>12</sup> Kierkegaard uses a series of metaphors that illumine the way in which the corrective alters the whole for the better. The first metaphor compares the corrective with a skilled cook adding a little dash of cinnamon. The cook realizes that the dish needs just a little bit of cinnamon even though the ordinary person is unable to taste it. The cook knows how the slight addition will make the whole more tasty. The second metaphor concerns the painter who adds a little red to a painting that has many colors. The red is introduced in small quantities and only in particular places such that people hardly notice any red in the overall painting. In both cases, there must be a little bit of cinnamon or a little bit of red that vanishes in the whole. The corrective is designed to contribute to the overall structure and design of the whole without being the focal point.<sup>13</sup> Kierkegaard does not mean, however, that the corrective is designed to moderate the established toward some happy medium ground. Rather, it is a dynamic structure meant to advance the whole.

To illustrate this idea, it is helpful to add an analogy to Kierkegaard’s two others: the corrective is like a fugue. In a fugue, a voice or musical pattern is in tension with another concurrent pattern, and this tension is used in order to bring out key aspects of the whole. The concurrent pattern or the dissident voice alone is not able to produce the

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<sup>11</sup> *JP* 3, 3299 / *SKS* 18, JJ:236.

<sup>12</sup> *JP* 1, 708 / *SKS* 24, NB23:15.

<sup>13</sup> *JP* 1, 709 / *Pap* X-4 A 596.

proper aesthetic experience, but when the two patterns are played together the impact and style of both are accented. This metaphor is particularly appealing because it shows that the tension between the corrective and the established is resolved neither by dismissing one or the other, nor by mitigating the force of the corrective to make it more palatable to the established. Rather, the whole is most improved when the corrective is presented forcefully and articulately, and when the established is strong enough to withstand the assault. The idea is not to resolve the tension but to insist on it all the more for the benefit of all.<sup>14</sup>

### 2.2.B. *One-sidedness*

Furthermore, the corrective is to be one-sided, but its one-sidedness does not entail that it ignores the opposing position. It must be expertly one-sided such that any appropriation of it, failure to consider it, or attack on it will change the totality. The corrective must be presented in such a way that *any* response to it results in the appropriate change to the whole. It follows that the one who uses the corrective must know the established order well, and it “must study the weak sides... scrupulously and penetratingly.”<sup>15</sup> The corrective is presented as a criticism of these deficiencies with an eye toward altering the whole. Each response – appropriation, attacking, or ignoring the corrective – are riddled with practical difficulties if the corrective is presented properly. As a model for understanding how the corrective can be presented such that ignoring or appropriating the corrective can serve its purposes, I will discuss Kierkegaard’s indirect criticisms of Martensen in the pseudonymous work *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*,

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<sup>14</sup> As an aside, the concept of a fugue was prominent in Heidegger’s *Beiträge zur Philosophie*. Heidegger explicitly describes the work as a “fugue” in Sections 81 and 82. *Contributions to Philosophy*, trans. Kenneth Maly and Parvis Emad (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> *JP* 6, 6467 / *SKS* 22, 194-195, NB12:97



Martensen's *Christian Dogmatics*, and Rasmus Nielsen's criticism of Martensen for ignoring Kierkegaard's criticism.<sup>16</sup> Though the criticisms of Martensen in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* are described as a corrective in one journal entry, it is not essential to my argument that they be understood as correctives. Rather, I am claiming that these critical comments are presented in such a way that any response – attack, silence, or appropriation – would accomplish Kierkegaard's goal.

Concerning the following situation, it is important to note that Kierkegaard does not explain how an attack on the corrective would bring the appropriate change in the established position. It is plausible that, in certain circumstances, an immediate response to a critic validates and strengthens the critic's position. It may highlight a problem of which people were generally unaware, or it may force people to investigate the matter for themselves to determine the validity of the criticism. My claim here is not that criticism always produces this type of change; though if presented appropriately in the right context, the corrective will accomplish its purpose when attacked.

The response to Martensen's *Christian Dogmatics* illustrates how the corrective accomplishes its purpose when it is ignored and appropriated. Martensen's work was published in 1849.<sup>17</sup> The work was a comprehensive theological treatise on the nature and activity of the Trinity – in creation and in the incarnation – and it also dealt with the

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<sup>16</sup> Kierkegaard's relationship with Martensen is a much broader topic than I will be covering in this chapter. Although there are substantial theoretical disagreements between the two men, much of the mutual animosity between them seems to have been personal. Martensen was just a few years older than Kierkegaard, and at least part of Kierkegaard's animosity has been attributed to a measure of jealousy and personal distaste (Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, pp. 64-66). In my treatment in this chapter, I will neither exhaustively cover the content of Martensen's *Christian Dogmatics* nor Nielsen's criticism of the work. I will only describe the situation with enough detail such that one is able to see the way a one-sided critique functions.

<sup>17</sup> Hans Lassen Martensen, *Christian Dogmatics*, tr. By William Urwick (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1866).

relationship between revelation, reason, and faith.<sup>18</sup> Although the work never explicitly mentions Kierkegaard (or any of his pseudonyms) by name, he rejects in short order the views of those who use “maxims, aphorisms, ideas, and glimpses,”<sup>19</sup> even though he addressed issues central to Kierkegaard’s authorship. Martensen’s *Dogmatics* created quite the stir in Copenhagen, and there were a number of critiques written in response to it. The most important response in this context was Rasmus Nielsen’s “Magister Kierkegaard’s ‘Johannes Climacus’ and Dr. Martensen’s ‘Christian Dogmatics.’ A Thorough Review.”<sup>20</sup> Nielsen had spent a good deal of time reading and studying the works of Johannes Climacus, and he had extensive conversations with Kierkegaard himself during this formative time. Nielsen’s review of Martensen’s *Dogmatics* quoted liberally from the writings of Johannes Climacus – primarily *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* – while criticizing Martensen for ignoring Kierkegaard’s insights about the relation of objective thinking and the subjective faith of an individual.<sup>21</sup> Nielsen follows Climacus in his claim that faith and speculation have separate domains and that Christianity is addressed to faith and to the individual.

This situation shows the practical difficulties of ignoring a one-sided critique. In a journal entry commenting on this situation, Kierkegaard writes:

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<sup>18</sup> Niels Thulstrup’s essay “Martensen’s *Dogmatics* and its Reception” briefly summarizes the content of Martensen’s *Dogmatics*. *Kierkegaard and His Contemporaries*, ed. Jon Stewart (New York: de Gruyter, 2003) pp. 182-187.

<sup>19</sup> Hans Lassen Martensen, *Den christelige Dogmatik* (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1849) p. iii. The preface is not translated into English.

<sup>20</sup> Rasmus Nielsen, *Magister S. Kierkegaards ‘Johannes Climacus’ og Dr. Martensens ‘Christelige Dogmatik.’ En undersøgende Anmeldelse* (Copenhagen, Reitzel, 1849).

<sup>21</sup> Niels Thulstrup’s essay “Martensen’s *Dogmatics* and its Reception” briefly summarizes the content of Nielsen’s critique of Martensen. *Kierkegaard and His Contemporaries*, ed. Jon Stewart (New York: de Gruyter, 2003) pp. 187-191.

*On Prof. Nielsen's Relationship to My Pseudonym Johannes Climacus*

A.

What I Cannot Approve

...Attempts have been made to explain Prof. Nielsen's intervention against Prof. M. simply on the basis of personal antagonism. It seems to me that another explanation comes just as close. To write a dogmatics in a limited setting like ours, one that even claims to "heed the signs of the times," and then try to ignore completely my work as an author or even try to sweep it away with a few casual words in a preface to a dogmatics which, strangely enough, indirectly bears unmistakable marks that there is considerable awareness of the existence of my work as a writer--yes, this is strange. I do not know of anything better to do than to smile, because I have nothing to say on this occasion. But another person can look at this strange matter from another angle, and it seems to me that it is quite understandable that Nielsen (who, parenthetically noted, is also a professor of the University of Copenhagen and a better student of Hegel than Prof. Martensen) feels called upon to protest against such strange conduct, he who has found these writings so significant that he has used two years to become acquainted with them. The point here is not that an objection can be made against Nielsen's attack upon Martensen from the standpoint of the idea and on behalf of the pseudonym; this was considered in its proper place anyway. Only this: it is a mistake, at times an offense, to want to ignore the corrective. But to want to change the corrective into doctrine is an alteration of the corrective and anything but imitating it, for the corrective should not be used by one who wants to be a corrective also, but by one whose greatness, yes, whose superiority to the corrective would be precisely that elevation by which he would say short and sweet: I have wanted to be corrected...<sup>22</sup>

Kierkegaard's evaluation of Nielsen's critique deals with the second and third essential features of the corrective – its one-sidedness and the fact that it should not become normative. Kierkegaard believes that Nielsen rightly criticizes Martensen for ignoring Kierkegaard's work as an author. Martensen's *Dogmatics* treated Kierkegaard only with a few cursory remarks in the preface, and Nielsen criticized his work publicly precisely because it ignored the works attributed to Kierkegaard. If the corrective is deployed appropriately in the proper setting, not only will an attack on it bring about the desired

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<sup>22</sup> JP 6, 6574 / Pap X 6 B 121.

change but ignoring it will also contribute to the reform of the whole. The idea is that ignoring legitimate criticism of one's position subjects one's view to further scrutiny.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, it is also the case that those who appropriate the corrective ultimately serve its aims. If the corrective is adequately one-sided, then it will never be adopted fully by the establishment even though it may gradually have a greater influence. It has a larger influence because those in power will often "surreptitiously utilize the corrective and pretend as if they themselves had said it... If they detect that that the corrective has power, they advance and covertly utilize the corrective – and then appropriate to themselves the honor of exemplifying moderation."<sup>24</sup> The one-sided character of the corrective prevents the powers that be from coming to a place of rest. It continually challenges and provokes, and it must be dealt with if only to dismiss it. It is a point outside of the established order that produces external and, more importantly, internal change.

The corrective must be deployed in such a way and in a particular setting such that any of the responses presented above – appropriation, silence, or attack – accomplish its purposes. Kierkegaard means precisely this when he claims that the corrective is supposed to be expertly one-sided with a deep awareness of the flaws and problems in the position it is correcting. The one-sidedness of the corrective, however, is problematic if it

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<sup>23</sup> Kierkegaard himself read Martensen's work as well as a number of critiques of the work. According to Martensen's description of a personal conversation between himself and Kierkegaard, it seems that Kierkegaard did not agree with Nielsen's complaints against Martensen for ignoring the works of Johannes Climacus. Kierkegaard, according to Martensen, said, "Our differences are a difference within the Christian," and Martensen took this to mean that Kierkegaard's opposition to him "was certainly not absolute." Later in the same passage, he mentions Kierkegaard claimed that the difference was one of emphasis – that is, Martensen emphasized Pauline theology and Kierkegaard emphasized the faith of James. H.L. Martensen, *Af Mit Levnet* v. II, (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandels Forlag, 1882) pp. 146-147. The translations in this footnote are my own.

<sup>24</sup> *JP* 1, 707 / *SKS* 22, 208, NB12:115.

is severed from its historical context – that is, if it is severed from that which it is correcting. Thus, the third essential characteristic of the corrective is that it cannot become normative.

### *2.2.C. Not Becoming Normative*

Kierkegaard developed his concept of the corrective in order to express his self-understanding of his own work, and his fear was that his corrective would become normative. That is, he did not intend for it to be universally accepted on its own. The entire purpose of the Kierkegaardian corrective is as a defense of the establishment. It is like a medicine that weakens the body temporarily but ultimately makes it stronger. “[T]he corrective should not be used by one who wants to be a corrective also, but by one... [who] would say... I have wanted to be corrected...”<sup>25</sup> Kierkegaard expresses this feature of the corrective in a number of entries, and it occurs most prominently in his criticism of Lutheranism and the People’s Church of Denmark. The problem with Luther, says Kierkegaard, is that he allowed himself to be made “into a paradigm.”<sup>26</sup> His work was essentially a corrective that was “made into the normative... [which is] confusing in another generation (where that for which it was a corrective does not exist).”<sup>27</sup> Kierkegaard even claims that a confusing corrective degenerates ultimately into that which it was supposed to correct by means of subsequent reactions against it. For example, Luther intended to recover authentic Christianity but instead he produced “the most refined kind of secularism and paganism,”<sup>28</sup> that is, 19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeois

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<sup>25</sup> *JP* 6, 6574 / *Pap* X-6 B 121.

<sup>26</sup> *JP* 3, 2522 / *SKS* 23, 367-368, NB19:57.

<sup>27</sup> *JP* 1, 711 / *Pap* XI-1 A 28. This entry is also significant because it is written sometime in 1854 either just prior to the “truth-witness” eulogy or just after.

<sup>28</sup> *JP* 1, 711 / *Pap* XI-1 A 28.

Christianity. In another passage, Kierkegaard asserts that one who wants “to change the corrective into a doctrine” misunderstands its nature.<sup>29</sup> The goal is not to bring a new doctrine into the world or to organize a party.<sup>30</sup> Rather one presents “ideals” which not only “incite people about the established order” but also criticize “all the false reformers and the opposition... whom only ideals can halt.”<sup>31</sup> To organize a party or promote a new doctrine changes the corrective from a constraint into a standard that strives for universal adoption, but a genuine corrective is an external critique designed to produce internal change and reform (though it may also result in external changes). It is in this respect that the corrective is understood as a defense of the establishment.

Kierkegaard’s own polemics against the Danish Lutheranism and the People’s Church illustrates the proper use of the corrective. He is not only critical of the establishment, but he also criticizes the critics of the establishment. Both his enemy and his enemy’s enemies were his enemies. In cases where Kierkegaard understands his work as a corrective, he uses this model of presentation. He presents a criticism of the standard view while at the same time distancing himself from other critics. This approach is important for understanding Kierkegaard’s relation to his contemporaries as well as his views concerning sociality, community and interpersonal relationships.

#### *2.2.D. Objections to Reading Kierkegaard as a Corrective*

In order to understand whether a particular argument employed by Kierkegaard is a corrective, it is essential to examine whether it bears the marks of these three essential features. This approach precludes the primary problem associated with reading

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<sup>29</sup> JP 6, 6574 / Pap X-6 B 121.

<sup>30</sup> JP 2, 2046 / Pap X-5 A 121.

<sup>31</sup> JP 1, 708 / SKS 24, NB23:15.

Kierkegaard as a corrective, i.e., that such a reading could serve as a justification for dismissing those elements of Kierkegaard's thought that one finds unpalatable. It must be admitted, however, that dismissing problematic aspects of Kierkegaard's authorship is a challenge for most interpreters. Since he often makes assertions and arguments that seems antithetical to one another, the fear is that people will pick whichever interpretations suit their own biases rather than finding the best interpretation of the available information from the text and historical situation. For example, an evangelical Christian may interpret Kierkegaard as a proto-evangelical Christian dismissing Kierkegaard's critique of Christianity, or a person who believes in participatory democracy may interpret Kierkegaard as a democrat whose criticisms of democracy are merely ironic correctives of the political conservatives of his day.

In spite of this risk, it is important not to dismiss the significance of the concept for Kierkegaard. First, this methodology is explicitly stated as a key for understanding Kierkegaard's work from as early as 1836 through 1855.<sup>32</sup> Although the term 'corrective' is first used in 1844 in the journals, the basic idea is present in Kierkegaard's thought from the very beginning. The first use of the basic idea is in a journal entry in 1836,<sup>33</sup> and it remains a dominant theme at least up through significant portions of the attack on Christendom where Kierkegaard continues to use the concept of a "corrective."<sup>34</sup> In an

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<sup>32</sup>The concept of collision becomes more prominent during the attack, and the use of the term 'corrective' diminishes. Kierkegaard never explicitly clarifies what he means by the term 'collision,' nor does he contrast it explicitly with corrective. But it is, like *Correctiv* a borrowed term [*Collision*] from Latin.

<sup>33</sup> JP 4, 4070 / Pap I A 307.

<sup>34</sup> It may be the case that the concept of corrective is replaced or supplemented at some point during the attack on Christendom. In some of the earlier Attack literature, Kierkegaard explicitly says that reform is not possible in the current situation. "The Christianity of the New Testament does not exist at all. Here there is nothing to reform; it is a matter of throwing light on a Christian crime continued over centuries... as long as the Christian crime continues, there can be no question of reforming but of throwing light on this Christian criminal case." *MLW* 39-40 / *SV* 14, 45-46. The crime is not that official Christendom fails to live

article written in February 1855, Kierkegaard discusses the importance of retrieving intensiveness, and with it genuine Christianity, rather than merely generating a greater number of “Christians.” Even though Kierkegaard’s approach is dissimilar to the propagation of Christianity in the New Testament, this new method is needed because the situations are different. The first reason for adopting a corrective reading of some of Kierkegaard’s arguments is that he himself understands many of his substantive arguments as correctives and he maintains this view throughout much (if not in the entire) authorship.

Another reason for adopting this approach is that Kierkegaard’s authorial style lends itself to reading him as a corrective despite whatever challenges it poses for scholars. When a reader is attempting to discern Kierkegaard’s view on a given matter, she must distinguish between that which is merely the corrective and Kierkegaard’s own fully developed positions (assuming there is such a thing). This process forces a reader to make certain hermeneutical choices such that one is never allowed simply to accept Kierkegaard as an authority. When Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms or Kierkegaard himself express multiple views from a variety of different perspectives, the reader is forced to decide for herself what elements are significant and which are hyperbole, exaggeration or corrective. Kierkegaard preferred that readers engage his work in this way.<sup>35</sup>

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up to New Testament Christianity. Rather it is that official Christendom is unable to admit that it does not resemble Christianity in the New Testament. Kierkegaard’s claim suggests that reform, and perhaps correction, is not possible. But he still has hope that the establishment will be changed for the better and thus, reform is possible if the establishment would simply admit that it no longer lives up to the ideal of New Testament Christianity. Thus, it appears that Kierkegaard does leave open the possibility of reform even though he makes explicit comments to the contrary.

<sup>35</sup> This idea is expressed in many places throughout Kierkegaard’s authorship, but the following passage is a representative example: “It is one thing to introduce a new doctrine into the world; it is something else to appropriate a given doctrine personally in inward deepening. In the first case disciples may be accepted, a party organized, because otherwise it could easily happen that the doctrine, with the teacher gone, would not get out into the world at all. It is entirely different with personal appropriation of a given doctrine in



Kierkegaard's explicit use of this methodology and his authorial style are good reasons for us to take the concept of the corrective seriously, but I have not directly addressed the concern that reading Kierkegaard as a corrective could end up justifying any position. The best response to this particular worry is that the corrective has a distinct logic and structure that cut against the misuse of the concept within Kierkegaard's work. The structure must address the three features of the corrective that I have articulated above: it must aim at reforming the established position, be expertly one-sided, and it must not become normative. If one of Kierkegaard's positions or arguments is to be understood as a corrective, then it will have this structure. The first two conditions are relatively easy to meet given Kierkegaard's polemical style. Kierkegaard often presented one-sided appraisals of situations or positions for the sake of some higher end, but the third feature of the corrective is the most significant. As I have mentioned above, Kierkegaard (or one of his pseudonyms) will often criticize those reformers who have set themselves against the established authorities even when Kierkegaard's actual argument is similar in many respects to that of the reformers. If Kierkegaard uses this particular tactic, then it is likely to be the case that the argument in question is being presented as a corrective.

This standard is useful because it shows that not all of Kierkegaard's arguments are best understood as a corrective, and it gives us criteria for evaluating whether or not a particular argument should be understood in light of the concept. In the next two sections, I will describe two of Kierkegaard's arguments that are relevant to my overall work

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inward deepening. Here it is essential that disciples not be accepted or a party organized, because doing so inevitably weakens personal appropriation; here what counts is to work as an individual, to stand as a single individual, to be sacrificed as a single individual. The task of personal appropriation is the only one there can be any question about in 'Christendom,' for everyone, to be sure, is acquainted with the doctrine." *JP* 2, 2046 / *Pap* X-5 A 121.

concerning the social and political dimension to Kierkegaard's thought. I will argue, on the one hand, that Kierkegaard's criticism of democracy (the numerical) is not presented as a corrective and, on the other hand when he criticizes his society or the concept of community, he intends it to be a corrective. This distinction is also important because it shows that even if Kierkegaard rejects democratic politics, there is still room for articulating a social dimension in his thought. A critique of certain social and political institutions and approaches need not be taken as a wholesale rejection of sociality as such.

### ***2.3. Kierkegaard's Critique of Democratic Processes and the Numerical***

Kierkegaard's critique of democracy, the liberal movement in general, and the "numerical" are prominent in his early polemical writings, but they are also evident in his more mature views. In this section, I will analyze his criticisms of democratic procedure and the numerical in terms of his methodology of correction. I will defend the view that these criticisms are not cases where Kierkegaard is presenting his argument as a corrective. Rather, he is expressing his own reservations about voting and democratic procedure. Kierkegaard's early criticisms of the liberal movement and democratic procedures in his *Early Polemical Writings* are followed by more developed criticisms in *A Literary Review* and in his journals.<sup>36</sup> In this chapter, I will only consider his journal entries on the topic, since I will treat the content of *A Literary Review* in a subsequent chapter.

Kierkegaard's criticism of voting and democracy and its requisite emphasis on the numerical follow from his conception of the nature of the human being. He claims, "The

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<sup>36</sup> *EPW* 3-34 / *SV* 8, 6-39. *TA* / *SKS* 8.

single individual" is a spiritual definition of being a human being; the crowd, the many, the statistical or numerical is an animal definition of being a human being... The single individual ranks qua spirit according to the extent he can endure, wholly unchanged, having statistics thrown at him..."<sup>37</sup> Human beings have a composite nature consisting of an animal component and a spiritual component. Achieving a majority, voting, or any other activity that presupposes the importance of the merely numerical gives priority to the animal nature. In these cases, the individual is considered merely as an instance of the universal. The central insight of Christianity, according to Kierkegaard, is that it promotes the category of the individual over the species or the genus. "Christianity is inversely related to the numerical, and generally advances are made in a direction opposite to the numerical."<sup>38</sup> "The numerical is actually the conspiracy, for the numerical craftily suffocates the point in Christianity. Under the guise of zeal for Christianity the numerical smothers Christianity..."<sup>39</sup>

Kierkegaard's notion of the human being and his understanding of Christianity give rise to a number of worries about democracy. First, Kierkegaard helps himself to the familiar criticism that democracy is simply the tyranny of the majority. He writes, "Fear of men is dominant; indeed, as antiquity has already declared (Aristotle somewhere in *Politics* or *Ethics*): Tyranny and democracy hate each other just as the one potter hates another--that is, it is the same form of government, only in tyranny one is the tyrant, in democracy, the masses."<sup>40</sup> Second, he maintains that the democratic commitment to the

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<sup>37</sup> JP 2, 2050 / Pap XI-1 A 81

<sup>38</sup> JP 2, 2072 / Pap XI-1 A 490

<sup>39</sup> JP 3, 2914 / Pap XI-2 A 174

<sup>40</sup> JP 3, 3219 / Pap XI-1 A 51

numerical undermines responsibility for one's actions, since the individual is anonymous in the crowd and impervious to criticism. "[N]o one wants to be the single individual; there is... a fear of the envy and opposition of the environment... "Number" makes us all alike. Ten names joined together have a basically anonymous effect, and the anonymous does not excite envy."<sup>41</sup> Kierkegaard claims that people prefer to run "together in a herd" because "in the herd one is free from the criterion of the individual and of the ideal."<sup>42</sup> The only available criterion in the numerical is comparison with others. Kierkegaard writes:

The numerical (which as numbers increase more and more has become the law of human existence [*Tilværelsens*]) also has the demoralizing effect that the sight of these thousands and thousands prompts men to live merely comparatively, all human existence dissolves in the nonsense of comparison, the mud of numbers, which then is even prettied up to look like something under the name of history and politics, where the whole point (the mark of spiritlessness) is always that what counts is a large number of participants, that numbers confer significance, almost as if the idea were like a teller in a bank, who ponders numbers.<sup>43</sup>

Although the democratic impulse may be purportedly justified in terms of some broader communal or political good, the desire is not really for the good or the true as such but only numerical victory. Kierkegaard expresses the same point in another passage: "The law of existence for the numerical or for mass men is that they live by comparisons. We see from this that the numerical is the sophistical, a self-extending factor which, inspected more closely, dissolves into nothing."<sup>44</sup> If there is no independent criterion for establishing the importance and value of the individual then the accumulation of power for oneself or one's group will be the ultimate aim of all human activity.

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<sup>41</sup> JP 2, 2051 / *Pap XI-1 A 82*

<sup>42</sup> JP 3, 2968 / *Pap XI-1 A 16*

<sup>43</sup> JP 3, 2999 / *Pap XI-2 A 167*

<sup>44</sup> JP 3, 2986 / *Pap XI-2 A 88*

In this situation, truth and reality are ignored and replaced with merely pragmatic concerns. “The Public... is the very opposite of the idea. For the public is numbers... the battle of opinions in public life is neither more nor less than the business of a stock exchange. Just as with the quotations on stocks and bonds, [one] is concerned only with the opinion having the highest percentage. He believes that numbers are ideas.”<sup>45</sup>

Although Kierkegaard rejects any attempt to reduce Christianity, truth, or the good to a platform for others to consider and vote on, he does suggest, sarcastically, a limited role for democratic governance. In two passages, Kierkegaard discusses the difference between voting on matters of religious truth and the proper subject matter of the political:

[Christianity].....cannot be formed according to the paradigm of balloting (balloting, balloting with discussion, balloting without discussion--balloting, from, in, with, upon, by balloting) or be done according to the popular song: Let's a few of us get together, hurrah, hurrah, hurrah. Street-lighting and clothes and, with all due respect, the sanitation department can be reformed in this manner; but let us be men: Christianity does not lend itself to reformation in this way.<sup>46</sup>

The Old Orthodox who claimed that they were the only true Christians in Denmark. I have nothing against their separating from us--but it is indefensible that they should achieve this by balloting and without giving up the claim that they are the true Church. But this is supposed to be the tactic--and then judgment is supposed to fall upon Mynster and his party. In what frame of mind could the honest Spandet make his proposal? Did he look upon it as similar to a motion about gas street-lighting and the like--if so, then of course a vote may be taken, but it was certainly improper to make his proposal in this vein. Or, if he insists that he has regarded it as a matter of conscience, how in the world can he then be satisfied with serving a matter of conscience (which as a "royal service" not only must be promoted quickly and be put through but must also be put through or the one commissioned falls)--by making a motion for balloting and then seeing how many votes it will get.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *JP* 3, 2985 / *Pap* XI-2 A 26

<sup>46</sup> *JP* 4, 4208 / *SKS* 24, NB23:100.

<sup>47</sup> *JP* 6, 6728 / *Pap* X-4 A 36. Niels Møller Spandet (1788-1858) was a Danish lawyer and politician who introduced a bill in the house of commons to establish civil counterparts of marriage, baptism, and confirmation.

Voting is an appropriate form of decision-making when the material being decided upon is purely pragmatic, addressing questions about traffic, electricity, clothes, streetlights or public sanitation; but such a procedure is antithetical to the determination of truth and goodness. Democratic governance is acceptable so long as it is limited to its proper, trivial domain.

Kierkegaard's criticisms of democratic procedure, voting and the numerical in general are informed by his conception of human nature. His views on the subject appear to be straightforward critiques of the burgeoning democratic ethos coming to the fore in 19<sup>th</sup> century Denmark. His general views on the subject are always expressed against the growing liberal movement that supported and wanted both State and Church Constitutions. Kierkegaard's criticism of D.G. Monrad, the author of the Danish Constitution, and the concept of the "People's Church of Denmark" (*den danske folkekirke*) provide concrete examples of the more general criticism of democratic voting procedures.<sup>48</sup> Kierkegaard's arguments show that he unequivocally rejects both the liberal movement and the union of the political and the religious, and therefore, Kierkegaard's opposition to the political liberals and democrats of his day should not be understood as a "corrective." He gives a normative position concerning the role of democratic procedure in the domain of the religious.

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<sup>48</sup> Monrad is best known as the author of the Danish constitution, but he was also a prominent Danish politician, bishop of Lolland-Falster, and a contemporary of Kierkegaard (November 24, 1811-March 28, 1887). Monrad was a significant participant in the liberal political movement as a student and later as a journalist and parish priest in Lolland. In 1848, the people of Denmark demanded and received authorization for a new constitution. Monrad's experience as both a liberal political reformer and as a member of the State clergy made him an ideal candidate to promote and develop the new Danish constitution as a member of the March Ministry, the Danish constitution committee.<sup>48</sup> The committee was forged in order to develop a satisfactory constitution that would be sensitive to the demands of the reformers, the conservatives, the people of Denmark, and the established Church, and it produced the first Danish Constitution signed into law on June 5, 1849. Poul Engelstoft, "Monrad, Ditlev Gothard," in *Dansk Biografisk Leksikon* v. XVI (J.H. Schultz: Copenhagen, 1939) pp. 98-114.

Despite writing frequently on political topics as a student, Kierkegaard says very little about political issues, the liberal movement or its members in his mature authorship. There are only three journal entries during this period where Monrad is mentioned specifically with only a handful of others related to these themes. Nevertheless, there are three points of contrast that are evident in these passages. First, Kierkegaard viewed the ordination of Monrad as Bishop as a political concession, and he explicitly described it as an instance of “worldly shrewdness” rather than Christian wisdom.<sup>49</sup> Monrad’s high-level religious appointment to the politically volatile region of Lolland-Falster appears from Kierkegaard’s point of view as a sort of pragmatic political decision. Kierkegaard interprets Monrad’s ordination in this manner because of Monrad’s association with the liberal constitutional movement.<sup>50</sup>

Kierkegaard’s criticism in relation to this event is directed at both Mynster, representing the establishment, and Monrad, representing the reformers. The apparent political character of Mynster’s ordination of Monrad demonstrates that there is a radical difference between New Testament Christianity and Mynster’s Christianity.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, it shows that “Bishop Mynster’s life, Christianly, is a lie” because Mynster maintains that Copenhagen, his entire diocese in Zealand, and all of Denmark are “in

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<sup>49</sup> SKS 22, 381-382, NB14: 63.

<sup>50</sup> There is strong evidence that Monrad’s appointment was not simply a political ploy. Since Monrad was a parish priest on the island of Lolland, and since he was relatively similar to Mynster theologically, it is probably unfair of Kierkegaard to criticize the appointment of Monrad as Bishop of Lolland-Falster. There seem to be a number of very good theological and social reasons for the choice of Monrad as Bishop of which Kierkegaard is either ignorant or perhaps blatantly ignores. Still, we do not know the precise reason that Monrad was chosen for the position, and there is evidence that H.L. Martensen made decisions about position of Bishop for Lolland-Falster based on pragmatic and political grounds. See H.L. Martensen’s *Biskop H. Martensens Breve*, ed. Bjørn Kornerup, v. I (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 1955) p. 120 and Bruce Kirmmse’s use of the quotation in *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, p. 194. Thus, it is not out of the realm of possibility that Mynster made the decision primarily for political reasons.

<sup>51</sup> *Pap.X-6 B 212*.

truth Christian.”<sup>52</sup> Neither New Testament Christianity nor true Christianity is explicitly described in these journal entries, but it is evident that it involves some sort of commitment to the truth of Christianity even at the expense of one’s wealth, cultural status, and reputation. The ordination of Monrad is evidence that Mynster is more concerned with maintaining the established Church and his position within it rather than with acting out the demands of New Testament Christianity.

Second, Kierkegaard was also critical of Monrad’s political activity as a member of the Danish constitutional committee. In one journal entry, Kierkegaard compares the political situation to the relationship between parents and children.<sup>53</sup> Although parents are able to submit themselves to their children, even more effectively than children could submit to their parents, it is still not the best state of affairs for the family, the parents, or the children. Likewise, the old vanguard, the religious establishment, the landowners, and the cultural elites are much more adept at submitting to the will of the new constitutional liberals than vice versa but this, according to Kierkegaard, is not the best form of government. This comparison is applied specifically to Mynster’s ordination of Monrad. Although Mynster is well-disciplined and can obey Monrad, “the young Monrad” is not able to do “his duty in obeying the old bishop.”<sup>54</sup> This passage shows that Kierkegaard’s political sympathies lie with the “old vanguard,” and it also reveals interesting facets of Kierkegaard’s understanding of the relationship between Christianity and politics. It shows that he rejects any cooption of the democratic impulse for religious purposes. He interprets Mynster’s decision to appoint Monrad as Bishop as a political compromise that

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<sup>52</sup> *SKS* 22, 381-382, NB14: 63.

<sup>53</sup> *JP* 4, 4140 / *Pap* VIII-1 A 615.

<sup>54</sup> *JP* 4, 4140 / *Pap* VIII-1 A 615.



demonstrates how Mynster is all too willing to not only participate in the new political developments of 1849, but to use them to his own advantage. He reinscribes his own authority and position and that of the Danish Church by appointing Monrad to a political region prone to revolt in the hope that Monrad's position will quiet dissent. The flexibility of the established Church in capitulating to the demands of the time conflicts with what Kierkegaard sees as genuine Christianity.

Implicit within this characterization is Kierkegaard's hope that the political events of 1848-1849 would correct established Christianity in Denmark and allow one to reintroduce Christianity into Christendom. In *A Literary Review*, written just prior to the political developments of 1848-1849, Kierkegaard "prophesies" that the democratic tendencies and the leveling of the present age will make it possible for one to become a single individual capable of having a genuine relationship with God. The social demands of the public can make it such that one is satisfied with oneself and one's relation to God which in turn forces one to make up one's own mind rather than submitting to the will of the public.<sup>55</sup> The political revolution effectively would allow for the reintroduction of Christianity into Christendom. This claim, however, does not imply that Kierkegaard is in favor of democracy or the new political developments as such. Rather he thinks they have the means for producing something which is virtually impossible in the cultural aristocracy of his times: that is to say, a person who is deeply sensitive to the importance of actually being a Christian in Christendom. But, as I indicated above, Kierkegaard's political sympathies lie elsewhere.

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<sup>55</sup> *TA*, 92 / *SKS* 8, 88.

The third point of conflict between Kierkegaard and Monrad concerns the relationship between Church and State. Kierkegaard criticizes both the establishment and the reformers for relying on democratic numerical procedures. Kierkegaard worried that the democratization of Christianity had the potential to undermine genuine religious commitment, and he feared that the establishment would use its Christianity as a weapon of cultural hegemony. In such a situation, Christianity would serve as a cultural defence of the establishment. It would be a tool used to accomplish some other political, social or cultural goal. Although such an approach is not discussed in the journal entries dealing explicitly with Monrad, it may be that such a criticism lurks behind Kierkegaard's identification of the State Church of Denmark (*Statskirke*) with the People's Church of Denmark (*den danske folke-kirke*).

Monrad is neither named in Kierkegaard's discussion of the People's Church nor is he the person who coined the term, but Monrad did author the Danish Constitution where the concept of the People's Church is employed in a unique way distinct from any previous uses.<sup>56</sup> Monrad found the concept to be appealing to a large, diverse group of people of influence, and he also thought the concept expressed theoretically the appropriate relationship between the people, the State, and the Church. I will first discuss the strategic political decision to use the concept, and then turn to the theoretical underpinnings of the concept.

The term, the People's Church [*Folkekirke*], became very common among the Grundtvigians and it escaped many of the critiques aimed at the State Church. Grundtvig

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<sup>56</sup>Peter Christian Kierkegaard was the first to use the term, the People's Church. In 1841, P.C. Kierkegaard wrote, "Jesus Christ's Church in the People's Churches" [*Jesu Christi Kirke i Folke-Kirkerne*] *Samlede Skrifter* ed. Poul Egede Glahn and Lavrids Nyegård (Copenhagen: Karl Schönbergs Forlag, 1902) p. 1. The term was very popular among Grundtvigians because it expressed the idea of a national church, one formed by a nation of people rather than by a government or ruler.

and his followers defended a free church formed by the people rather than the government or a ruler. The idea is that the communal life of the people, the nation, gives rise to a national or people's church rather than it being forced upon the people from religious authorities. Furthermore, Monrad's own liberal movement favored a Church constitution that would be ultimately responsive to the people. The concept of the People's Church and an explicit provision guaranteeing religious freedom promised just this sort of responsiveness.<sup>57</sup> In the Constitution itself, Monrad explicitly identified the Evangelical Lutheran Church as the People's Church which satisfied the cultural and political conservatives in the Church who wanted to maintain this established Church relatively unchanged. Monrad's description of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as the People's Church of Denmark satisfied virtually all of the major political players in 19th century Denmark. His use of the term, however, conceals a deep ambiguity.<sup>58</sup> It is unclear whether Monrad is emphasizing the fact that the People's Church is simply another name for the Evangelical Lutheran Church or asserting that the people have decided, in effect, that they are evangelical Lutherans and that this decision constitutes the authority of the Church for the people. The first view would be merely a change in semantics with very little, if any, change in the actual practices of the Church. The second view would have constituted a fairly deep break with the traditional understanding of the Danish Church.

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<sup>57</sup>The constitution itself embodies the idea that ecclesiastical and religious matters are governed by Danish law and subject to possible revision in the form of additional laws or constitutional changes. Paragraphs 81-84 in the 1849 Danish Constitution express the type of religious freedom in Denmark. The people have the following freedoms: freedom of worship, the freedom to refrain from giving personal financial (or other) contributions to a religion other than one's own, freedom to disagree with one's religious community, and it is also illegal to deprive a person of his or her civil or political rights because of a person's religion.

<sup>58</sup>Kirmmse discusses the "vague and elliptical language" of the Danish Constitution as it pertains to the People's Church. Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard and Golden Age of Denmark*, p. 75.

Monrad, however, would reject both of these characterizations of the concept. Although the term was agreeable to almost everyone of political influence for various reasons, Monrad had a distinctive Hegelian interpretation of the concept.

Monrad's vision of the People's Church is Hegelian: the Church is necessary because 'the spirit does not exhaust its whole being [*fylde*] in some single individuals [*enkelt individ*], but in [their] totality'; because to 'feel the pulse of the spirit' the people must be organized as an organism; the Church should follow the spirit and be sovereign over the State, this organization will not deprive but give the single individuals [*de enkelte*] freedom and only by 'pursuing its own higher purpose' does the Church promote 'the State's interest.'<sup>59</sup>

Monrad claims that the State interest is promoted by the existence of the Church since the Church organizes and structures the life of the people such that the people become good citizens and promote the good of the whole. Such a situation, it is asserted, does not deprive citizens of their freedom. Rather, the people voluntarily promote the betterment of all. It appears, therefore, that Monrad would simply deny the dilemma presented above, and he would claim that the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the people mutually presuppose and constitute the other. The Church builds the people, and the people have decided that they are Evangelical Lutherans.

Kierkegaard, however, does not seem to recognize any distinction between the People's Church and the State Church. Kierkegaard only uses the term the People's Church [*Folke-Kirke*] in a negative light and only in six journal entries, and in all but one of those entries there is an explicit identification of the State Church and the People's Church.<sup>60</sup> There are two ways to interpret this identification. On the one hand, one can

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<sup>59</sup>P.G. Lindhart *Den Danske Kirkes Historie*, v. VII, ed. Hal Kock and Bjørn Kornerup (Copenhagen: Gyldendal Boghandel Nordisk Forlag, 1958) p. 16. The translation from the Danish is my own.

<sup>60</sup>*JP* 5, 6761 / *Pap* X-4 A 296; The following entry is the only reference to the People's Church in Kierkegaard's writings where it is not identified with the State Church, and it is a reference to Martensen's defense of the People's Church. Since Kierkegaard is referring to Martensen's use of the term, the use in this entry does not undermine the claim that Kierkegaard fails to make a distinction between the People's

take it as evidence that Kierkegaard simply did not understand the difference between the People's Church and the State Church. Just as there is a difference between a government of the people (e.g., the people's assembly [*Folketing*], which is the Danish parliament), and the State as such, so is there a difference between the People's Church and a State Church. A Church of the people would, ideally, be set up in such a way where there would be little or no conflict between the Danish people as a whole and the religious authorities. The people could demand, through the government, religious reformation if a situation arose where Christianity was undermined by the religious practices in the Church. According to this interpretation, the Church not only functions as the means for developing the people into a nation, but it is also the product or result of the collective will of the people. The evidence for this interpretation of Kierkegaard's equivocation is that (1) Kierkegaard never explicitly distinguishes between the two concepts and (2) his criticisms of the People's Church are identical to his criticisms of the State Church. It is rather strange that Kierkegaard never directly addresses the constitutional characterization of the Church, since many of his criticisms are more applicable to the People's Church than the State Church (e.g., Kierkegaard's critique of determining religious truth by means a vote).

On the other hand, it may be that Kierkegaard was aware that some political and religious figures attempted to distinguish between the two concepts, but he thought such an attempt was doomed to fail. According to this interpretation, Kierkegaard recognized the political nature of Monrad's redescription of the State Church. The very same institution of the State Church is called the People's Church as a political ploy designed

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Church and the State Church: *JP* 5, 6786 / *Pap* X-6 B 145, p. 213; *Pap* X-6 B 212, p. 335; *JP* 5, 6932 / *Pap* XI-2 A 206; *JP* 4, 4222 / *Pap* XI-2 A 291; *JP* 4, 4503 / *Pap* XI-2 A 373.

to bring Grundtvigians, Monrad's own liberal movement, and the conservatives together, and ultimately the State Church as a institution would remain exactly the same as before. The only result would be that whatever form of criticism left to the people would be ideologically undermined since any criticism would be directed against one's own church, the People's Church. One of Kierkegaard's greatest fears is that Christianity would become merely a cultural phenomenon used as a means to accomplish some other end rather than an expression of the truth, and it may be that the renaming of the State Church as the People's Church is a turn in that direction. Thus, it is not surprising that Kierkegaard identifies both the State Church and the People's Church as a single object of his criticism. This view is a coherent reconstruction of a position that would explain many of Kierkegaard's criticisms of the State Church and his equivocation between the two terms. Nevertheless, there is no direct textual support for this interpretation and Kierkegaard, who regularly describes his own methods of attack, never explicitly articulates this strategy.

Kierkegaard's relationship with Monrad is complicated by their personal relationship, but Kierkegaard's reaction to Mynster's ordination of Monrad as Bishop of Lolland-Falster, his criticism of the Danish constitutional committee, his criticism of the People's Church reveal two facets of Kierkegaard's political thought. First, it shows that Kierkegaard separates the religious from the political. The means of operation in the political arena (e.g., voting, ballots, etc.) are inappropriate for determining religious truth, and any attempt to popularize Christianity through political means falsifies the sanctity of that religious truth. Kierkegaard never venerates democratic procedure, even though he does hope that some good will come of it. Second, Kierkegaard's critique of political

cooption is applicable to both Mynster's ordination of Monrad and Monrad's characterization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as the People's Church. On the one hand, Kierkegaard thinks Mynster's ordination of Monrad exemplifies Mynster's commitment to his own religious authority and power rather than to God alone. On the other hand, clothing the State Church in a new name, the People's Church, ideologically insulates the religious establishment from criticism, and thereby coopts for itself critiques of the religious establishment. Since it is no longer the King's Church, the State Church, or Mynster's Church, but the Church of the people, any criticism of the Church is effectively undermined since it would also constitute a criticism of oneself.

Since Kierkegaard's critique of the numerical – which he sees as endemic to the democracy itself – and his more specific criticism of Monrad's union of Christianity and politics are directed at both the establishment and the reformers, it is evident that this criticism should not be understood as a corrective. The three features of the Kierkegaardian corrective are that it must be one-sided, aimed at reforming the whole, and it cannot become normative. If any of these three features are absent in a particularly argument, then Kierkegaard is not presenting the argument as a corrective. Kierkegaard's polemics against democratic procedure may exhibit the first two characteristics, but they are presented normatively insofar as they give reasons to reject voting on any matters beyond trivial issues like sanitation and public lighting.

In cases where Kierkegaard wants to preclude others from adopting his view, he will aggressively and often preemptively reject any attempt to coopt his views for ulterior motives. This approach is most evident when Kierkegaard rebuffs Rudelbach for appropriating his work to advance the political cause of civil marriage and religious

freedom, but there is nothing even remotely similar regarding Kierkegaard's polemics against voting and democracy. Kierkegaard never criticizes the political, cultural or religious aristocracy for fighting democratic change. On the contrary, he is often critical of "the old vanguard" for capitulating to the demands of the reformers as Mynster did toward Monrad.

Although Kierkegaard's belligerent tone and his disdain for the democratic reformers and their ideas may be one-sided and aimed at reform, he never attacks the cultural and political aristocracy for fighting against democratic developments. As such, it appears as if Kierkegaard's contempt for democracy is a genuine expression of his views, and it is offered as a reason for rejecting democratic procedure. Furthermore, Kierkegaard never explicitly mentions, as he does regarding other issues, that he is employing the method of the corrective in his polemics against voting and democracy. For these reasons, Kierkegaard's anti-democratic views ought not be understood ironically or as a corrective

The three features of the corrective serve as criteria for evaluating whether Kierkegaard's arguments are intended to be correctives. By establishing a basis for judging whether an argument is presented as a corrective, one is able to preclude hermeneutical cherry picking where problematic views are merely interpreted as an exaggeration or "corrective." Reading some of Kierkegaard's arguments as correctives does not imply that all of them are presented in this way, and a proper understanding of the concept of corrective show that some of his arguments are not correctives (e.g., his criticisms of democracy, the liberal Democratic movement, and his criticism of Monrad). Furthermore, even if, as this section has shown, Kierkegaard is distrustful of politics and



democratic institutions and procedures, there could still be room for a distinctive social dimension to his thought.

#### **2.4. Kierkegaard, Community, and Corrective**

Many people understand Kierkegaard's criticism of the masses, the crowd and the numerical as a wholesale rejection of sociality as such. I have argued that Kierkegaard's criticism of the numerical, voting and Monrad's political work is tied to an anti-democratic stance, but I maintain in spite of this that Kierkegaard's defense of the single individual and any criticism of sociality or community ought to be understood as a corrective. That is, Kierkegaard eschews politics, particularly democratic procedures, but his views do not preclude a social dimension to his thought. In this section, I will sketch a preparatory defense of the claim that one can understand Kierkegaard's polemics against sociality as a corrective which will only be completed in subsequent chapters.

A social dimension to Kierkegaard's thought is implicit in the concept of the corrective in general and his more specific criticism of mere numerical strength. Kierkegaard's elaborate strategy for administering the corrective shows that he was deeply aware of the contours of his social environment and that his polemics were intended to improve that environment, and he even explicitly describes the role of the corrective in the formation of community in one journal entry.<sup>61</sup> He claims, "To defend

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<sup>61</sup> JP 4, 4161 / Pap X-1 A 369. This passage is rather odd. It is an extended comment on the Biblical claim from Genesis that "woman" creates community. Kierkegaard asserts that all unity requires correctives. The example he gives is that unity cannot be forged only among a single type of people (children, grandparents, men, women, etc.), and his comment implies that differences among members are essential for unity. His position implies that heterogeneity rather than homogeneity is the basis of community. Hegel's account of the family in *Philosophy of Right* is similar to Kierkegaard's account. For Hegel, the subjective origin of marriage may lie in the "*particular inclinations* of the two persons who enter into the relationships... but its objective origin is the free consent of the persons concerned, and in particular their consent to constitute a single person and to give up their natural and *individual personalities* within this union." §162. Hegel's view is that there must be particularity as well as individuality in order to forge unity and arrive at universality.

the established order with my polemics on the numerical, the crowd, the inorganic, the mass, the evil in society: that was my task.”<sup>62</sup> He conceives of his work as a necessary therapeutic device that (1) always takes place from within the establishment and (2) temporarily weakens the establishment in order to make it stronger. He writes, “Either the established order-or the single individual, unconditionally the single individual, but nothing in between for that is half-and-half, parties, sects, etc. That is how I support the established order, for there is scarcely one in any generation who manages to be unconditionally the single individual, the all want to dabble around in parties, etc..”<sup>63</sup> Kierkegaard directs his attack at the numerical, the crowd; but his criticism is from the inside. His goal is to reform the establishment by unequivocally criticizing the power it gives to statistics and popular appeal. His criticisms are one-sided against the establishment. That is, he continues to offer his polemics again and again, and he never retracts them.

But he is also critical of those who intend to enlist Kierkegaard’s work for their own purposes. He is critical of the liberals who sought to appropriate his ideas for their political agenda. “What I wrote about ‘the crowd’ was understood at the time by the liberals, by the opposition...now they presumably understand it no more. That means they never have had any essentially ethical outlook. They want to have the crowd on their side – otherwise they are angry with it. But it is not understood that the crowd itself is the evil.”<sup>64</sup> In one case in particular, he publicly repudiated A.G. Rudelbach, a prominent supporter of pietistic religious awakening movements in Denmark, for

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<sup>62</sup> *SKS* 24, NB 24:113.

<sup>63</sup> *JP* 6, 6705 / *SKS* 24, NB 22:33.

<sup>64</sup> *JP* 3, 2936 / *SKS* 24, NB25:54.

claiming that Kierkegaard's criticism of "habitual Christianity" supported the political cause of religious freedom and allowing for civil marriage.<sup>65</sup>

He was also critical of solidifying Denmark and Christianity around nationalist ideas. "The Grundtvigian nonsense about nationality is also a retrogression to paganism. It is unbelievable what foolishness delirious Grundtvigian candidates are able to serve up... [saying] that no one can be a true Christian except through nationality. And Christianity specifically wanted to do away with paganism's deification of nationalities!"<sup>66</sup> Kierkegaard's criticism of the liberal and Grundtvigian reformers shows that he does not regard his own position as normative. It is not designed to promote or aid one of the opposition movements. As a result, Kierkegaard criticizes those people and groups who might use his ideas to promote external political changes to the Church or government. This strategy reveals that he does not want his arguments and positions to become universally adopted. Kierkegaard wants to preclude his defense of the single individual from becoming "normative" so that it will not become confusing to subsequent generations who lack the object of correction.

Kierkegaard's conception of the relationship between the individual and the community is already implicit within the concept of the corrective. A person's community and culture functions most effectively when the individuals within the community are sufficiently developed intellectually, ethically and spiritually. The possibility of offering a corrective presupposes this existence of such an individual. Kierkegaard explains:

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<sup>65</sup> *C* 51-59 / *SV* 8, 436-444.

<sup>66</sup> *JP* 4, 4121 / *SKS* 20, 193, NB2:131. I will return to Kierkegaard's critique of nationalism briefly in Chapter 3.

In the "public" and the like the single individual is nothing; there is no individual; the numerical is the constituting form and the law for the coming into existence [Tilblivelse] of a *generatio aequivoca*; detached from the "public" the single individual is nothing, and in the public he is, more basically understood, really nothing at all. In community [Menighed] the single individual [den Enkelte] is; the single individual is dialectically decisive as the presupposition for forming community, and in community the single individual is qualitatively something essential and can at any moment become higher than "community," specifically, as soon as "the others" fall away from the idea. The cohesiveness of community comes from each one's being a single individual, and then the idea; the connectedness of a public or rather its disconnectedness consists of the numerical character of everything. Every single individual in community guarantees the community; the public is a chimera. In community the single individual is a microcosm who qualitatively reproduces the cosmos; here, in a good sense, it holds true that *unum noris, omnes*. In a public there is no single individual and the whole is nothing; here it is impossible to say *unum noris, omnes*, for here there is no one. "Community" is certainly more than a sum, but yet it is truly a sum of ones; the public is nonsense--a sum of negative ones, of ones who are not ones, who become ones through the sum instead of the sum becoming a sum of the ones.<sup>67</sup>

Human relationships are not grounded on the numerical or the public, but Kierkegaard distinguishes between the concept of the public and the concept of community. The single individual is a fundamental component of community who stands against mere numerical strength and pseudo-unity. Kierkegaard also implies in this passage that the strength of the communal bond is found in the ethical commitment that individual's make to one another rather than by being jointly directed toward a common end (though in particular cases these need not be antithetical to one another).

These comments have not established that there is in fact a social dimension to Kierkegaard's thought. I have merely shown how Kierkegaard's arguments, understood properly, do not preclude the possibility. In the next chapter, I will examine three Kierkegaardian views on the subjective self, the one-to-one God relation, and the problem with the Danish Church in order to show that those three views do not preclude a

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<sup>67</sup> JP 3, 2952 / SKS 23, 40 NB15:60, NB15:60.a.

social dimension to Kierkegaard's thought. Chapters two and three jointly serve to defend my negative thesis that Kierkegaard's does not reject sociality as such. This negative thesis prepares the way for chapters four and five where I show that there is, in fact, a social dimension to Kierkegaard's thought that can be conceptualized in philosophically interesting ways.

### **Chapter Three: Inwardness, The One-to-One God-Relation, and The Attack on the Church**

Three themes in Kierkegaard's thought – the emphasis on subjectivity or inwardness, his description of the unique one-to-one God-relation, and his final attack on Christendom at the end of his life – jointly present the strongest case against there being a social dimension to Kierkegaard's thought. The attack on Christendom is an attack on the dominant cultural and social institution in 19<sup>th</sup> century Denmark, and Kierkegaard's concern with inward deepening is often set in opposition to any external social changes. Inwardness, in fact, is most fully realized in the individual whose faith is in opposition to the social and ethical order. The figure of Abraham is the father of faith, and his sacrifice of Isaac sets Abraham against the ethical order, his community, and it even requires that he hide his act from his spouse. Although I agree that these themes are dominant within Kierkegaard's thought, and although I maintain that they have a deep insight into the nature of selfhood, I will argue in this chapter that none of these three views preclude a social dimension to Kierkegaard's thought. My claim in this chapter is not that there is a social dimension to Kierkegaard's thought. Rather it is only that such a view is not ruled out by his view of the single individual, the one-to-one God-relation, or his final attack on the Church.

In order to show this, I will first examine how Kierkegaard characterizes the development of the single individual (the single self) as a process of inward or subjective deepening *via* the one-to-one God relation, represented in *Fear and Trembling* by Abraham's relation to God. I maintain that such a relation does not preclude meaningful human relationships. I will also show that Kierkegaard's rejection of the People's Church

of Denmark is not a wholesale rejection of all forms of sociality. The ultimate aim of this chapter is to show how Kierkegaard's views on community and sociality *can be* incorporated into his already well-developed views about Christianity and the single individual. Only in subsequent chapters will I show that Kierkegaard, in fact, incorporates his earlier characterization of the single individual into his "social authorship" in 1846-1847.

### ***3.1. The Single Individual and the One-to-One God-relation in Fear and Trembling***

One of the most difficult challenges for articulating a Kierkegaardian understanding of sociality is the priority he places on the God-relation. The usual portrayal of *Fear and Trembling* is that it expresses how God's commands take priority over moral obligations such as a person's familial duties or societal norms.<sup>1</sup> Under such a reading, *Fear and Trembling* illustrates the primacy of the God-relation, and the character of Abraham is portrayed as being an outsider to his society, ethics and his family. This understanding of the text and the God-relation is, at the very least, partly responsible for why the life of faith appears to be a solitary life. Because of the prevalence of this understanding of the text, I will begin Section 3.2 by describing the structure and arguments presented in *Fear and Trembling*. Although I reject the common reading of the work, there are still a number of arguments and passages that, at the very least, seem to preclude a social life for those who follow Abraham as the father of faith. These passages will show the exegetical motivation for understanding the Kierkegaardian single individual in opposition to other people. In response to these challenges, I will describe three strategies for responding to this challenge: (1) the incognito response, (2) the

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<sup>1</sup> One example of this reading of *Fear and Trembling* can be found in Merold Westphal's review of Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* in *The Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter*, v. 48, September 2004.

pseudonym response, and (3) the absolute relation response. Each of these strategies considered individually have significant problems, but when evaluated collectively they show that the one-to-one God-relation<sup>2</sup> presented in *Fear and Trembling* does not preclude a social dimension for the one who takes Abraham's faith seriously. The ultimate aim of this section is to illustrate how Kierkegaard's social thought coheres with his already well-developed views on faith.

### 3.1.A. *The Structure and Arguments in Fear and Trembling*

*Fear and Trembling* is best understood as an attempt to express the character and life of the person of faith. Rather than presenting a comprehensive account of the nature and character of faith, Silentio studies an individual, Abraham – an exemplar of faith.<sup>3</sup>

The work starts with an examination of the individual rather than a particular concept.

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<sup>2</sup> So far as I am aware, Kierkegaard never uses this language himself, though it is at least an appropriation characterization of the God-relation in works prior to 1847. Furthermore, Kierkegaard's characterization of the God-relation seems to suggest that he thinks of it as the most significant relationship a human being has such that the individual who relates to God only secondarily relates to others. The following passages are representative examples of Kierkegaard's characterization of the God-relation: "Only the God-relationship gives significance" (*JP* 2, 1365 / *Pap* VII-1 A 670); "What I find hard to understand according to the orthodox Christian view is that in the single individual's God-relationship there comes to be any comparison with others..." (*JP* 2, 1350 / *SKS* 18, JJ:434); "This is the way I think of it. When a man (the single individual) is related to God, he must readily grasp that God has the absolute right, the unlimited absolute right, to require everything of him, and yet on the other hand, that the God-relationship itself is absolute blessedness, is the absolutely unlimited depth of happiness. But if this is the relationship, then consideration of and comparison with any other man are forgotten." (*JP* 2, 1350 / *SKS* 20, NB138); "Right at this point the real meaning of religious sociality is to be found--that is, when the ideality of the God-relationship has become too strong for an individual (since he cannot, after all, demand direct revelation from God, and his reflection traps him), he must now have another person to discuss it with." (*JP* 2, 1377 / *SKS* 21, NB7:58); "In the God-relationship there are the orders given to a man (and consequently to every man): 'Do not be concerned about the others, not at all; you have only to do my will scrupulously or as fully as you are able.'..." (*JP* 2, 1382 / *SKS* 21, NB9:20) .

<sup>3</sup> Johannes de Silentio is the pseudonymous author of *Fear and Trembling*. Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms is a significant issue in Kierkegaard scholarship, but the issue is not especially significant for my project. It is customary to respect Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms and to refer to the author of each pseudonymous work rather than to the pseudonym's author – Kierkegaard. This approach is especially important in many passages since it is clear that Kierkegaard does not share all the views of his pseudonyms, and I will honor it. Nevertheless, there is good reason to think that the conception of the one-to-one God relation presented in *Fear and Trembling* is not unique to Silentio or absent in Kierkegaard's thought. As such, I will, on occasion, refer to Kierkegaard's view of faith and I mean it to encompass some of the view attributed to Silentio as well as other pseudonymous and non-pseudonymous writings. This issue will be treated in more detail in §3.2.C.



The discussion of Abraham is situated in the context of how Kierkegaard's contemporaries discussed the notion of faith in two respects. First, Silentio references Martensen who is aware of the trends in modern philosophy and he "goes further" in doubt than his predecessors.<sup>4</sup> The operative notion of faith here is understood both as mere belief and as the Christian faith. People are born with faith, that is, they are both born as Christians and they treat faith as something that is clarified and examined so that it can become knowledge. Hegel characterizes faith in a similar fashion saying, "[T]he relation of the individual to this object [truth in religion] is an obligation based on authority, and the *witness* of his *own* spirit and heart, as that in which the moment of freedom is contained, is *faith* and *feeling* [*Empfindung*]."<sup>5</sup> Faith is a subjective, inward relation to truth, but when it is expressed externally in Church doctrine and social mores, it becomes the object of rational, public scrutiny so that it can become knowledge.

Silentio contrasts this characterization of faith as something to be overcome on the path to knowledge with the more thoroughgoing doubt and faith of the Ancients that can only be achieved over the course of a lifetime. Silentio portrays Descartes' comments about faith as a more contemporary instance of the doubt and faith of the Ancients.<sup>6</sup> He refers to Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy* where he accepts faith and revelation as authoritative, but he also claims in his *Discourse on Method*, "My design is not here to teach the Method which everyone should follow in order to promote the good conduct of

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<sup>4</sup> FT 5 / SKS 4, 100. There are a number of references to "going beyond" faith, and this phrase was commonly used by Martensen to describe his work in going beyond Hegel. Jon Stewart discusses Kierkegaard's references to Martensen and to "going further" in *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, p. 308.

<sup>5</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) §270, p 299. Emphasis in original.

<sup>6</sup> FT 5-6 / SKS 4, 101-102.

his Reason, but only to show in what manner I have endeavored to conduct my own...”<sup>7</sup>

The task of faith for Silentio is one approached as an individual – it is not for everyone, and it is certainly not the state where everyone begins. He wants to distinguish this concept of faith from the one articulated from the standpoint of “the system.” It is this model of faith exemplified in Abraham that Silentio finds puzzling rather than the Hegelian/Martensen conception of faith.

In order to more fully express what he finds particularly difficult about understanding Abraham, Silentio describes four alternative versions of the Abraham story that – in contrast to the actual story – can be understood. In the first, Abraham in a loving and fatherly way tells Isaac that he has received a command from God to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. Isaac is, like Silentio, unable to understand how his loving father could offer him as a sacrifice to their loving God. Because Isaac fails to understand, Abraham changes his demeanor, feigns wildness and proclaims himself a madman in order to protect Isaac’s faith.<sup>8</sup> A person can understand why Abraham acts as he does in this account, but he is not the father of faith.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, v. I-II, tr. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931), v. I, pp. 231, 253; *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, v. I, p. 83. A more likely explanation than Silentio’s is that Descartes did not want to be or have his works censored. As such, he included conciliatory remarks about Christianity and faith. Perhaps the best evidence for this is his claim in Meditation 4 that it is morally wrong, “a sin,” for one to extend the will beyond the intellect. Insofar as faith, at least regarding some matters, involves believing that which the intellect does not currently comprehend or understand, then Descartes denies room for faith in Meditation 4.

<sup>8</sup> *FT* 10-11 / *SKS* 4, 107-108.

<sup>9</sup> This version of the story is perhaps the clearest reason why Abraham’s faith cannot simply be prioritizing God’s command over the moral, social, and familial obligations. In this version, Abraham is not acting in faith, but he prioritizes the command of God above all. In fact, each of the four alternative account of Abraham present an Abraham who is willing to submit to what he takes to be the will and command of God. As such, the central character of faith must be located in some other avenue. Lippitt makes a similar point when he claims that the two common features to the four alternative account is that (1) each Abraham goes to Moriah willing to sacrifice his son in accordance with God’s command and (2) each Abraham fails to live up to the exemplar of faith – the Abraham of the Biblical narrative. John Lippitt, *Kierkegaard and Fear and Trembling* (New York: Routledge, 2003) pp. 28-29.

In the second version of the story, Abraham was silent, made the journey to Moriah, and was about to sacrifice Isaac. He then spots a ram and sacrifices it instead; Abraham from that point on could not forget that God had ordered him to sacrifice his son, and there was no joy for him in having Isaac even though Isaac “thrived as before.”<sup>10</sup> This Abraham is not the father of faith because he becomes disillusioned with God – the God who could command him to sacrifice his son. He did not believe that God would fulfill his promises to him to make him a father of many nations through his son Isaac. That is, he thought Isaac would ultimately be lost. Lippitt suggests that what Abraham lost in this situation was his capacity to understand the loss and turmoil of others. Because of his own inner turmoil, his own disillusionment with his God, he is unable to interact with Isaac. He sees nothing but “Isaac thriving.” In this version of the story, Abraham has his son, but he has lost his compassion for others and the joy of living.<sup>11</sup>

The third version of the story is the antipode to the second. Just as before, Abraham takes Isaac to Moriah but on the way, he repents of his willingness to sacrifice his son and he repents of denying his fatherly duty; but afterwards, Abraham cannot reconcile God’s clear, unmistakable and justified command to offer up his son with his later understanding of it as a sin. Abraham is not the father of faith in this example because he is unable to retain Isaac and his relationship to God.<sup>12</sup> Rather than losing his compassion for his son as in the second story, Abraham’s relation to God suffers in this

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<sup>10</sup> *FT 12 / SKS 4*, 109. The only major differences between this narrative and its Biblical counterpart is that the Angel of the Lord does not tell Abraham to stop. Rather, Abraham simply “saw the ram that God had selected.” Furthermore, it is not clear from the story how or if Abraham knew that God had selected this ram. Though neither of these issues are not highlighted by Silentio. Based on Silentio’s later account, however, I suspect that this Abraham is not the father of faith because he did not always expect Isaac back – which is why he cannot receive him back joyfully.

<sup>11</sup> Lippitt, *Kierkegaard and Fear and Trembling*, p. 25.

<sup>12</sup> *FT 13 / SKS 4*, 110.

one. In both stories, however, the initial problem in the father-son relation or the God-relation respectively undermines the other relation.

In the fourth version of the story, Abraham proceeds to Moriah, but he is internally torn about it (represented in the narrative by his left hand being clenched in despair). Abraham, just as in the Biblical narrative, is just about to kill Isaac when he is stopped. Abraham passed God's test for him by being willing to offer Isaac, but Isaac always remembers that his father despaired. In this example, Abraham maintains his God-relation and he apparently even maintains his relationship with Isaac. In reality however, Isaac lost his faith because he saw that Abraham was not able to live with the conflicting demands put upon him.<sup>13</sup>

In each of the four narratives, there are three common elements. Lippitt mentions the first two: (1) Abraham in all four accounts is willing to sacrifice Isaac and he also ultimately acts according to what he perceives to be God's will. (2) Abraham in these four stories fails to live up to the exemplar of faith – the Abraham of the Biblical narrative. Silentio is able to understand how each of these alternate Abrahams deals with the dilemma insofar as he is able to put himself in their position and comprehend why each of them acted as they did. He is not able to do that for the real Abraham – he is unable to understand him. The upshot for Lippitt is that a “simple willingness to obey God's command is no guarantee of what Johannes [de Silentio] means by ‘faith.’”<sup>14</sup> The most important point, however, and the reason why each of these Abrahams fail to live up to the exemplar is that they are not able to maintain the relation to God and the relation to the world represented in Isaac when faced with Moriah. Each figure either

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<sup>13</sup> *FT* 14 / *SKS* 4, 111.

<sup>14</sup> Lippitt, *Kierkegaard and Fear and Trembling*, pp. 28-29.

gives up the finite for the sake of God or he gives up his relation to God for the sake of the finite ultimately resulting in the loss of both. Abraham is the “father of faith” not because he gave “up [his] desire...” (i.e. Isaac) but because “... [he held] fast to it after having given it up; it is great to lay hold of the eternal, but it is greater to hold fast to the temporal after having given it up.”<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, Abraham as the father of faith never questions whether God has, in fact, called him to sacrifice his son and he is willing to do so. On the other hand, Abraham loved Isaac and believed that he was the promised child who would make Abraham a father of many nations in accordance with God’s promise. Abraham renounces his desire in that he is willing to sacrifice his son, but he has faith that God will fulfill his promise to him. It is also important to note that his faith is not an otherworldly faith that is only completed in eternity. Rather, the content of his faith was that “he would grow old in this country, be honored among the people, blessed by posterity, and unforgettable in Isaac, [who is] the most precious thing in his life, whom he embraced with a love that is inadequately described by saying he faithfully fulfilled the father’s duty to love the son...”<sup>16</sup> Abraham does not reject his fatherly duty or his moral obligation for the sake of some otherworldly reunion with Isaac or for the sake of being vindicated in the afterlife. He holds fast to the finite, the temporal, and his faith is for this life including the life of his son and the esteem of the world. Some might suggest that Abraham’s faith is great because he was “willing to offer his best,” but Silentio claims that this “omits... the anxiety, because to [a possession] I have no ethical obligations but to the son the father has the highest and holiest [obligation].”<sup>17</sup> The

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<sup>15</sup> *FT 18 / SKS 4, 114.*

<sup>16</sup> *FT 20 / SKS 4, 116-117.*

<sup>17</sup> *FT 28 / SKS 4, 124.*

difference between Abraham and the four pseudo-Abrahams is rightly understood as a precursor to the distinction between the knight of faith and the knight of infinite resignation .

### *3.1.A.1. Distinguishing the Two Knights*

Silentio describes the difference between the two knights by means of a story about a young lad and a princess. The boy's love for the princess was "the entire substance of his life," but his love could not be realized in actuality. He had neither a relation to the princess nor the means for acquiring a relationship with her. "The slaves of the finite, the frogs in the swamp of life" tell the boy that such love is folly and that he should be satisfied to marry a more ordinary girl – a more equitable arrangement.<sup>18</sup> Although the young boy knows that it is highly unlikely, and perhaps impossible, for him to be in a reciprocal relationship with the princess, he still maintains his care for and attachment to her.

This parable sets the stage for Silentio's description of the knight of infinite resignation who renounces his desire for a finite end for the sake of an infinite end. This act of renunciation presupposes a deep attachment to the finite end rather than a stoical rejection of attachment. "The knight of infinite resignation... does not give up the love, not for all the glories of the world," because for such a person, attachment and care for its object are identity constituting. That is, the young boy "assures himself that it actually is the substance of his life..." and "he does not lack the courage to attempt and to risk everything..." for his love.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the boy "renounces" his attachment. Rather than directing one's care toward a finite object, it is aimed at an eternal object. The knight

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<sup>18</sup> *FT* 41-42 / *SKS* 4, 136.

<sup>19</sup> *FT* 42 / *SKS* 4, 136-137.

of infinite resignation shapes his desires into one single desire – the desire for the beloved, but it is redirected toward another object. “His love for that princess would become for him the expression of an eternal love, would assume a religious character, would be transfigured into a love of the eternal being, which true enough denied the fulfillment but nevertheless did reconcile him” to a love “that no actuality can take away”; and even when the princess marries, the young lad maintains his attachment to the princess and his resignation of his own desires “for one who has resigned infinitely is sufficient to oneself... What the princess does cannot disturb him; it is only the lower natures who have the law for their actions in someone else, the premises for their actions outside themselves.”<sup>20</sup> The person’s single desire is still for its object, but the person experiences the pain and hardship associated with never acting on that desire. In the end, renouncing one’s cares for any particular, finite object achieves a painful peace secured from the caprice of daily life. As a result, the one who does so leads a “solitary life” since attachment is directed toward the eternal rather than the finite.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, there are three key features of the knight of infinite resignation: (1) the person deeply cares for the particular object of his affection. (2) This care for the other is the constitutive-feature of the person’s identity. That is, if the person did not care for the other in this way, the person would not be in some very important sense the same person. This care is the source of the pain that is inherent in the act of resignation. (3) The person realizes that his most important desire cannot be fulfilled in the here and now, so it is directed toward the eternal, the universal. As a result, the attachment remains but it “is

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<sup>20</sup> *FT 43 / SKS 4*, 138-139.

<sup>21</sup> *FT 42 / SKS 4*, 137.

*transformed* – infinitised; eternalised, transcendentalised.”<sup>22</sup> One’s care remains, but one has given up the former object of one’s care. In fact, Silentio mentions in one illuminating passage that it would be embarrassing and “awkward” if the one who infinitely resigned Isaac received him back – even though this was what was so easy for Abraham.<sup>23</sup>

The knight of faith takes up where the knight of infinite resignation leaves off. Silentio explains, “He does exactly the same as the other knight did: he infinitely renounces the love that is the substance of his life, he is reconciled in pain. But then the marvel happens; he makes one more movement even more wonderful than all the others, for he says: Nevertheless I have faith that I will get her – that is, by virtue of the absurd...”<sup>24</sup> Faith is described as a double movement: “Infinite resignation is the last stage before faith, so that anyone who has not made this movement does not have faith...”<sup>25</sup> but the second movement is that of faith. Faith in this sense takes place after resignation but it continues to trust and believe that one’s greatest hopes and desires will be fulfilled in this world. The movement of faith is when Abraham believes that Isaac will be returned to him even when he is willing to kill Isaac himself. The return in faith does not mean that everything is just as before – though it may appear to be so from an external perspective.

The two distinguishing features of the knight of faith are (1) that she believes on the strength of the absurd and (2) that she has made the movement of infinite regression

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<sup>22</sup> Lippitt, *Kierkegaard and Fear and Trembling*, p. 48.

<sup>23</sup> *FT 35 / SKS 4*, 130. This issue is also the problem with the second pseudo-Abraham.

<sup>24</sup> *FT 46 / SKS 4*, 141.

<sup>25</sup> *FT 46 / SKS 4*, 140.



and then a subsequent movement of faith. Though these two claims are crucial for understanding Silentio's characterization of faith in *Fear and Trembling*, both are difficult to explain. Nevertheless, as I have indicated above, if one can make sense of these two claims and still maintain that the person of faith retains the world, if Abraham has Isaac returned to him; then there is a presumptive reason for thinking that regarding faith understood in this sense, one is firmly connected to one's family and social community. It is the movement of infinite regression that separates the single individual from other people and the world, but this movement is negated and transcended in the movement of faith.

In fact, Kierkegaard's most lengthy treatment of the knight of faith as a character describes how the knight is incognito. Consider the following three descriptions of what John Lippitt calls the "mundane knight of faith"<sup>26</sup>:

I may very well imagine him [the knight of faith]. Here he is. The acquaintance is made, I am introduced to him. The instant I first lay eyes on him, I set him apart at once; I jump back, clap my hands, and say half aloud, "Good Lord, is this the man, is this really the one – he looks just like a tax collector!" But this is indeed the one. I move a little closer to him, watch his slightest movement to see if it reveals a bit of heterogeneous optical telegraphy from the finite, a glance, a facial expression, a gesture, a sadness, a smile that would betray the infinite in its heterogeneity with the finite. No! I examine his figure from top to toe to see if there may not be a crack through which the infinite would peek. No! He is solid all the way through. His stance? It is vigorous, belongs entirely to finitude... He belongs entirely to the world; no bourgeois philistine could belong to it more. Nothing is detectable of that distant and aristocratic nature by which the knight of the infinite is recognized. He finds pleasure in everything, takes part in everything and every time one sees him participating in something particular, he does it with an assiduousness that marks the worldly man who is attached to such things. He attends to his job. To see him makes one think of him as a pen-pusher who has lost his soul to Italian bookkeeping, so punctilious is he. Sunday is for him a holiday. He goes to church. No heavenly gaze or any sign of

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<sup>26</sup> Lippitt, *Kierkegaard and Fear and Trembling*, p. 42.

the incommensurable betrays him; if one did not know him, it would be impossible to distinguish him from the rest of the crowd... He finds pleasure in this way...

On the way [home], he thinks that his wife surely will have a special hot meal for him when he comes home – for example, roast lamb's head with vegetables... It so happens that he does not have four shillings to his name, and yet he firmly believes that his wife has this delectable meal waiting for him. If she has, to see him eat would be the envy of the elite and an inspiration to the common man... [If his] wife does not have it – curiously enough, he is just the same.

He drains the deep sadness of life in infinite resignation, he knows the blessedness of infinity, he has felt the pain of renouncing everything, the most precious thing in the world, and yet the finite tastes just as good to him as to one who never knew anything higher, because his remaining in finite would have no trace of a timorous, anxious routine, and yet he has this security that makes him delight in it as if finitude were the surest thing of all... He resigned everything infinitely, and then he grasped everything again by virtue of the absurd.<sup>27</sup>

This knight of faith exhibits the relationship between resignation and faith. Resignation is recognized by what it gives up for the sake of some higher purpose. In faith, however, that which is given up is returned. Thus, the knight of faith appears to be just like everyone else's. His faith, as opposed to the life of resignation, is hidden. He appears just as a tax collector, a bourgeois philistine. He takes his family and social obligations seriously and he discharges them appropriately. He enjoys life to its fullest – even when his faith, say his hope for roast lamb's head, turns out to be disappointed. Despite appearances, this man has inwardly renounced that which is most important to him – his attachment to his family, his job, his community, etc.; but he grasps it again “by virtue of the absurd.” It is clear according to Silentio that the mundane knight of faith, if not Abraham as well, is deeply attached to one's ethical obligations, family and social life. But it is not clear why this is so, nor is it obvious that this attachment is maintained

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<sup>27</sup> *FT* 38-40 / *SKS* 4, 133-135.

throughout the double movement. As a result, it is not clear what getting it back “by virtue of the absurd” means, and it is not clear what exactly the double movement is.

### 3.1.A.2. *The Absurd and the Double Movement*

Silentio characterizes his own presentation of faith as the perspective of an outsider to faith. “By no means do I [Silentio] have faith.”<sup>28</sup> He claims that he is unable to make the movement of faith, though he does not disparage it.<sup>29</sup> Thus, it may very well be the case that Silentio’s characterization of faith as “absurd” is a result of his status as an outsider to faith. It is not clear that the same could be said from Abraham’s point of view (or from Kierkegaard’s). A number of scholars have made this point<sup>30</sup>, but it is also well supported in Kierkegaard’s journal entries. In the journals, Kierkegaard regularly distinguishes between the outsider’s perspective presented in the pseudonymous authorship including *Fear and Trembling* and the perspective from the standpoint of faith. He writes:

When the believer has faith, the absurd is not the absurd – faith transforms it, but in every weak moment it is again more or less absurd to him. The passion of faith is the only thing which masters the absurd – if not, then faith is not faith in the strictest sense, but a kind of knowledge. The absurd terminates negatively before the sphere of faith, which is a sphere by itself. To a third person the believer relates himself by virtue of the absurd; so must a third person judge, for a third person does not have the passion of faith.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *FT* 32 / *SKS* 4, 128.

<sup>29</sup> *FT* 51 / *SKS* 4, 145.

<sup>30</sup> See C. Stephen Evans, “Faith as the *Telos* of Morality: A Reading of *Fear and Trembling*,” *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Fear and Trembling and Repetition*, ed. Robert Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), p. 14. Evans describes Silentio’s position as the view of an outsider to faith though that does not entail that Silentio portrays faith inaccurately from that perspective. That is, Silentio’s criticism of simple or mere belief, the immediate as an improper characterization of Abrahamic faith is accurate. See also: Edward F. Mooney, *Knights of Faith and Resignation* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1991), p. 55; and Lippitt, *Kierkegaard and Fear and Trembling*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>31</sup> *JP* 1, 10 / *Pap* X-6 B 79.

This passage explicitly claims that the absurd is recognized as the absurd only from a third-person standpoint, and it is not absurd from the standpoint of faith. Additionally, the term “the absurd” is further described in Kierkegaard’s journals. The concept applies neither to direct contradictions nor to mere nonsense. On the contrary, it is described as that which “... is composed in such a way that reason has no power at all to dissolve it in nonsense and prove that it is nonsense; no, it is a symbol, a riddle, a compounded riddle about which reason must say: I cannot solve it, it cannot be understood, but it does not follow thereby that it is nonsense.”<sup>32</sup>

Despite these clues from the journals, making sense of how Abraham’s faith advances “on the strength of the absurd” and how it is a “double movement” is a notoriously slippery concept. In particular, it is difficult to make sense of two claims expressed throughout *Fear and Trembling*. On the one hand, Abraham knew that he had to sacrifice Isaac. According to the first movement, which is a necessary condition of faith, he “gives up Isaac.”<sup>33</sup> That is, Abraham “does indeed know that God demands Isaac as a sacrifice, and he knows that he himself in this very moment is willing to sacrifice him.”<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, he believed that Isaac would still live even if he acted on God’s command. He believed that God would honor his promise to make him a father of many nations through Isaac.<sup>35</sup>

These two beliefs are incommensurable because it is Abraham who has been given the task of taking Isaac’s life; he has already made his decision concerning whether he

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<sup>32</sup> *JP* 1, 7 / *SKS* 23, NB 15:25.

<sup>33</sup> *FT* 115 / *SKS* 4, 203.

<sup>34</sup> *FT* 119 / *SKS* 4, 206.

<sup>35</sup> *FT* 20 / *SKS* 4, 116.

will perform the action in accordance with his understanding of God's command. "But given the task as assigned to Abraham, he himself has to act; consequently, he has to know in the crucial moment what he himself will do, and consequently, he has to know that Isaac is going to be sacrificed."<sup>36</sup> If Abraham was not charged with the task of taking his own son's life – if God had told Abraham that God would take Isaac's life from him – then Silentio could understand how Abraham could believe that God had made his intention known that he would take Isaac's life, but Abraham could still trust and hope that God would relent. But since Abraham is the agent and since he acts in accord with his understanding of God's command even as he is about to plunge the knife into Isaac, one is unable to understand how it is that Abraham believed that God would relent.

It is simply not clear how we can understand Abraham's actions on Moriah if he genuinely believed that Isaac would not be taken from him even if he acted on God's command. Silentio comes closest to an explanation when he posits two ways in which Abraham could still believe in God's promise. In the first, he says, "He had faith by virtue of the absurd, for human calculation was out of the question, and it certainly was absurd that God, who required it of him should in the next moment rescind the requirement. He climbed the mountain, and even in the moment when the knife gleamed he had faith – that God would not require Isaac."<sup>37</sup> Thus, the incommensurability between Abraham's action and his belief is operative even as 'the knife gleamed' just before he was to kill Isaac. In the second, following the suggestion of the author of the book of Hebrews, he writes that if Isaac had been sacrificed, then Abraham believed that

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<sup>36</sup> *FT* 119 / *SKS* 4, 206.

<sup>37</sup> *FT* 35-36 / *SKS* 4, 131.

“God could give him a new Isaac, could restore to life the one sacrificed.”<sup>38</sup> In the first account, Abraham cannot simultaneously believe that God will require him to sacrifice Isaac as his course of action suggests and also believe that God will not require him to do so. And although the second account is a common view among theologians primarily because the author of Hebrews (11:19) suggests the interpretation, Silentio only presents it flippantly with no explanation.

Given the multiple ways that Abraham seems to have understood his own action, it is difficult to address the problem presented above. On the one hand, it is clear that Abraham believes that he has been commanded by God to kill Isaac and he is willing to obey God’s command throughout the ordeal. On the other hand, Abraham believed God’s promise – that is, he thought that Isaac would still live in order to fulfill God’s promises to him *in this world* even if he obeyed God. The two accounts above describe how Abraham might suppose that God could fulfill his promise even if Abraham obeys, but Abraham did not have a definitive view about how God would fulfill his promise. He merely believed *that* God would fulfill his promise, but he did not know *how* that would be accomplished. As such, Abraham’s infinitely resigns himself continually by acting in accord with God’s explicit command, but in reality he believes that Isaac will still fulfill God’s promises to Abraham. Abraham acts in such a way that conflicts both with his commitment to his family as well as his belief that God will fulfill his promise.

There are two things that should be noted here: first, this action is not a case of *akrasia*; that is, it is not a case where a person is unable to direct one’s actions in accord with one’s deepest commitment. Rather, the person expresses the strength of one’s

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<sup>38</sup> FT 36 / SKS 4, 131.

resolve by being able to maintain one's commitment in the face of one's actions. Second, the situation is also not an instance of hypocrisy. If an action is hypocritical but not an instance of *akrasia*, then the action reveals that the person thinks that there is sufficient warrant for overriding his purported beliefs or commitments. The implication is that the person does not genuinely believe what he claims to believe. The way in which Abraham's actions deviate from his commitment to Isaac and his belief that God will fulfil his promise is neither a case of *akrasia* nor a case of hypocrisy.

The struggle for Abraham is to remain in finitude, to embrace the world fully, when he knows full well that his course of action opposes such an embrace. Because of the explicit conflict between one's actions and one's beliefs in this peculiar sense, one is unable to adopt Abraham's perspective. Silentio says, "I am constantly aware of the prodigious paradox that is the content of Abraham's life, I am constantly repelled, and, despite all its passion, my thought cannot penetrate it, cannot get ahead by a hairsbreadth. I stretch every muscle to get a perspective, and at the very same instant I become paralyzed... I *think* myself *into* the hero; I cannot think myself into Abraham..."<sup>39</sup>

### *3.1.B. Challenges From Problemas I, II, and III*

The account in the last section is not intended to be an exhaustive analysis of attempts to understand Abraham's moral psychology. Rather, I merely want to show how a knight of faith – whether the mundane knight of faith or Abraham – can fully embrace the world including one's family and society even when, as in the case of Abraham, one's action are contrary to this way of caring for the world. Although the case is far from unproblematic, Silentio presents the situation as if it is only the knight of infinite

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<sup>39</sup> *FT* 33 / *SKS* 4, 128.

resignation who gives up that which is cared about most deeply, but that Abraham who “had faith for this life” as well as the mundane knight of faith who is indistinguishable from an ordinary citizen embrace the entirety and fullness of the finite world including one’s relationships with others. This initial characterization, however, is problematized in each of the three *Problemas*. Nevertheless, each of the three exhibits the same structure outlined above – that is, the person acts in such a way that conflicts with the person’s deepest commitments and beliefs.

The difficulty is that it is all too easy to take what Silentio considers the easy route: the path of resignation. One can understand and make sense of an Abraham who is willing to sacrifice his family for the sake of God, even if one pities him or thinks him deluded. The challenge is to explain how one can still have “faith for this life”, how can one fully embrace one’s own Isaac, when one’s own action militates against such a commitment. One must continually reject the tendency to *understand* this particular course of action as an act of renunciation. This struggle is apparent in *Problema* I, II, and III, and there are a number of passages that suggest that it is impossible for the knight of faith to embrace the world in this way. In Section 3.1.B, I will examine those passages that appear to preclude a social life for the knight of faith, and in Section 3.1.C, I will argue that there are good reasons for thinking that the presumptive case described above can be maintained in spite of these difficult passages.

The first *Problema* “Is there a Teleological Suspension of the Ethical?” analyzes the issue of faith in terms of the relationship between the single individual and the universal (that is, the ethical which is applicable to all people at all times). Each human person has the ethical task of continually “express[ing] himself in [the universal]...”



annul[ling] his singularity in order to become the universal.”<sup>40</sup> A single individual can assert his singularity against the universal in two ordinary ways: first, the individual who sins implicitly, if not explicitly, places himself above the universal. The individual acts in such a way that the maxim of his will cannot be made into a universal law and he, therefore, places himself above the universal. Second, one may choose to make a decision according to one’s feelings – according to aesthetic categories – rather than according to the universal. In which case, one is privileging the single individual’s unique particularities over the universal. Both of these cases are instances where ethics condemns the single individual, and according to Silentio this is rightfully so.<sup>41</sup>

The case of faith – where the single individual is higher than the universal – is distinct from both of the two instances described above. First, Abraham recognizes the domain and pull of the ethical life, even though he violates it. He understands his actions are being justly condemned from the standpoint of the ethical, and he also has the strength of will and character to fulfill the demands of the ethical though he acts against it. Second, his immediate desire is not to take his son’s life. In fact, if it were his immediate desire and he acted on his desire, it would indicate that Abraham understands neither his fatherly duty to love Isaac nor the domain of the ethical within his own life. Abraham does not make an exception of himself before the moral law; rather his situation “contains... a teleological suspension of the ethical.”<sup>42</sup> That is, “By his act he transgressed the ethical altogether and had a higher *telos* outside it, in relation to which

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<sup>40</sup> *FT 54 / SKS 4*, 148.

<sup>41</sup> *FT 54-5 / SKS 4*, 148-149. In the voice of Silentio, Kierkegaard makes a rare explicit reference to a passage from Hegel where Hegel claims that the person who deviates from the universal expresses “a moral form of evil.” See Hegel, *Elements of The Philosophy of Right*, §131-133§ for an elaboration of this point.

<sup>42</sup> *FT 56 / SKS 4*, 150.

he suspended it.”<sup>43</sup> His situation – the incongruity between, on the one hand, his desires, his recognition of the ethical demand in this particular case, his strength of will for following the demand of the ethical, and on the other hand, his action which violates the ethical – reveals how the domain of the ethical is not the totality to which all of human life is directed.

Nevertheless, there is no justification outside the individual for Abraham’s action: he does not act to save a nation as Agamemnon does, nor does he act to uphold justice when his son has acted against his duty as Brutus did with his two sons, nor is he acting to appease an angry God as Jephthah did.<sup>44</sup> Each of these three figures can cloth themselves in the ethical – their actions are understandable given the social and moral community of which they are a part, but Abraham’s actions do not make sense in this way. In faith, Abraham’s actions are described as being higher than the universal, the state, and society – which all jointly condemn his course of action.

Ordinarily *Problema* II “Is there an Absolute Duty to God?” is understood as a defence of the claim that there is, in fact, an absolute duty to obey God which transcends the demands of the ethical. I have already suggested that there is much more to Silentio’s argument, since none of the other four accounts of Abraham are instances of faith even though each one is willing to obey God. The crucial question in this *Problema* is whether a person’s most deeply held commitments must be expressed externally in action. If they must, then Abraham is lost. There is no way for him to act externally in accord with God’s command to sacrifice his son while simultaneously believing inwardly that he will

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<sup>43</sup> *FT* 59 / *SKS* 4, 152.

<sup>44</sup> *FT* 58-59 / *SKS* 4, 151-152.

not ultimately lose Isaac. Silentio explicitly frames the discussion in these terms in the following passage:

[I]n the ethical view of life, it is the task of the single individual to strip himself of the qualification of interiority and to express this in something external. Every time the individual shrinks from it, every time he withholds himself in or slips down again into the qualifications of feeling, mood, etc. that belong to interiority, he trespasses... The paradox of faith is that there is an interiority that is incommensurable with exteriority, an interiority that is not identical, please note, with the first but is a new interiority.<sup>45</sup>

It follows from this account that faith is not identical to acting on one's feelings or immediate desires. Just as Abraham's faith begins only with an understanding of the ethical, so it also presumes that one has applied reason and understanding to the content of faith. That is, Abraham appears as if he has no understanding of ethics and lives in immediacy, but that is not true. He understands, believes, and desires to uphold the ethical, but he coordinates his action according to his unmediated relation to the absolute. Faith is described as a second immediacy, a new interiority because it is mediated by neither ethics, reason, nor understanding; but the person of faith understands the value and importance of each. Abraham's explicit, external action is to take Isaac's life, but he at the same time loves his son and he believes that God will honor his promise.

Since the inward commitment conflicts with Abraham's course of action, it cannot be expressed externally in his action. There is no way for Abraham to make his course of actions consistent with his beliefs and commitments, and there is likewise no way for him to make others understand why he is acting as he is. As a result, "The one knight of faith cannot help the other at all... partnership in these areas is utterly

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<sup>45</sup> *FT* 69 / *SKS* 4, 161.

unthinkable.”<sup>46</sup> A partnership with another person requires that one’s goals and intentions be commensurable with one’s actions. Furthermore, in certain circumstances if one has Abraham-like faith, one’s commitment to one’s family, friends, etc. may not be able to be externalized in actions. One may, in fact, be required to act in such a way that it appears that one hates one’s own family.<sup>47</sup> The end result, according to Silentio, is that “the knight of faith is always absolute isolation... simply and solely the single individual without any connections and complications.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, not only is the knight of faith outside the framework of the ethical and his social community, but in certain circumstances, he will act as if he has no commitment to that which he values most deeply.

The situation becomes even more dire for the possibility of social relations in *Problema III* as Abraham is fundamentally incapable of communicating with others concerning his ordeal. The question that orients *Problema III* is “Was It Ethically Defensible for Abraham to Conceal His Understanding from Sarah, from Eliezer, and from Isaac?” The problem arises because the universal is publicly available and disclosed to all, whereas the single individual understood as “immediate, sensate, and psychical, is the hidden. Thus, his ethical task is to work himself out of his hiddenness and to become disclosed in the universal.”<sup>49</sup> A necessary condition for one’s actions being moral is that one’s reasons for acting should be universal and publicly accessible. That is, one must explain or be able to explain how it is that one’s action is justified. This basic

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<sup>46</sup> *FT 71 / SKS 4*, 163.

<sup>47</sup> *FT 72 / SKS 4*, 163-164. Silentio quotes Luke 14:26 where Jesus tells his disciples that if anyone comes to him that they must hate their father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sister.

<sup>48</sup> *FT 79 / SKS 4*, 170.

<sup>49</sup> *FT 82 / SKS 4*, 172.

characterization of the difference between hiddenness and silence on the one hand, and discovery, recognition and disclosure on the other frames the quandary in which Abraham finds himself.

Rather than desiring to hide his understanding of the ordeal, Abraham is simply unable to communicate it to others. *Silentio* does not mean that Abraham is unable to tell others about his situation; rather, he is unable to help them understand why it is that he acts as he does given (1) his love of and commitment to Isaac, and (2) his belief that God will keep his promise to make his ancestors as numerous as the stars through the lineage of Isaac. “Abraham *cannot* speak, because he cannot say that which would explain everything (that is, so it is understandable): that it is an ordeal such that, please note, the ethical is the temptation.”<sup>50</sup> This situation is described explicitly in the first pseudo-Abraham story where Abraham tried to explain his situation to Isaac, “[b]ut Isaac did not understand him.”<sup>51</sup> One can imagine how the conversation might go, and *Silentio* tries to do just that: “To the question ‘Why?’ Abraham has no other answer than that it is an ordeal, a temptation...”<sup>52</sup> If Abraham believes that God is going to spare Abraham, then why does Abraham continue to act on God’s command to kill his son? Likewise, if he believes that God will raise Isaac from the dead after Abraham kills him, then in what way has Abraham made the movement of resignation? In either case, the incommensurability between Abraham’s actions and his beliefs result in others being incapable of understanding him.

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<sup>50</sup> *FT* 115 / *SKS* 4, 202. Emphasis in original.

<sup>51</sup> *FT* 10 / *SKS* 4, 107.

<sup>52</sup> *FT* 71 / *SKS* 4, 162.

Because of this fact, Abraham does not speak on the trip to Mount Moriah – to Sarah, Eliezar, or Isaac except for one time – and at that one time, he really “does not say anything.”<sup>53</sup> Isaac asks Abraham: “Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” And Abraham responds: “God will provide himself a lamb for the burnt offering.” This response is understood as an indication, first, that this is Abraham’s only utterance on the trip to Moriah. He has not informed the fellow travelers – Isaac and Eliezar about his ‘ordeal.’ Second, Abraham’s response is given mere moments before he intends to take the life of Isaac. If one is considering the trajectory of Abraham’s actions, then the response to Isaac appears as nothing short of a direct lie. Nevertheless, despite his own actions, Abraham believes that God will fulfill his promises.<sup>54</sup>

Silentio claims that this concealment expresses an absolute relation to the absolute rather than to the ethical.<sup>55</sup> Ordinarily this claim is thought to mean that Abraham’s relationship to God takes precedence over his familial duties to Sarah and Isaac and his duty to his social community. I will return to this issue in the next section, but it is important to note that such an interpretation leaves out crucial elements of Silentio’s argument. First, each of the four alternative accounts of Abraham likewise places the obligation to God over the obligation to ethics and one’s family. Each one is willing to sacrifice Isaac, if God requires it; yet each of these Abrahams lacks faith. Second, Silentio is adamant that the absolute relation to the absolute is not mediated in external practices or institutions. That is, one’s relation to God need not be manifest in a particular course of action and it need not be expressed publicly. A person relates to God through

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<sup>53</sup> *FT 118 / SKS 4, 206.*

<sup>54</sup> *FT 115-116 / SKS 4, 103.*

<sup>55</sup> *FT 113 / SKS 4, 201.*

an inward relation, and a person's ethical actions or participation in social institutions should only be a product of that inwardness.

Each of these claims in *Problema* I, II and III raise the issue of whether the person who has Abraham-like faith is able to fully participate in social relationships of any kind. The preceding description of each of the *Problemas* is not to be understood as an exhaustive analysis of the contents of those chapters. Rather, I only mean to express the difficulties one has in finding room for community and interpersonal relationships for the knight of faith. The possibility is bleak in each of these three respects: (1) Abraham as the single individual is higher than any ethical obligation he has to other people; (2) Abraham acts in such a way that is contrary to having meaningful familial or social relationships; and (3) Abraham is unable to communicate his situation to any other person.

Nevertheless, I will argue that one can be a knight of faith as described in *Fear and Trembling* and also be constituted as a self in one's relationships to others. This claim is rather weak insofar as I am only defending the view that there is no direct contradiction between being a knight of faith and having meaningful relationships with other people. I will make three arguments that jointly support this claim – the incognito response, the pseudonym response, and the absolute relation response.

### *3.1.C. Can the Knight of Faith Maintain Relationships with Others?*

I claimed previously that the initial characterization of the difference between the knight of faith and the knight of infinite resignation portrays the latter knight as the one who is unable to engage in meaningful interpersonal relationships. Perhaps the strongest support for this way of understanding faith and sociality is Silentio's portrayal of the mundane or simple knight of faith as incognito. An individual is "incognito" when "[the

individual] lives in the finite, but he does not have his life in it. His life, like the life of another, has the diverse predicates of a human existence, but he is within them like the person who walks in a stranger's borrowed clothes. He is a stranger in the world of finitude, but he does not define his difference from worldliness by foreign dress... he is incognito, but his incognito consists in looking just like everyone else."<sup>56</sup> The mundane knight appears just like everyone else and is unrecognizable as a knight of faith. There are no external characteristics of renunciation that set her apart from other people. The knight of faith could be any person who appears to be completely caught up in one's social environment, occupation, etc., etc. The incognito knight of faith engages with and fully embraces the members of her social community.

If this type of faith were the only form, then there would be no question about whether the knight of faith can be a full participant in family and community life, but the case of Abraham precludes this possibility. Abraham is a knight of faith who appears from every conceivable point of view to be the knight of infinite resignation as he is deliberately planning to kill his son, but he believes somehow that God will fulfil his promise and thus, in the end Isaac will not be lost. The problem of community arises for Abraham in a way that it does not arise for the mundane knight. The incognito response fails to show how *every* knight of faith can embrace human relationships and the finite world.

The second strategy for answering the objection is the pseudonym response. Kierkegaard's wrote *Fear and Trembling* using a pseudonym – Johannes de Silentio. Silentio writes explicitly from the perspective of an outsider to Christianity. As such, one

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<sup>56</sup> CUP 410 / SKS 7. 373.



must ask to what extent we should take Silentio's characterization of faith and Abraham as indicative of Kierkegaard's (or the character of Abraham's) views. If Kierkegaard's views were radically different from Silentio's, then the characterization of Abraham's isolation may be overstated or completely absent for Kierkegaard.

As I mentioned above in section 3.1.A.2, Silentio's description of faith as the absurd is from the standpoint of an outsider, and Kierkegaard explicitly make this point in a journal entry on the topic.<sup>57</sup> Even though Kierkegaard argues that faith from the first-person standpoint is not inherently absurd, he never suggests that the other aspects of Silentio's account are inaccurate. C. Stephen Evans explains, "[T]he fact that Johannes de Silentio writes from an "outsider's" perspective does not mean he does not accurately describe faith *as seen from that perspective*. Furthermore, that perspective is an illuminating one. By and large, I think Johannes's understanding of what faith is *not* is on target..."<sup>58</sup> Thus, even if the term "absurd" is problematic, Silentio's portrayal of Abrahamic faith shows the risks and implications for the person who has that type of faith.

The key question, then, is: is Silentio's characterization of the social isolation of the knight of faith inaccurate? My own view is that Silentio accurately describes how someone whose actions are incommensurable with his or her beliefs will impede his or her own person's social relationships. My earlier account of the problems presented in each of the *Problema* above describes how Abraham's incongruence would make it impossible for him to express his faith in action, in language, or even in discursive

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<sup>57</sup> See fn. 28 for a more lengthy treatment of the difference between Kierkegaard and Silentio on the question of faith.

<sup>58</sup> Evans, "Faith as the *Telos* of Morality," p. 14. Emphasis in original.

thought. As a result, Abraham's relationship to Isaac, Sarah, and his servants would all be undermined, even if he were able to hide the truth of his actions from them. Thus, if I am to maintain my position, I must be able to explain how one can maintain a strong view of both the one-to-one God relation and the importance of one's social relationships.

Such an account is possible if one has a proper understanding of what it means to be in an "absolute relation to the absolute." This characterization of "faith" is included in each *Problema*: (1) "[T]he single individual as the single individual stands in absolute relation to the absolute."<sup>59</sup> (2) [T]here is an absolute duty to God, for in this relationship of duty, the individual relates himself as the single individual absolutely to the absolute."<sup>60</sup> (3) [W]e are face to face with the paradox. Either the single individual as the single individual can stand in an absolute relation to the absolute, and consequentially the ethical is not the highest, or Abraham is lost..."<sup>61</sup> The ordinary way of understanding this phrase – where the God-relation is thought to trump all other relations – derives largely from the way it is characterized in the second *Problema*. As I mentioned above, this interpretation cannot be correct because each of the pseudo-Abrahams prioritize obedience to God above all else.

A better way to understand this idea is to explicate it as an unmediated or a direct relation to God. That is, Abraham's actions cannot be understood in terms of the ethical structures and institutions (*Problema I*). Furthermore, Abraham's commitment to his son and his trust in God's promise cannot be externalized in actions (*Problema II*) or language (*Problema III*). The form of faith as *Silentio* understands it involves a direct,

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<sup>59</sup> *FT 56 / SKS 4, 150.*

<sup>60</sup> *FT 70 / SKS 4, 162.*

<sup>61</sup> *FT 113 / SKS 4, 201.*

unmediated relation to God. As such, the faith relation is neither determined by social morality and conventions, nor is it externalized in actions or language. Of course, it could be the case that an individual only comes to understand his or her faith relation in a community and it may also be the case that social relationships are developed and maintained by the knight of faith.<sup>62</sup> Thus, although the form of the faith relation does not require a person to externalize one's belief in moral actions, ethical institutions, language, or even discursive thought, the content of a person's faith may very well require it. The formal characteristics of faith are exhibited in the figure of Abraham – that is, there is a direct conflict between his course of action and his inward, subjective commitment; but the particular conflict exhibited in the figure of Abraham is not one that arises for all knights of faith. The demand of the absolute may very well be different from the demand given to Abraham. The mundane knight of faith is one example of a person whose faith relation allows him to pursue and engage in social relationships, and for another example, “God may bring the knight of faith to give his love to the neighbor – an expression opposite to that which, ethically speaking, is duty.”<sup>63</sup> This second example figures prominently in Kierkegaard's characterization of love, and if indeed it were the case that God demanded that a person love the neighbor, then “the ethical receives a completely

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<sup>62</sup> Regarding the first claim, the movement of faith only takes place after one understands the importance and place of the ethical as well as social interaction and exchange. Abraham is only able to make the movement of faith because he knows what it is to love Isaac. Just because the form of faith is inwardness – an unmediated relation to the absolute – does not imply that faith can arise outside the confines of a community. Silentio describes the movement of faith as a “later immediacy” which can only arise within a community. *FT* 82 / *SKS* 4, 172.

<sup>63</sup> *FT* 70 / *SKS* 4, 201. This point is further elaborated by Kierkegaard in *Works of Love* (*WL* 160 / *SKS* 9, 161) and in the next chapter in §3.4.C. It is also important to note that loving the neighbor in the Kierkegaardian sense is neither an easy task nor something which is required by ordinary social conventions.

different expression” that is dependent on having single individuals who understand the importance of inwardness.

This interpretation of *Fear and Trembling* shows two things: (1) the characterization of the one-to-one God relation does not preclude an account of the importance the social. The account is, at the very least, consistent with the knight of faith having meaningful and important interpersonal relationships. (2) This way of understanding *Fear and Trembling* anticipates some of the developments during the social period of Kierkegaard’s thought in 1846-1847. Specifically, he makes an explicit reference to the connection between the God-relation and neighborly-love which will receive extensive treatment in the next chapter. This issue is described differently in this later period, but one can see even in *Fear and Trembling* – perhaps one of the most problematic texts for my thesis – that there are indications of a more fully developed account that is to come. The implication is that there is no fundamental contradiction between the characterization of the single self in the pseudonymous authorship here in *Fear and Trembling* and the later characterization of the social self in, say, “On the Occasion of a Confession” and *Works of Love*.

### **3.2. *The Attack on the Church***

The image of the faith as a solitary sojourn is commonly attributed to Kierkegaard. I have already indicated how one of the texts – *Fear and Trembling* – thought to support this image actually indicates ways in which it is ultimately consistent with Kierkegaard’s later, more developed account of the social. In this section, I will show that Kierkegaard’s critique of Christendom is not inherently anti-social. This task is more difficult than revealing the social dimension of *Fear and Trembling*, since even if

Kierkegaard's social thought was percolating in the early pseudonymous authorship and even if it receives extensive treatment in the middle authorship, the final attack on the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark may show that, in the end, Kierkegaard's conception of faith and religiosity leave no room for a social dimension. In fact, it has been very common among Kierkegaard's critics to suppose that Kierkegaard's critique of the church is indicative of his view of community. They maintain that Kierkegaard has no role in his thought for sociality just as he has no role for the church. This critique has historically been one of the most prominent objections to Kierkegaard's community and ecclesiology.

As a contemporary, Hans Lassen Martensen thought Kierkegaard was wholly against any form of society or congregation. Kierkegaard, according to Martensen, denied all forms of association. He wrote, "He [Kierkegaard] did not want to found a congregation or establish any new society. He totally denied every notion of society or associations, and he looked only to individuals...."<sup>64</sup> Martensen was, however, quite hostile to Kierkegaard because he perceived the 'attack' literature<sup>65</sup> as being directed at himself.<sup>66</sup> He thought Kierkegaard was exaggerating the differences between New

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<sup>64</sup> Hans Lassen Martensen in Bruce Kirmmse, *Encounters with Kierkegaard*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 203.

<sup>65</sup> Although one might classify much of Kierkegaard's authorship as "attack literature," I am specifically referring to the final portion of his authorship in 1854 and 1855 when he attacks the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark (The People's Church of Denmark). These writings primarily consist in two series of articles with the first published in a popular Copenhagen newspaper titled *Fædrelandet* (*The Fatherland*) between December 18, 1854 (though the first one was written in February 1854) and May 13, 1855 and the second published independently by Kierkegaard under the title "The Moment." There were nine installments of "The Moment" published during Kierkegaard's life with the final #10 lying complete and ready for publication on his desk when he collapsed on October 2, 1855. He died shortly thereafter on November 11, 1855 and #10 was not published until the publication of Kierkegaard's posthumous writings in 1881. There were also a handful of small independently published pamphlets within the "attack literature."

<sup>66</sup> H.L. Martensen gave the eulogy for J.P. Mynster, who was the Bishop of Zealand and the People's Church of Denmark as well as the priest of the Church that Kierkegaard attended most often. Martensen

Testament Christianity and the established religion in Denmark in part because of a personal grudge with Martensen. Martensen explained, “Søren Kierkegaard’s attack... was tantamount to an attack on me.” Even though Kierkegaard’s critique was explicitly directed at the established religion, Martensen felt that “personal issues nonetheless play an important role.”<sup>67</sup>

There are many Kierkegaardian scholars who are in agreement with Martensen on his diagnosis of the social in Kierkegaard. Bruce Kirmmse claims, “In the last part of his life it looked as if Kierkegaard opposed not only the Danish State or People’s Church, but also the very concepts of Church and congregation as such.”<sup>68</sup> Kirmmse’s entire article is a very detailed defense of the claim that Kierkegaard’s emphasis on a private, individual religiosity is antithetical to any church. One scholar summarizes Kirmmse’s position as such, “[A]ny version of “church” we apparently know would appear to be rejected by

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calls Mynster a “truth-witness” in the eulogy, and this characterization of Mynster provokes Kierkegaard’s response – though he does not publish it until well after the Martensen had succeeded Mynster as the highest Bishop of the Danish Church. The dispute was a public affair, and it provoked quite a reaction – which was mostly negative – from the Danish cultural elite and the people in general. Although Kierkegaard goes through great pains to claim that the attack is not against Martensen, in one newspaper article, “On Bishop Martensen’s Silence,” Kierkegaard discusses their tumultuous relationship. Regarding Kierkegaard’s past works, Martensen writes, “For many years there has been, literarily, an unsettled account between us.” (*MLW* 81 / *SV* 14, 96) Even when Martensen was aware that *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* was directed partly against him, Martensen did not respond directly to the criticism. Nevertheless, Kierkegaard viewed Martensen’s defense of his description of Mynster as a “truth-witness” as an expression of his overall distaste for Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard thought Martensen’s “abusive remarks” were leveled at him because “the mood was against [Kierkegaard]” over the Mynster issue. (*MLW* 81 / *SV* 14, 96) Kierkegaard’s comments about Martensen’s motives indicates that Kierkegaard’s own personal disagreements with and dislike of Martensen may have more of a role in the attack literature than Kierkegaard is willing to admit. Whatever the reasons for the attack, it is still important that the arguments Kierkegaard presents be evaluated on their own terms, though it is possible that the ferocity of the attack makes the arguments appear stronger than they actually are.

<sup>67</sup> Martensen, *Encounters with Kierkegaard*, p. 201. Martensen’s complaint is not without a great deal of support. Kierkegaard often was polemical toward those individuals whom he did not personally like, and it is often difficult to separate the substance of an argument from the exaggerations resulting from Kierkegaard’s personal distaste for a person.

<sup>68</sup> Bruce H. Kirmmse, “The Thunderstorm: Kierkegaard’s Ecclesiology”, *Faith and Philosophy*, v. 17. (Wilmore, KY: The Society of Christian Philosophers, 2000), p. 89

him [Kierkegaard] as hindering Christ's invitation to each individual, cluttering it with clergy and ceremony."<sup>69</sup>

Defenses of Kierkegaard's theological focus have taken many forms. Many defenders have sought to downplay the significance of the 'Attack' as mere exaggeration and to contextualize Kierkegaard's critiques. Martensen, for example, thought Kierkegaard has misunderstood his 'calling' to attack the establishment. He said, "To the extent that Kierkegaard thought that he had a mission in his activity, it must certainly be said that he missed his calling. His true calling was to be quietly active as an author, as he had been earlier."<sup>70</sup> Martensen's sentiment is popular among at least some Kierkegaard scholars. One Lutheran theologian, who is very sympathetic to Kierkegaard's philosophical theology says, "There are several blind spots in his (Kierkegaard's) thought, notably the individualism and subjectivism which have prevented most of his followers from articulating an adequate doctrine of the Church."<sup>71</sup> Another sympathetic Kierkegaard scholar defended Kierkegaard's Church by saying that it is indeed defective when compared to the New Testament but certainly not non-existent.

One of the ways in which the Kierkegaardian stress on 'the individual' has been misunderstood... is in the contention, constantly recurring, that Kierkegaard had no essential place in his thought for the Church. I too maintain that, measured by the New Testament conception of the Church, Kierkegaard's ecclesiology is defective. But to assert that his doctrine of the Church is defective is different from asserting that he had no doctrine at all.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Michael Plekon, "Kierkegaard At The End: His 'Last' Sermon, Eschatology And The Attack On The Church", *Faith and Philosophy*, v. 17. (Wilmore, KY: The Society of Christian Philosophers, 2000), p. 78.

<sup>70</sup> Martensen, *Encounters with Kierkegaard*, p. 203.

<sup>71</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *From Luther to Kierkegaard*, p. 118. Pelikan is referring to Emil Brunner when referring to Kierkegaard's 'followers'.

<sup>72</sup> Howard A. Johnson, "Kierkegaard and the Church" as an introduction to Søren Kierkegaard, *Attack Upon Christendom*, p. xix.

The suggestion is that it would be difficult for anyone to maintain that there is adequate room for social institutions and a social life if one takes the later attack literature seriously. Kierkegaard's attack on Denmark's most prominent social institution is thought to reveal the essential and individualistic character of Kierkegaard's view of the faith and religiosity.

Although an interpreter could marshal much support for this claim, there are reasons for thinking that this understanding of Kierkegaard's later authorship is problematic. In order to defend this claim, I will offer three arguments that mitigate the force of these objections. Although these arguments do not show that Kierkegaard, in fact, has a social dimension to his thought, they do show that Kierkegaard's criticism of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark is insufficient for demonstrating either (a) that Kierkegaard is unconcerned about sociality or (b) that he rejects every social institution. As I make my case, I will examine the dominant themes in the final attack period. I will conclude by examining what I take to be the most difficult passage from Kierkegaard concerning the possibility of community.

### *3.2.A. Kierkegaard's Critique in *The Fatherland and The Moment**

Much of Kierkegaard's work, particularly the work published after the 1848-1849 political revolution, is seen as a response to a decadent religious culture. Denmark had come to be dominated by a mob of 'Christians' who were designated as Christian because of their citizenship in Denmark. The most dominant religious influence was the traditional Lutheran orthodoxy, and throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries attending Sunday church was compulsory and only those confirmed in the Lutheran church were



recognized as Danish citizens.<sup>73</sup> Kierkegaard sarcastically commented, “Calling oneself a Christian has become such an important condition for advancing in the world that most likely one could not get permission to earn his living by maintaining a house of prostitution without proving that he is baptized and is (that is, calls himself) a Christian.”<sup>74</sup> During Kierkegaard’s lifetime there were political and religious controversies over compulsory paedobaptism, the Free Church movement, and civil marriages for non-Lutherans. Each of these issues highlights how the established church tried to retain power and authority by making everyone Lutheran – the Baptist’s children were forcibly baptized as Lutherans against their parent’s wishes, prominent members of the Free Church movement were given their own parishes within the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark, etc. Kierkegaard writes, “In the interest of the established order, orthodoxy fights to maintain the appearance that in a way we all are Christians, that the country is Christian and the congregations are Christian.”<sup>75</sup> Kierkegaard often criticizes the claim that Denmark was a Christian country, with millions of Christians. He laments, “[H]ow profane Christianity has been made now by the slipshod way in which everyone is made a Christian as a matter of course and everyone is assumed to be one!”<sup>76</sup> These comments are representative samples of a great body of work published after the political revolution of 1848-1849 up through the final attack on Martensen and the Danish Church.

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<sup>73</sup> Jones uses these laws and requirements to illustrate the religious intolerance and orthodoxy that was the State Church in Denmark since the reformation came to Denmark in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and were repealed during the beginning of Kierkegaard’s life. W. Glyn Jones, *A Modern History of Denmark*. (London: Croom Helm, 1986).

<sup>74</sup> *JP* 4, 4496 / *Pap* XI-I A 74.

<sup>75</sup> *BA* 46 / *Pap* VII-2 B 235, p. 87.

<sup>76</sup> *JP* 3, 2793 / *SKS* 23, NB15:13.

These themes come to a head during the attack period when Kierkegaard brings his case to the “common man.” Kierkegaard’s final attack on the Evangelical Lutheran Church is one of three public encounters brought not to the literary establishment in Denmark but to the common person. The first was in *The Corsair* affair, the second was his response to and criticism of Rudelbach’s appropriation of Kierkegaard in order to promote a free church, and the last is the attack literature. Although the attack literature may appear on an initial glance to be deeply political, a closer analysis reveals a more complex situation. I will now examine this situation as well as a number of common themes in the attack literature.

First, Kierkegaard’s initial critique of applying the label of “truth-witness” to Mynster is written very shortly after Mynster died and Martensen gave his truth-witness eulogy concerning Mynster. But Kierkegaard refrained from publishing this piece for eleven months until well after all the political decisions had been made concerning Martensen as Mynster’s successor to the Bishop of Zealand, the highest Primate in Denmark. If Kierkegaard had intended his attack to produce a political result, he would have led the assault on Martensen well before his ascension to the Bishopruc. By withholding his critique during a period of political transition, Kierkegaard demonstrates the truthfulness of his claim that he does “not in the remotest manner [want to] clash... with any civic arrangement whatever...”<sup>77</sup> He further demonstrates the truth of this assertion by continuing to pay the Church taxes just “as everyone else does.”<sup>78</sup> Kierkegaard did not want life to become difficult politically for the clergy; rather, he

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<sup>77</sup> *MLW 77 / SV 14, 90.*

<sup>78</sup> *MLW 77 / SV 14, 90.*

wants the Danish Church to admit that it does not represent the Christianity of the New Testament.

Kierkegaard further distances himself from some political program just as he did in the Rudelbach controversy by disavowing all “popular movements.”<sup>79</sup> Kierkegaard did not want to be associated with Rudelbach or the free church movement in Denmark, and vowed that he would not “counter-demonstrate” any government action against him by mobilizing or aiding a popular movement. Thus, Kierkegaard demonstrates by his actions that he neither has distinct political motives nor sympathy for the reform movements of his day. This strategy is similar in structure, if not identical to Kierkegaard’s concept of the corrective where the aim is to reform from the inside rather than through political opposition.

These declarations do not necessarily show that Kierkegaard is apolitical, though it may do so. It could also lend more plausibility to Kierkegaard’s characterization of his own position as a defense of the establishment. The only way for the established to be restored and improved is through proper internal development; it is necessary for the people to develop themselves as selves. The only sense in which the attack literature can be understood as political is *negatively*; that is, Kierkegaard thinks that the political arrangement between the Danish government and the People’s Church of Denmark precludes the proper development of the individual and inwardness and likewise it precludes genuine religiosity. In one article, he presents his task as bringing “amalgamation or alliance of Church and state” to “the most extreme decision.”<sup>80</sup> In fact,

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<sup>79</sup> *MLW* 76 / *SV* 14, 90.

<sup>80</sup> *MLW* 75 / *SV* 14, 89.

much of the attack literature is directed against the union of Church and state in Denmark – particularly priests being state functionaries.

The idea that the priest is a state functionary – protected and secure in his faith – is contrary to Kierkegaard’s conception of genuine New Testament Christianity. Perhaps the most consistent theme in the attack literature is that New Testament Christianity involves suffering and that the clergy and “Christians” in 19<sup>th</sup> century Denmark did not suffer at all but instead prospered because of their faith. Furthermore, Kierkegaard’s conceives of his own work as a sort of sacrifice intended to force the establishment to admit that it fails to live up to the New Testament ideal of the Christian life.<sup>81</sup>

Kierkegaard claims that he only wants honesty from the establishment and he expresses Christianity as an entirely separate domain from any political program. His task is not to fracture the opposition and strengthen his own movement (since he disparages movements, parties, and the like); in fact, he claims that “to be a Christian” is to have “the willingness to be sacrificed,” and he explicitly says that this notion is in opposition to the numerical increase or extensiveness of Christianity. Rather than propagating Christianity as the early Church did, it is now vital to develop intensiveness by emphasizing the difficulty of Christianity.<sup>82</sup> Just as the faith of Abraham was manifest inwardly, so Christianity in the New Testament is about inwardness.

Although the attack literature is directed against the most prominent social institution of 19<sup>th</sup> century Danish society, there are good reasons for thinking that Kierkegaard’s critique of this institution is compatible with attributing a higher degree of importance to the social element within his thought. First, simply because Kierkegaard

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<sup>81</sup> *MLW* 73 / *SV* 14, 85.

<sup>82</sup> *MLW* 42 / *SV* 14, 49.

rejects one social institution, even an especially prominent one in 19<sup>th</sup> century Denmark, does not imply that he rejects all social institutions. His criticism of one particular social institution is not a rejection of every social institution nor is it a rejection of social institutions in principle. His criticisms are particular to the religious establishment in Denmark.

Second, the attack literature also shows that Kierkegaard is concerned with the political and social events of his day. He does not advocate a specific external change, but he thinks that there must be an internal change before any external political change takes place. This internal change may or may not result in any external changes. Kierkegaard's political position is essentially a negative one – that is, he is critical of his contemporary social and political institutions because they preclude the development of inwardness and genuine religiosity insofar as they declare everyone a Christian because of one's citizenship in the country.<sup>83</sup> Kierkegaard's position here does not establish a positive account of the value and place of interpersonal relationships or community, but it does not explicitly preclude such an account.

Finally, even if it turns out that Kierkegaard's criticisms of the Danish Church are applicable to a significant number of social, political and/or religious institutions, it still need not imply a rejection of sociality and community as such. It could very well be the case that interpersonal relationships and community function more appropriately when they are not established and codified in institutions. Perhaps Kierkegaard prioritizes the domain of personal human relationships over the propagation of social and political

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<sup>83</sup> This issue still arises in Denmark because each child born in Denmark is presumptively considered a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark. One has to go to a Church office and specifically request for one's child to be removed from the Church rolls. This situation has become rather complicated in recent years as the number of Muslim immigrants has increased.

institutions. My own view is that Kierkegaard is merely critical of the propagation of the Church numerically or extensively without any attention to inwardness or intensiveness.

In a revealing footnote, which I mentioned briefly above, he writes:

When Christianity entered the world, the task was to propagate the doctrine. In “Christendom,” where the evil is precisely the untruthful extensiveness brought about by an untruthful propagation, the counteracting of this evil (extensiveness) must above all be careful lest it itself have the form of extensiveness – therefore the fewer the better, preferably literally a single individual, because the evil is due to extensiveness (the extensive); thus the counteraction must come from – the intensive.<sup>84</sup>

This passage pits New Testament Christianity (which is often praised by Kierkegaard) against Christendom. The former gained a number of adherents by teaching a doctrine, and Kierkegaard makes no negative comments about this method or extensiveness within the New Testament. Kierkegaard implicitly suggests that the extensiveness of New Testament Christianity is accompanied by an appropriate inwardness or intensiveness. Extensiveness and numerical success, however, ultimately eliminated the role of inwardness within Christianity. As a result, Kierkegaard thinks it best to raise the issue from the standpoint of the single individual. Until intensiveness is recovered one must not align oneself with movements, parties, institutions, or any such thing. This account does not in principle preclude these forms of social organization, but the growth of these organizations without a properly developed sense of the single individual is the antithesis of genuine sociality and community. In the next chapter, I will argue that there is an implicit social ideal that justifies Kierkegaard’s criticism of the Danish Church, but first I will address what I consider the most problematic passage for defending my thesis.

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<sup>84</sup> *MLW* 42fn / *SV* 14, 49.

### 3.2.B. “An Alarming Note”

Though I have argued that Kierkegaard’s criticism of Christendom ought not be thought of as a rejection of sociality and community as such, there is one important passage that seems to suggest otherwise. The passage titled “An Alarming Note” is as follows:

Those three thousand who were added *en masse* to the congregation on Pentecost-is there not something dubious here at the very beginning? Should the apostles not have had misgivings about the appropriateness of Christian conversions by the thousands *auf einmal*? Has not something human happened to the apostles, so that, remembering all too vividly their despair over Christ’s death when everything was lost and now overwhelmed with joy over the effect they have brought about, they forgot what Christianity really is, forgot that if true imitation is Christianity, such an enormous conquest as three thousand at one time will not do? It is very difficult, because there is a curious meeting of two thoughts, something like the meeting of two persons in a bottleneck where they cannot pass each other. In Christ Christianity has the orientation of intensity, that is, it is the pure intensity. The apostles’ task seems to be oriented toward extensity, the more extensity the better. But to the degree that intensity is accentuated, extensity is diminished and – yet it was surely true Christianity the apostles were to spread. In Christ Christianity is the single individual; here is the one and only single individual. In the apostle there is at once-community. But in this way Christianity is transposed into an entirely different conceptual sphere. This concept has been the ruination of Christendom. This concept is responsible for the confusion that whole states, countries, nations, kingdoms are Christian.

*\*in the margin*

Then there is the question whether the principle of hating oneself, which belongs to Christianity, is not so asocial that it cannot constitute community. In any case we can get some idea from this about what non-sense this is about state churches, folk churches, and Christian countries.<sup>85</sup>

Bruce Kirmmse claims this passage presents “Kierkegaard’s final view of the Church: 1) true Christianity is too unsocial for any concept of congregation; and 2) the concept of

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<sup>85</sup> JP 2, 2056 / *Pap XI A* 189-190.

congregation has been ‘the ruination of Christianity’.<sup>86</sup> The passage is the centerpiece of his claim that Kierkegaard relegates all considerations of the social and the political outside the scope of his project. Kirmmse’s claim is provocative, and this passage is an extremely difficult one. Before examining the passage, it is important to note some relevant important details. First, the passage is written during the attack period, but it was never published. It may be suggested, since it is a journal entry, that it expresses Kierkegaard’s actual views about the relationship between the single individual and the community. According to my earlier account of Kierkegaard’s work as a corrective, this claim may have some merit; but it is also the case that Kierkegaard often wrote portions of his published work in his journals prior to publication, and he would even sometimes work out the implications of a viewpoint differently from his own in journal passages (e.g., a position of a pseudonym). Regarding this particular entry, however, there is never any indication that Kierkegaard intended to publish it. That is, he never revises it or alters it substantially, and he never suggests that the view he articulates is anyone’s other than his own.

It is also quite clear that Kierkegaard does not present the passage as a corrective or a case of intentional exaggeration. First, it is not expressed in a public forum as his other “correctives” are. Second, he makes mitigating claims and explanations internally within the text, and this fact suggests that his argument in this passage should not be understood as a corrective, which is intentionally and explicitly one-sided. These mitigating claims, however, illustrate how one can understand this passage without

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<sup>86</sup> Kirmmse, “The Thunderstorm,” p. 98. The Danish word translated community [*Menigheden*] in the passage above can mean community but it usually means congregation. Kirmmse uses the latter term, which is more accurate in this context, while the Hongs’ alternate between ‘congregation’ and ‘community.’



ascribing to Kirmmse's interpretation that in Kierkegaard's final analysis Christianity (and likewise the single individual) is too unsocial to be involved in congregations or communities.

The passage begins with a series of provocative questions that appear to suggest that the Apostles' were wrong to allow "Christian conversions by the thousands." Although the questions seem rhetorical, the basic position is very strange since Kierkegaard regularly promotes "New Testament Christianity" as an ideal to which Christendom has failed to attain. As I mentioned above regarding the attack literature, Kierkegaard expressed no reservation about the Apostle's propagation of Christianity as a doctrine because it was accompanied with appropriate intensiveness. Furthermore, the only statement he makes in response to his series of questions is to explain how resolving the issue "is very difficult." Though he explicitly characterizes Christ's Christianity according to its intensity, he also thinks that the Apostle's task, which was "oriented toward extensity," was surely spreading "true Christianity." Thus, Kierkegaard explicitly allows for the possibility that intensity is compatible with extensiveness in some cases, even if the general rule is that intensiveness diminishes extensiveness. Thus, there is nothing fundamentally incompatible with Christianity being the single individual in Christ but also the community in the Apostles.

Nevertheless, Kierkegaard also asserts that the apostolic method of propagation transposes Christianity "into an entirely different conceptual sphere." In this sphere, extensiveness is the most important characteristic of Christianity rather than extensiveness grounded in inwardness. This ruin of Christendom is attributed to this subtle shift in that it allows for "whole state, countries, nations [and] kingdoms" to be

Christian. Kierkegaard's final conclusion is not that Christianity is too unsocial for community or congregation, but it is merely that Christian states and nations are incompatible with genuine Christianity. This conclusion is much weaker than the one suggested by Kirmmse, though it is the only conclusion Kierkegaard draws in this passage. Furthermore, this theme is a consistent one throughout the latter part of Kierkegaard's authorship, and it is not surprising to see it expressed here. Now it may be that Kirmmse sees a stronger premise which could support a stronger conclusion, but Kierkegaard simply does not make the move that Kirmmse suggests.

The marginal note on the entry – probably written sometime after the original entry – asks whether the principle of hating oneself precludes community. Once again, Kierkegaard expresses this issue as a question and he only concludes from it that it is nonsense to talk about “state churches, folk churches and Christian countries.” There is no reason to think that Kierkegaard actually thinks that genuine Christianity is anti-social. Furthermore, if my analysis of *Fear and Trembling* is correct, then hating one's family and oneself (according to Luke 14:26) is not, in fact, incompatible with valuing social relationships and community.

### **3.3. Conclusion**

In chapter one, I argued that Kierkegaard's concept of the corrective provided a basic outline for where one could find features of Kierkegaard's social thought implicit in his works that appear to militate against social relationships or community. In this chapter, I am arguing that Kierkegaard's concept of the single individual, the one-to-one God relation, and his final attack on the Church are not fundamentally at odds with any conception of sociality or community. That is, there is an implicit subtext that reveals a

social dimension to Kierkegaard's thought that is not ordinarily recognized. Approaching the issue in this way accomplishes two goals: (1) it lays the foundation for future chapters where I will defend my claim that there is, in fact, a positive social dimension to Kierkegaard's thought, and (2) it shows how one can incorporate the social dimension of Kierkegaard's thought into his already well-developed views of the single individual, faith and religiosity.

In Section 3.1, I accomplished these two goals by showing that the knight of faith, in order to actually be the knight of faith, must fully embrace the finite world including one's relationships to others. In short, one must be fully committed to one's own Isaac. Furthermore, my characterization of "the absolute relation to the absolute" referenced throughout *Fear and Trembling* does not preclude social relationships, though it indicates the importance of the single individual and inwardness in the development of oneself as a social individual. This theme will receive further treatment in the next chapter where the single individual and the community mutually develop one another. In Section 3.2, I defended the claim that the later attack on the Church is not an attack on the concept of community as such, and I indicated how there is an implicit concept of a community grounded in intensiveness or inwardness even during Kierkegaard's most vile attack on 19<sup>th</sup> century Denmark's most important social institution. My argument in this chapter is a modest one where I am only showing how three of the most "anti-social" aspects of Kierkegaard's work are not, in fact, anti-social.

#### Chapter Four: The Primacy of the Social 1846-1847

Kierkegaard's most extensive consideration of the concept of community or society occurs after the publication of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* in 1846 and before Kierkegaard's voluminous writings in 1848 (*Christian Discourses, Sickness Unto Death, Practice in Christianity, Point of View*). This period is a brief interlude expressing the importance of sociality and human relationships rather than either his earlier emphasis on the individual and the distinction between self and God, as well as other humans, or his later portrayal of the ideal Christian who takes a stand against Christendom and society. The former is thought to posit a fundamental split between individuals, and the latter rails against perhaps the most important social and cultural institution in 19th century Denmark. If these two views were examined individually or collectively, one could easily construe the entire authorship as a sort of antisocial diatribe. This middle period, however, makes the issue much more complicated.

There are two ways to understand these rather different points of emphasis in Kierkegaard's authorship. On the one hand, it could be that Kierkegaard considers the social dimension in terms of the existing human subject, but then ultimately abandons this element of his thought for some reason, perhaps partly because of the 1848-1849 revolutions across Europe and more particularly in Denmark. Kierkegaard found the liberal movement in his own country to be odious, and his reaction may shape his final attack on Christendom. On the other hand, one could advance a developmental thesis such that although there are different treatments of various topics within the authorship, each period builds on the insights from the previous one. If one adopts this sort of view, then it is incumbent upon the interpreter to show how each period of the authorship

builds on previous stages. It is not uncommon to interpret Kierkegaard's authorship developmentally, particularly concerning Kierkegaard's use of irony and aesthetics on his path toward authentic Christian existence. Kierkegaard not only suggests such an interpretation in *Point of View*, but there are a significant number of Kierkegaard scholars who defend this view as well.<sup>1</sup> Although in recent years the social dimension to Kierkegaard's has received much attention, there has been little to no discussion of how Kierkegaard's understanding of sociality develops throughout his authorship, how it relates to other themes within Kierkegaard's authorship, or how it develops in relation to the views of his contemporaries and intellectual ancestors.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter, I propose a developmental thesis concerning the role of sociality and community in Kierkegaard's authorial efforts in 1846 and 1847. In order to provide a successful account, I first must explain how the earlier characterization of the individual who is radically alone before God, separate from all others, is further developed by Kierkegaard's discussion of sociality. Furthermore the ideas expressed in 1846 and 1847 should at the very least cohere with and render intelligible the developments in Kierkegaard's later authorship, including the infamous attack literature. Otherwise, the social direction in his thought would seem to be a dead end that Kierkegaard pursued at one point and later abandoned. Additionally, it would add considerable weight to my claim if an internal connection can be shown between the major works of this period

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<sup>1</sup> *PV / SKS* 16. C. Stephen Evans defends a very common developmental thesis concerning the role of irony and aesthetics in the earlier authorship and its service for his later views about Christianity. See his "Introduction" *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006) pp. 3-26. Jon Stewart also advances a developmental thesis concerning Kierkegaard's relationship(s) to Hegel in his *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, pp. 597-619

<sup>2</sup> All of the following books focus on the importance of human relationships and community for Kierkegaard. Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving*; Connell and Evans, *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community: Religion, Ethics, and Politics in Kierkegaard*; Pattison and Shakespeare, *Kierkegaard: The Self in Society*.

including *A Literary Review*, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, and *Works of Love*. In this chapter, I show not only the development of Kierkegaard's expression of the role of community and society within these three works, but also that this view will cohere with and form a complete whole with the earlier and later writings.

I will show that the three works of this period build on one another, and this development mirrors an important journal entry written during this same time period concerning the dialectic of community. This journal entry suggests a strategy for understanding not only the connection between these three works but also the role of sociality in Kierkegaard's overall authorship. The cumulative effect of this journal entry and each of these three works suggests that community or society plays a larger role in Kierkegaard's thought than ordinarily assumed. This understanding of Kierkegaard's social thought illustrates a new facet to our understanding of Kierkegaard, but it also shows how his thought is related to his contemporaries and immediate predecessors including Hegel.

#### ***4.1 "The Dialectic of Community"***

In a significant journal entry written sometime between January and September of 1846, after Kierkegaard had written *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard discusses "the dialectic of community or society." This journal entry is helpful for illustrating both the prevalence of the concept of community during this period, and also for establishing the connection between the various characterizations of human relationships and community in the various periods of Kierkegaard's authorship. The entry is as follows:

*The Dialectic of Community [menighedens]  
or Society [samfundet] Is as Follows:*

(1) the individuals who relate to each other in the relation are individually inferior to the relation.

Just as the separate members of the body are inferior to the body; the particular heavenly bodies in the solar system.

(2) the individuals who relate to each other in the relation are individually equal in relation to the relation.

Just as in earthly love each one is a separate entity, but the need for the relationship is the same for both.

(3) the individuals who relate themselves to each other in the relation are individually superior to the relation.

As in the highest form of religion. The individual is primarily related to God and then to the community [menighedens], but this primary relation is the highest, yet he does not neglect the second.

See also *Concluding Postscript*, p. 327 [1.428]---that the task is not to move from the individual to the race but from the individual through the race to reach the individual.

See an article by Dr. Bayer, “*Der Begriff der sittlichen Gemeinschaft*” (in Fichte’s journal, 1844, XIII, p. 80). His tripartition is: *Beziehung, Bezug, Einheit* [connection, relation, unity]. (See pp. 80 and 81.)<sup>3</sup>

The first line of the journal entry, “The dialectic of community or society is as follows” indicates the theme for this passage. Here Kierkegaard develops his own dialectic of community, though it still leaves much to be desired in terms of a coherent development of a distinct theory of community. This entry purports to show how the individual becomes progressively more important as the community develops. Ultimately, the dialectic culminates in a stage where the individual is more important than the individual’s relations. Kierkegaard explains this concept by pointing out how the God-relation is more important than other relations but then stresses that this does not

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<sup>3</sup>*JP* 4, 4110 / *SKS* 18, 283, *JJ*:430. Kierkegaard’s Danish is grammatically incorrect in his gloss of the third stage, and it is unclear whether he simply made an error when writing or whether he deliberately made the mistake. The end result of the mistake is that it is ambiguous whether the highest form is the religious (in comparison to ethical or aesthetic forms) or whether it is the highest form of the religious in comparison to other forms of the religious. Every translation that I am aware of fixes the grammatical error by imposing a particular interpretation on the text. I maintain that the latter interpretation is best in light of the context of the passage and Kierkegaard’s views expressed elsewhere.

undermine one's other relations. This claim is fascinating given Kierkegaard's elaboration of the God-relation, and it also opens up the possibility for a theory of community that is consistent with Kierkegaard's conception of the God-relation. This sort of account indicates that for Kierkegaard there is an intimate connection between the earlier authorship's focus on becoming the single individual and the later emphasis in 1846 and 1847 on human relationships and community. Nevertheless, Kierkegaard's development here is unclear and provides very little in terms of a positive account of community.<sup>4</sup>

Kierkegaard does, however, provide two helpful clues for understanding his presentation of the dialectic of community. First, he suggests that we look at a passage in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, which says, "the task is not to move from the individual to the race but from the individual through the race to reach the individual."<sup>5</sup>

This reference establishes that the race, the universal, the community are not only ends in

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<sup>4</sup> The Danish terms used for "community" (*menighedens*) or "society" (*samfundet*) are somewhat ambiguous in the passage. It is not clear whether Kierkegaard means to distinguish the two terms or not. *Menigheden* can be translated a variety of ways but it, almost without exception, has a distinctive religious character as a religious community or congregation, and this word is used in the third numbered stage of community when Kierkegaard writes, "The individual is primarily related to God and then to the community, but this primary relation is the highest, yet he does not neglect the second." It appears, then, that Kierkegaard is illustrating his point here by describing how the individual can be higher than any of his or her relations yet not demean the relation by claiming that one can have a one-to-one relation to God, and yet that will not demean one's relation to one's religious community. "*Samfundet*" also has a multitude of meanings. It can mean community, society, a religious society, an association, a communion, or the entire social system. It is not clear in the journal entry whether Kierkegaard intends the terms to be interchangeable or whether it begins as *samfundet* and culminates in *menigheden*. Although the use of *menigheden* in the third stage may lend some credence to the latter view, I do not find it definitive. It must be remembered that each of the sentences where Kierkegaard glosses his description of the status of the individual vis-à-vis the relation are merely illustrative. They are not intended to capture the entire content or to limit the application of the concepts. Furthermore, Kierkegaard also fails to use either of the terms in any other place throughout the journal entry. For this reason, it appears most likely that Kierkegaard is using the two terms interchangeably. There are only a handful of other passages where both *menighed* and *samfund* are mentioned. They are neither consistently distinguished nor consistently used interchangeably. There is simply no consistent usage of these two terms for Kierkegaard. The two terms are used together in each of the following passages, and there is no consistent distinction used throughout each of these passages. In *CI* 249 / *SKS* 1, 288; *EOI* 48 / *SKS* 2, 56; *EO2* 102 / *SKS* 2, 104; *FT* 28-29 / *SKS* 4, 124-125; *MLW* 259-258 / *SV* XIV 271-272; *MLW* 343-344 / *SV* XIV 354

<sup>5</sup> *JP* 4, 4110 / *SKS* 18, 283, JJ:430. *CUP*, 428 / *SKS* 7, 389.



themselves but also a means for developing the individual in some capacity. The individual is both the prerequisite for and the product of community. This passage emphasizes Kierkegaard's conception of the development of self as a process, and it illustrates a further connection between the earlier authorship and Kierkegaard's writings about sociality and community.

The second suggestion Kierkegaard gives for deciphering this passage is a reference to Karl Bayer.<sup>6</sup> Kierkegaard specifically suggests that we "See an article by Dr. Bayer, 'Der Begriff der sittlichen Gemeinschaft' ["The Concept of the Moral Community"] (in Fichte's journal, 1844, vol. 13, p. 80). His tripartition is: *Beziehung, Bezug, Einheit*. (See pp. 80-81.)"<sup>7</sup> Not only does this suggestion provide a clue for understanding what Kierkegaard is trying to accomplish in this passage, but it also shows that Kierkegaard is not directly comparing his dialectic of community to Hegel's in *The Philosophy of Right*. Although the comparison to Hegel's dialectic of community might seem initially plausible, and it may be quite philosophically fruitful, it is quite clearly not Kierkegaard's source or inspiration for the passage, though Bayer's theory of community is distinctively Hegelian in many respects.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Karl Bayer was a 19<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher and teacher who later became an important political figure in Bavaria in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Bayer studied philosophy and theology at both Erlangen and Berlin working with both Friedrich Schleiermacher and G.W.F. Hegel. Bayer made a name for himself philosophically by writing books such as *Betrachtungen über den Begriff des sittlichen Geistes und über das Wesen der Tugend* [*Contributions to the Concept of the Moral Spirit and the Nature of Virtue*], and by publishing regularly in some of the more prominent philosophical journals in the mid-nineteenth century such as the "anti-Hegelian" *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und spekulative Theologie* [*Journal of Philosophy and Speculative Theology*]. *Dictionary of German Biography*, ed. Walther Killy and Rudolf Vierhaus, vols. 1-10, Munich: K.G. Saur 1995-2003, vol. 1, p. 359.

<sup>7</sup> *JP* 4, 4110 / *SKS* 18, 283, JJ:430.

<sup>8</sup> Although it is quite evident that Bayer's thought deviates substantially from Hegel, it is equally true that Bayer was heavily influenced by Hegel's thought and methodology. This is evident in the types of questions Bayer addressed (e.g., the relationship between freedom and thought, and the relationship between community and morality) as well as the dialectical approach he employed. If one, however, were to compare Kierkegaard's and Hegel's dialectics of community, then one should be clear about the

#### 4.1.A. Karl Bayer's Theory of Community

Because Kierkegaard explicitly references Bayer as an interpretive clue to this passage, it is important to examine Bayer's theory of community and Kierkegaard's relationship to it. Bayer's theory of community as Kierkegaard knew it is expressed in "The Concept of Moral Community," so I limit my description of Bayer's theory to this particular work.<sup>9</sup>

Kierkegaard's explicit reference to Bayer's article and the overall similarity between each of their theories of community strongly supports the claim that Bayer is influential at least for this journal entry but also perhaps for Kierkegaard's own conception of community. Both of their theories emphasize the importance of the individual for the community, and they also criticize other conceptions of community for leaving out an adequate concept of the individual. They also both identify the production and development of individuals as an important task of community. Furthermore, the

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structural differences between them. In Hegel's view, the stages in the dialectic represent the development of a particular type of freedom and the reconciliation of unity and individuality. Kierkegaard's conception, however focuses on the development of the individual in her relation to others.

<sup>9</sup> Kierkegaard only appears to have been marginally acquainted with Karl Bayer's works. He explicitly references Bayer's article, "The Concept of the Moral Community" in two journal entries (*JP* 4, 4110 / *SKS* 18, 283, JJ:430. *JP* 5, 5883 / *SKS* 18, 284f., JJ:433), and he references, but does not cite, the same article in *Works of Love*. Both journal entries are undated though they were written between January and September 1846, and *Works of Love* was completed in 1847 so it most likely written at approximately the same time. Although Kierkegaard only mentions this one article, there are some good reasons for thinking that Kierkegaard was at the very least acquainted with four other works by Bayer. First, in one of the two references to "The Concept of the Moral Community" there is an allusion to one of Bayer's previous works *Die Idee der Freiheit* (*The Idea of Freedom*); thus, Kierkegaard was most likely aware of this particular work even though there is no evidence that he actually read it. Second, Kierkegaard subscribed to the *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und spekulative Theologie* where "Der Begriff der sittlichen Gemeinschaft" as well as three other Bayer articles were published. Thus, it is likely that he was also aware of these other three articles even though they are never mentioned. Despite the possibility that Kierkegaard was aware of Bayer's other works, one can only reasonably assume that Kierkegaard read and studied "Der Begriff der sittlichen Gemeinschaft." It may be possible to make a more definite statement about this topic by examining Kierkegaard's own copy of Bayer's other articles in *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und spekulative Theologie* volumes 10, 11, and 18. Depending on the markings in the text, if there are any, one could determine more precisely if Kierkegaard examined Bayer's other articles in more detail than I suggest here. Unfortunately, I have been unable to find these resources since they were sold to a second-hand bookseller in Copenhagen after Kierkegaard died. I do not know of any way to determine more fully whether Kierkegaard read Bayer's other work, *Die Idee der Freiheit*, since Kierkegaard did not own the text.

specific three-fold structure of Kierkegaard's dialectic of community is structurally similar to Bayer's three-fold classification in "The Concept of the Moral Community."<sup>10</sup>

For both Bayer and Kierkegaard, the free individual who is able to enter into a social relationship is the central feature in the structure of community. This notion of a free individual is undermined in both mechanical and organic forms of unity because both of these types of unions lack a developed notion of this free individual.<sup>11</sup> On the one hand, Bayer thinks that mechanical views of community, such as an account of human community based solely in terms of economic laws and principles, improperly conceive of these free individuals as mere parts of the whole. On the other, Bayer asserts that "organic" theories of communities where solidarity arises out of "common values" minimize the relative importance of the individual. Bayer directly asserts that the "space" of community is the individual, and that the individual is essential if one is to achieve a genuine sense of unity.<sup>12</sup> No shared end, territory, language, values, etc. supplant free individuals as the ground of community. In Kierkegaardian language, solidarity in this sense is only in the "externals" rather than a product of "inward deepening." Kierkegaard is very sympathetic to Bayer's critique of organic theories of unity as is evident in his criticism of Grundtvig's emphasis on Scandinavian nationalism and "common values."<sup>13</sup>

These similarities, however, only indicate broad agreements between Kierkegaard and Bayer. The structural similarities between Bayer's threefold classification of the

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<sup>10</sup> Bayer, "Der Begriff der sittlichen Gemeinschaft," p. 80.

<sup>11</sup> Bayer, "Der Begriff der sittlichen Gemeinschaft," p. 74.

<sup>12</sup> Bayer, "Der Begriff der sittlichen Gemeinschaft," p. 83.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *JP* 4, 4121 / *SKS* 20, 193, NB2:131. Bayer's criticism of an organic community also functions to undermine virtually any inherently teleological notion of community where individuals are united together insofar as they have a common commitment to some idea or goal. A similar criticism is operative in *A Literary Review*. *TA* 61-64 / *SKS* 8, 61-62

different forms of being-together and Kierkegaard's dialectic of community reveal Kierkegaard's use of Bayer even more clearly. Bayer's threefold classification of "*Beziehung, Bezug, Einheit*" represents different forms of being-together, and the development from connection to unity constitutes Bayer's dialectic of community. "Connection" (*Beziehung*) is the type of relation that is merely externally in nature, and Bayer gives the example of a planetary system where entities are related to one another simply because they are on the same planet.<sup>14</sup> "Relation" (*Bezug*), for Bayer, is the relationship that exists in a living community. Within this type of community, there is a unifying principle which directs all of the members of the community toward the same ultimate end.<sup>15</sup> The common end unites the members of the aggregate, and if the members are aware of the common end then this form of being-together would most closely resemble Bayer's description of organic unity, but if they are unaware of the shared end, then it more closely resembles mechanical unity. Although Bayer does not say this explicitly, he seems to have animal communities in mind, i.e., an ant colony or a wolf pack when discussing this form of being-together. Presumably animals do not think about why they are united in the common endeavor to protect and provide for one another, in which case this form of being-together would most closely resemble mechanical unity. The final type of community is characterized by a relationship of "unity." This type of community is the only fully realized and genuine community. Bayer says that this type of community is realized in the realm of spirit. It is the moral-spiritual community grounded in the free acts of its members.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Bayer, "*Der Begriff der sittlichen Gemeinschaft*," p. 80.

<sup>15</sup> Bayer, "*Der Begriff der sittlichen Gemeinschaft*," p. 81.

<sup>16</sup> Bayer, "*Der Begriff der sittlichen Gemeinschaft*," p. 81.

There are two things I would like to point out about this notion, which Kierkegaard seems to stress as well: first, there is an ambiguity about the relationship between the moral and the spiritual at least in regards to the community. It is not clear how to distinguish the moral realm from the spiritual. It could be that adequate moral practices would suffice to establish a moral-spiritual community, or it may require more concrete religious practices. Kierkegaard maintains this ambiguity in some places as well, e.g., in *A Literary Review* he claims that to be religiously educated is to “become essentially human in the full sense of equality.”<sup>17</sup> Second, autonomy is a key characteristic of Bayer’s concept of community. Although it is lacking in the planetary system or a pack of animals, it is a constitutive character of human community. Kierkegaard stresses this same concept by arguing that the individual is higher than the relation in the third stage of community and that a decision on the part of the whole can limit one’s freedom and call into question the extent of one’s freedom.<sup>18</sup>

Kierkegaard’s three stages of community express his view about the essential connection between the development of individuals and the development of community. In the first stage, the relation to others is more important than the individual (as in the relation of parts of the body to the whole). In the second stage, the individual and the relation to others are equally valued (as in the relation of “earthly love”). The first stage is comparable both to Bayer’s organic view of, whereas the second stage is comparable to Bayer’s mechanical view of community. In Kierkegaard’s final and third stage, the individual is more important than the relation to others. Kierkegaard’s explanatory

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<sup>17</sup> *TA* 88 / *SKS* 8, 84-85. Though Kierkegaard’s concept of “equality” is deeply religious in the sense that God-relation or the possibility of the God-relation is the ground of human equality.

<sup>18</sup> *TA* 85 / *SKS* 8, 81-82.

comment about the third stage, however, suggests that there is still no ultimate conflict between the individual and the community. He writes, “The individual is primarily related to God and then to the community, but this primary relation is the highest, yet he does not neglect the second.”<sup>19</sup> This is a very odd claim, since as many have pointed out, if one is fundamentally related only to God, then all relations to others are merely secondary, i.e., God could require that an individual give up her relationships with others.<sup>20</sup> Although this view is no longer the standard view among Kierkegaard scholars, it is still operative in many contexts.<sup>21</sup> In the next section, I address this sort of concern by using Kierkegaard’s dialectic of community as a model for constructing an interpretation of the nature of the social relations and their importance in Kierkegaard’s authorship.

#### *4.1.B. Self and Others in Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of Community*

Kierkegaard’s description of the dialectic of community displays much more complexity and development than ordinarily assumed. Within this short journal entry, one sees aspects of his overall theory of community as well as a historical connection between developments within German social philosophy.<sup>22</sup> Most importantly, however, this journal entry provides an interpretative framework for understanding the role of community in Kierkegaard’s overall authorship. I maintain that this entry is instructive in

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<sup>19</sup> *JP* 4, 4110 / *SKS* 18, 283, JJ:430.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Martin Buber’s critique of Kierkegaard in “The Question to the Single One,” in *Between Man and Man*, trans. by Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: MacMillan 1948) pp. 46-93.

<sup>21</sup> This view is perhaps the dominant lense through which Kierkegaard is filtered when he is taught to philosophy and religion students in the U.S., and it reinforces the common conception of Kierkegaard as not only an antipode of Hegel, but also a critic of any form of sociality or community.

<sup>22</sup> This entry shows that Kierkegaard appropriates concepts and ideas from a Karl Bayer, who is a student of Hegel. Thus, there is some connection between Kierkegaard’s own views of sociality and Hegel’s. Establishing theoretical connections between the larger developments within German social philosophy, and Kierkegaard’s thought requires a more detailed analysis.

establishing the connection between the early, middle, and later authorship, and furthermore that the middle period where Kierkegaard explicitly and primarily thematizes questions of human relationships and community has its own internal developmental structure. In Section 4.2 through Section 4.4, I will discuss how three prominent works of the middle period deal with the subject matter by developing the insights from the previous works of the period. That is to say, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* builds on the results of *A Literary Review*, and *Works of Love* takes up where *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* leaves off. I will now outline Kierkegaard's three stages in the dialectic of community as it pertains to each of these three works. Each stage involves a choice such that the individual and the community are both progressively developed.

The first stage, where the individual is inferior to the relation, is where one initially finds oneself. A person comes to consciousness already, for instance, a member of a family or perhaps even as a member of public. When one first considers one's relationships with others, one is already within a social relation that privileges the relation over the individual. This form of existence lacks a developed concept of self; the one living in this form of existence has no self in the Kierkegaardian sense. The choice that confronts the individual is whether one's self is determined by external factors such as one's feelings, environment, etc., or whether one makes a choice to be a self, to be an individual. This choice is not a necessary result of one becoming conscious of one's predicament, though becoming conscious of one's situation is a necessary condition for choosing to be a self. Furthermore, the choice to be a self in this stage does not have any particular content; it does not matter what sort of self one chooses to be, though the

second and third stages deal with this question; but if one does remain selfless, then one's entire existence is determined by external, contingent factors.

The second stage begins in the position of the egoistic self who looks to provide for nothing higher than oneself or one's own (one's family, friends, etc.). The choice here is whether the individual will pursue some end higher than him- or herself or remain committed to those ends justified only in terms of self-interest. Everyone is equal in this stage, insofar as everyone is thought to be (or rather it is presumed that they should be) egoistic, rational actors. For Kierkegaard, the highest possible "something" to which one could be devoted is God, though there are certainly numerous other ends one could pursue. Still whatever these other ends may be, it is crucial, if one indeed chooses to pursue an end higher than oneself, that the end is chosen for some reason other than mere self-interest. Here the self develops a higher degree of agency, insofar as an individual's actions are not determined solely out of self-interest. But if one chooses to remain in the second stage, the self is modeled on others. Aping the interests and desires of others forms the self. That is to say, one's desire for objects is derived from the desires of others just as one's own desires are partly constitutive of the desires of others within this stage of being. Modelling the behaviors and desires of others is precisely what leads to the Hobbesian "war of all against all." Not only is the use-value of an object fixed by one's relation to others, but many objects are desired not primarily for their use-value but because they are valued by others. Once again, as was the case with the choice to become a self, the choice to appropriate freely some end higher than one's own self is not the necessary result for all who find themselves in this situation.



The third stage is the position of the person who has chosen to dedicate oneself to God. As such, the individual's relation to God has primacy over the relation to others. Although this is the highest stage, there is also a choice that presents itself within this stage. And just as in each previous stage, autonomy and agency play a central role. Will the God-relation render one incapable of having relationships with others, or will it overflow and make one more responsible for one's frame of mind and relationships to others? Guilt plays a central role in a person's response to this question. Will one's failure to live up to the moral or religious ideal isolate and alienate oneself from others and even oneself, or will it spur one to strive even more strenuously toward the ideal? For Kierkegaard, the latter choice represents a more developed form of selfhood such that the individual is responsible for one's relationship to others, even though the individual may not always fulfill those responsibilities.

Autonomy and choice, freedom and responsibility, are shot through each of these stages. The development of the self is the key feature of each stage such that the self-less (rather than the self-denying) individual becomes, first, a self-seeking egoist, and then a self who appropriates a higher purpose. This higher purpose then heightens one's responsibilities toward others. No stage necessarily develops to the next one, but in each one, a person is confronted with a choice that will radically change one's perspective on oneself and others. This account maps nicely onto Kierkegaard's dialectic of community, and it coheres well with the role of autonomy within Bayer's "moral-spiritual community." One can also find this sort of development in the progression from *A Literary Review* through "On the Occasion of a Confession" to *Works of Love*. In the next

three sections, I will show how each of these works provide support for the tentative outline presented here.

#### ***4.2 The Individual and Sociality in A Literary Review***

*A Literary Review* is a book review of *Two Ages* written anonymously by Christine Gyllembourg-Ehrensvaard, the mother of J.L. Heiberg, a member of Copenhagen's cultural elite. Kierkegaard was greatly attracted to the book for theoretical and aesthetic reasons. The book tells the story of people whose lives spanned the end of the 18th century and the "present age" in the early- to mid-19th century. The former age represents a passionate age where action reigned over reflection and indecision. The French Revolution is the archetype of the passionate age. The present age, on the other hand, is dominated by reflection, envy, and indecision. Committee meetings and theoretical discussion are preferred over genuine action. Kierkegaard portrays the former age in a more positive light than the present age, but the present age does have a positive upshot even though it is in itself negative.

*A Literary Review* is also Kierkegaard's most concentrated attempt at describing the relation between individuals and political phenomena. Section A outlines Kierkegaard's account and explains why the present age is unable to regress to a previous form of communal life, say antiquity. The situation Kierkegaard describes is one where the ties that once bound us together, such as clan, tribe, nation, etc., no longer function. In their place, there is an amorphous "public" which both includes and excludes everyone. I conclude in section C by examining Kierkegaard's description of the benefits of the public and the present age, his generally negative portrayal of the same notwithstanding.

#### 4.2.A. *Types of Societal Relations*

In his first characterization of society, Kierkegaard develops his concept of the public through a consideration of three different types of societal relations. The first, he says, is that which is found “[w]hen individuals (each one individually) are essentially and passionately related to an idea and together are essentially related to the same idea, the relation is optimal and normative.”<sup>23</sup> In this conception individuals are related to one another through some medium, i.e., the same idea, and this medium constitutes the connection between the members of the aggregate. This sort of union is “optimal” because it recognizes the diversity of the members insofar as each of the participants is an individual him- or herself, and it recognizes the unity in the relation to the ideal. Although Kierkegaard does not explicitly say so, he seems to think that the binding together of clan, tribe, or nation in the past exemplifies this form of society even though it may seem odd to 21st century ears to hear the structure of clan, tribe, and nation described as “optimal,” “normative,” and as recognizing the diversity of its members.<sup>24</sup>

Kierkegaard contrasts this notion with two other alternative notions: first, it could be that instead of individuals relating themselves to the same idea, the aggregate as a whole, the masses, are devoted to the same idea. This notion, however, is problematic because “we get violence, anarchy, riotousness.”<sup>25</sup> Since it is the masses rather than individual that are related to the idea, there is no respect for the diversity of individuals,

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<sup>23</sup> *TA* 62 / *SKS* 8, 61.

<sup>24</sup> In Section 4.2.B. I argue that Kierkegaard does not intend to defend a return to these sorts of societies. Although the language is laudatory, Kierkegaard does not envision that a return to these forms of societies is possible or preferable. Kierkegaard’s failure to criticize these types of societies should not be understood as an endorsement; in fact, his proclamation of the benefits of levelling and the public as described in Section 4.2.C. illustrate implicitly his criticism of these types of societies.

<sup>25</sup> *TA* 63 / *SKS* 8, 61.

and the result is violence against the one outside the masses. Although this may sound like an accurate description of some political phenomena today, and although Kierkegaard is critical of this sort of relation, it is not the object of Kierkegaard's primary criticism.<sup>26</sup> Rather, it is directed at a third type of relation where the masses, rather than individuals, fail to be related to any idea. Thus, there are neither individuals nor are there ideas. The result, Kierkegaard tells us, is "crudeness," which is pointless externality, mere custom, levelling, and it also blocks any further access to a unifying and shared idea by which one could solidify a community. In other words, it precludes the possibility of returning to forms of society exemplified in his first characterization of society above. In such a situation there is neither respect for the diversity of individuals nor is there unity since there is no shared idea.<sup>27</sup> The majority of the third part of *A Literary Review* is directed against this third conception.

#### *4.2.B. The Impossibility of Retrieving a Unifying Idea*

The second account of the development of community or society is really a three-term "dialectic" of antiquity, Christendom, and the present age. In antiquity, Kierkegaard says that the culmination of the dialectic was in the eminent. The great individual is produced by the crowd, and the great individual then educates the crowd. Christendom is grounded in representation where the people see themselves in their representative. And finally, the present age is based in equality with levelling as the primary vehicle for

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<sup>26</sup> Kierkegaard does not think that this is an accurate characterization of modern society. A genuine aggregate where a crowd forms is absent in modern society. If he were rewriting the work in our present age, it would be fascinating to see a study of how the second and third views relate to one another. What is the result when there is no shared idea but there are multiple ideas that are shared by ideological groups, and an attempt is made to institute such an idea as normative for the whole? Kierkegaard criticism of sects, schismatic movements, and characterless reformers suggests that he would find it problematic.

<sup>27</sup> *TA* 63 / *SKS* 8, 61-62.

producing “the negative unity of the negative mutual reciprocity of individuals.”<sup>28</sup> The final culmination of each stage respectively is the great individual, the representative, and “negative unity.” It is a negative unity because it is purchased at the expense of individuality. “The category ‘generation’ [is placed] over the category ‘individuality’.”<sup>29</sup> Kierkegaard primarily compares the first and the last stages, antiquity and the present age. The members of the crowd determined the worth of the great individual in antiquity. Whereas in the present age, there is no distinction between individuals, one merely needs to be in the majority or to be represented by public opinion in order for one’s views to have merit.

One way to read Kierkegaard’s critique of the present age is as a sort of nostalgia for antiquity. If one could only recapture the communal spirit of antiquity and really be directed toward some shared goal, then the public, the numerical, and the present age would lose its strength. Kierkegaard even suggests just this at various points. He says that in a passionate age, natural relationships are restored such that people have felt connections between them.<sup>30</sup> He also claims that the lack of a strong communal life is what allows for the rise of the press and the abstraction “the public.” Since the public is made of particular numerical units rather than genuine individuals, those units can never experience genuine unity and they can never create a community. A common relation to a

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<sup>28</sup> *TA 84 / SKS 8*, 81.

<sup>29</sup> *TA 84 / SKS 8*, 81. It is somewhat confusing to me that Kierkegaard refers to both Christendom and the “present age” as being present. I suspect he means that his society is in a transitional stage from Christendom to what will become the present age. This notion would explain Kierkegaard’s “prophecies” toward the end of *A Literary Review*.

<sup>30</sup> *TA 65 / SKS 8*, 63.

shared idea on the other hand, Kierkegaard says, would preclude the rise of such a monstrosity.<sup>31</sup>

Although Kierkegaard may have some sort of nostalgia for the past and certainly had negative experiences with the press of his day, he by no means thought a return to the model of society in antiquity was possible. Not only is access to the idea blocked, since any attempt to produce a unifying idea would be levelled (cf. Kierkegaard's claim that the idea is blocked in his initial characterization of the development of society), but Kierkegaard also explicitly states that it is "very doubtful... that the age will be saved by the idea of sociality, of association."<sup>32</sup> In the present age, people would rather watch, reflect, envy, and criticize any proposed idea rather than participate in its promotion and development. This sociological condition makes a return to past notions of communal identity impossible.

Furthermore, Kierkegaard thinks that it is only through levelling that the split between inwardness and externality or publicity is achieved, and this split is a necessary condition for the development of the individual. It opens the path to a new type of relationship grounded on the existing individual. In the next section, I discuss Kierkegaard's defence of the public in its production of individuals.

#### *4.2.C. The Importance of the Public in the Production of The Individual*

Kierkegaard's diagnosis of the problem of the present age is that people are related to one another in a sort of false relation in the public and it is impossible for our society to return to the communal idea of old. The public is not a real connection between

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<sup>31</sup> *TA 91 / SKS 8, 87.*

<sup>32</sup> *TA 106 / SKS 8, 100-101.*

people like family, tribe, or even nation.<sup>33</sup> Individuals are only united through an imaginative construction in the various forms of media. The “union” requires no work, no sacrifice, and no genuine social interaction with actual persons. The way to move beyond the public and levelling is for there to be genuine individuals who do not need a unifying idea. It is interesting that Kierkegaard never directly portrays this as a fourth sort of relation in the opening pages of the third part of *A Literary Review*, and I suggest it is because he presents it as the solution to the problem of the present age, the problem of the crowd, of levelling.

The third category, where there are neither individuals nor unifying ideas, is what gives rise to the public and levelling in *A Literary Review*. Levelling, Kierkegaard says, is produced when the “friction that occurs when the separateness of individual inwardness of religious life” is absent.<sup>34</sup> If differences between individuals are non-existent or ignored, then the result is that any difference is eliminated through a process of levelling. For levelling to take place, there must be a “public”.<sup>35</sup> The concept of the public is a distinctively modern phenomenon where particular human beings are merely connected in the abstract, for example, in public opinion. “[T]he public,” Kierkegaard writes, is “made up of unsubstantial individuals who are never united or never can be united in the simultaneity of any situation or organization and yet are claimed to be a whole.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Nation would in contemporary society be a false sort of relation as well. Rather than contemporary forms of nationalism, I have in mind city-nations in Ancient Grecian society, e.g., Athens, Sparta, etc.

<sup>34</sup> *TA 87 / SKS 8*, 83-84.

<sup>35</sup> I am not claiming that diversity is respected when there is no concept of the “public”. In fact, Kierkegaard’s second account of society in Section 4.2.A. where the crowd is as an aggregate driven by a shared idea is portrayed as destroying diversity. The public, however, is more invidious in that it gives the impression of diversity while eliminating it.

<sup>36</sup> *TA 91 / SKS 8*, 87.

Although Kierkegaard's description of the public and its implication for genuine individuals is bleak, he does ultimately conclude that the development of the public in the present age contains within it the possibility of producing "a religiously educated" individual who is able to make a stand against even the whole world.<sup>37</sup> The lack of both a proper respect for the individuals and an adequate conception of a unifying idea for the aggregate is what gives rise to the public. The public by its very nature precludes any further access to a unifying idea since the idea itself would collapse under the weight of the public. The only solution to the problem of the public, then, is to retrieve the individual.

Levelling, Kierkegaard says, makes "... it such that every individual, each one separately, may be religiously educated in the highest sense by the rigorous examination of levelling."<sup>38</sup> The very principle which levelling undermines, that is to say the principle of individuality uses the process of levelling itself "and thereby religiously develops the cooperating individual into an essential human being."<sup>39</sup> By finding an eternal or religious perspective, one is able to escape the temptation of the public, and this eternal perspective is what makes one an essential human being. To be religiously educated, according to this passage, is identical with becoming an essential human being. In fact, Kierkegaard explicitly makes this claim: to be educated means to become an "[essential] human being in the full sense of equality. This is the idea of religiousness."<sup>40</sup> To be satisfied with oneself and one's relation to God which in turn forces one to make up one's

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<sup>37</sup> *TA 106 / SKS 8, 100-101.*

<sup>38</sup> *TA 87 / SKS 8, 83-84.*

<sup>39</sup> *TA 89 / SKS 8, 85.*

<sup>40</sup> *TA 88 / SKS 8, 84-85.*



own mind rather than submitting to the will of the public portrays a state of affairs that is possible, though difficult to attain, for each and every human being. This form of existence is possible only as a result of the public and levelling. Thus, the public and levelling turn out to have a positive consequence.

The choice to be an individual – to not merely be an anonymous member of the public – confronts the individual. The existence of the public and the practice of levelling forces the question upon the individual. In this way, the situation as described in *A Literary Review* exemplifies the first choice outlined in Section 4.1.B. If one never extricates oneself from the public, then one’s beliefs and even one’s entire life is always determined by the public. Since an individual is the determining factor in one’s self and one’s beliefs, one cannot simultaneously be merely a member of the public and an individual.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, the nature of the individual is ambiguous; in a certain respect the individual is cut off from “others” represented in the public, but this individual’s existence has a deeply rooted social conscience, which is manifested in the desire to see others become individuals.<sup>42</sup> The social conscience of the individual becomes more prominent in Kierkegaard’s next work, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, and it does so from the perspective of the single individual.

#### ***4.3 The Social Responsibility of the Confessor***

*Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, which includes the abnormally long “On the Occasion of a Confession,” is a series of religious discourses on various topics. They are edifying discourses meant to enliven and strengthen Christian believers. “On the Occasion of a Confession” considers the role and importance of confession and preparing

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<sup>41</sup> *TA* 92 / *SKS* 8, 88.

<sup>42</sup> *TA* 108-109 / *SKS* 8, 102-103.

for confession on the part of individual Christian believers. The primary focus of the discourse concerns the process of becoming a single individual by means of unconditionally willing the good in truth. It is only through being a single individual, alone before God, and knowing the demand of unconditionally willing the good in truth that one can be adequately prepared for confession

In order to understand not only Kierkegaard's account of confession but also how it is that single individuals can relate to one another, one must first understand Kierkegaard's account of what it means to have "purity of heart," which is accomplished by "willing one thing" or "willing the good in truth," which are two ways of saying the same thing. "Double-mindedness," a term Kierkegaard draws from James 4:8, is really another term for sin, and it is willing the good plus something else. To be double-minded is essentially to have two wills that are or could be in conflict with one another. Kierkegaard illustrates what it means to have purity of heart by contrasting willing one thing with double-mindedness. In many respects, Kierkegaard's presentation of willing one thing and his criticism of double-mindedness is similar to Kantian deontology. To will one thing, to will the good in truth, requires that one "do everything for the good."<sup>43</sup> Although this characterization alone does not show the Kantian character of willing one thing, the contrast between willing one thing and being double-minded shows a deeply Kantian aspect of Kierkegaard's comprehensive ethico-religious thought in "On the Occasion of a Confession."

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<sup>43</sup> *UDVS* 79 / *SKS* 8, 185.

Kierkegaard claims that “the good is unconditionally the one and only thing that a person may will and shall will, and is only one thing.”<sup>44</sup> In all cases of double-mindedness there is a possible conflict between one’s willing the good and another desire or will to something else. To will the pleasures of the world, i.e., sensuous pleasure, wealth, honor, or power, is double-minded since pursuing the good can conflict with flourishing in each of these respects.<sup>45</sup> To will that which is great, no matter whether it is good or evil, is also double-minded.<sup>46</sup> To will a specific task or goal, e.g., winning one’s beloved, is double-minded insofar as winning the beloved may be best accomplished through immoral means.<sup>47</sup> To pursue the good solely because of the reward one receives for pursuing the good is double-mindedness if the “reward” is itself not intrinsic to the good pursued.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, to avoid evil and to will the good merely out of a fear of punishment is double-mindedness.<sup>49</sup> To will the good so that the good may be victorious in the world is also double-mindedness since a person’s commitment to the good is conditioned by its successfulness.<sup>50</sup> All of these cases are examples of double-mindedness or failing to have purity of heart, but the most common form of double-mindedness is to will the good but only to a certain degree.<sup>51</sup> Weakness of the will is an example of this form of double-mindedness since hardship, temptation, difficulty, or suffering may alter a person’s commitment of pursuing the good unconditionally and

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<sup>44</sup> *UDVS* 25 / *SKS* 8, 139.

<sup>45</sup> *UDVS* 26-27 / *SKS* 8, 140-141.

<sup>46</sup> *UDVS* 30 / *SKS* 8, 143.

<sup>47</sup> *UDVS* 35 / *SKS* 8, 148.

<sup>48</sup> *UDVS* 37 / *SKS* 8, 149.

<sup>49</sup> *UDVS* 44 / *SKS* 8, 156.

<sup>50</sup> *UDVS* 60 / *SKS* 8, 169.

<sup>51</sup> *UDVS* 64 / *SKS* 8, 172.

without reservation. Compromise, at least as it pertains to pursuing the good, is also an example of this type of double-mindedness. In all of these cases, it is possible to distinguish willing the good and willing one's own happiness, wealth, reward, etc.<sup>52</sup> In order to have purity of heart, one must will one thing – that is, one must will the good in truth. This means, for Kierkegaard, that one's commitment to the good must be active in all times and places, effective for all of one's relationships, and it must be retained without compromise or condition. There can be no evasion of one's responsibility to will the good. This standard is the one used in preparation for confession.

Although there is a much more lengthy description of one's obligations to others in "On the Occasion of a Confession, the situation of the confessor as a single individual can be understood as an instance of the more general description of the single individual found in *A Literary Review*. Kierkegaard's description of the public and his criticism of its merely numerical strength in the latter is similar to his attempt to isolate the single individual from the crowd in the former.<sup>53</sup> He presents that single individual as a person who is fundamentally alone. Not only is there a "remoteness of separation"<sup>54</sup> in the single individual's understanding and inwardness, but "other people" are presented as obstacles one must overcome in order to be an actual single individual and in order to will one thing. The desire to be in accord with the numerical, the crowd, is presented as double-

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<sup>52</sup> This argument concerning the good is similar to G.E. Moore's in his *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959).

<sup>53</sup> Although there is much to say for the similarity between the concepts of the crowd and public respectively, there are also dissimilarities. The concept of the public is similar to the concept of the crowd insofar as its strength arises out of the numerical, but the crowd can be unified in relation to an idea which is impossible for the public. By its very nature, the public blocks access to the idea since any attempt to produce a unifying idea would be levelled.

<sup>54</sup> *UDVS 5 / SKS 8*, 121.

mindfulness<sup>55</sup>, and thus, “the good person, if he is also sagacious, will realize that if anything can be done for the good, he must get people separated as individuals. The same people, who as individual are able to will the good in truth, are immediately corrupted as soon as they unite and become many...”<sup>56</sup> The crowd cannot even be used to split up the crowd. “[God] does not want the crowd. He wants only the single individual...”<sup>57</sup> And being a single individual is a necessary condition for willing the good in truth – since one is not even something “definite” unless one extracts oneself from the crowd.<sup>58</sup>

Kierkegaard even goes so far to suggest this as a test of whether one has actually willed the good in truth. You should first make the decision yourself and then determine whether the masses are in agreement with your decision. If they are not in agreement, then you most likely have willed the good in truth.<sup>59</sup>

This image of the individual set against the public and “the whole world” would seem to preclude any sort of genuine human relationships. For these individuals, there can be no shared idea which draws them together because the very nature of the public and the isolated character of human existence in the present age precludes this possibility.

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<sup>55</sup> UDVS 28 / SKS 8, 142.

<sup>56</sup> UDVS 96 / SKS 8, 200.

<sup>57</sup> UDVS 127 / SKS 8, 227.

<sup>58</sup> UDVS 127 / SKS 8, 227.

<sup>59</sup> UDVS 136 / SKS 8, 234-235. The concept of a “test” [*Prøve*] is important for Kierkegaard. I will discuss it later in this chapter when I discuss Kierkegaard’s concept of loving the dead. The first thing to note about a test is that it is not the basis of a decision or determination. One does not, in this context, make one’s decision by looking to what the crowd does and doing the opposite. That would be simply another form of being dependent on the crowd. Rather, Kierkegaard, somewhat facetiously, says that one should first make the decision and then put one’s decision under trial by determining whether it is in accord with the determination of the crowd. If it is not, then this serves as a further test of one’s decision. One first examines and tests the decision in the initial process of deliberation, and then tests it a second time through the medium of others. The second thing to note is that Kierkegaard does not specify how one is to respond if the crowd’s determination coheres with one’s own. The proper response is not to abandon one’s prior decision. Rather one should re-examine one’s motivations and criteria so that one is less likely to be under the control of self-deception.

But finding oneself in this way is precisely the situation found in “On the Occasion of a Confession.” The discourse is about preparing oneself adequately for confession. To do so, one must be “conscious of being a single individual,”<sup>60</sup> and one must compare one’s ethical and spiritual life to the concept of willing the good in truth. Confession, at least within the Christian tradition, is between an individual and God (or God’s representative in the form of a priest); it is not a corporate practice. To be a single individual presupposes that one extract oneself from the crowd, and this question is central to the discourse.<sup>61</sup> Being a single individual is the condition for being adequately prepared for confession. Kierkegaard situates this question within the confines of recognizing oneself as a single individual in one’s relationships with other people.<sup>62</sup>

Such statements, however, conceal an ambiguity within Kierkegaard’s understanding of the relation between the single individual and other people. On the one hand, to be a single individual is to be alone before God, and that is the prerequisite for confession. On the other hand, Kierkegaard explicitly states that one’s relationship with other people should be markedly affected by willing the good in truth. To be aware of oneself as a single individual is to be “...living in such a way that this awareness can acquire the time and stillness and liberty of action to penetrate [*gjennemtrænge*] your life relationships...”<sup>63</sup> This attitude has a number of implications. First, it means that one cannot will the good or be a single individual and ignore the needs of others. When Kierkegaard describes weakness of the will as double-mindedness, he says that the

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<sup>60</sup> *UDVS* 127 / *SKS* 8, 227.

<sup>61</sup> *UDVS* 135 / *SKS* 8, 234.

<sup>62</sup> *UDVS* 129 / *SKS* 8, 229.

<sup>63</sup> *UDVS* 137 / *SKS* 8, 236.

person who is aware of the good and ignores the sufferings of others, even if he or she is also suffering, does not will the good in truth. This person merely wills the good to a certain degree insofar as one is supported by others.<sup>64</sup> Second, it does not require that one withdraw from one's previous life or occupation. Rather one's frame of mind toward other people is shifted such that one's relationships with other people are illuminated and transformed.<sup>65</sup> Kierkegaard discusses the implications of such a perspective for a person in a family, a parent, and even one's everyday social relationships. It is clear from the text that while the crowd is an obstacle to willing the good in truth, it is not the case that all human relationships fall into the category of the crowd. Thus relationships with others may constitute an obstacle to becoming a single individual and willing the good in truth, but they need not.

#### *4.3.A. Relationships Precluded by the Nature of the Single Individual*

In order to clarify which relationships are excluded and which ones are possible for the single individual, I will first discuss those relationships which are ruled out for the single individual who wills the good in truth. Then by means of this negation, I hope to illumine the sort of human relations that are not only consistent with but required by Kierkegaard's description of willing the good in truth. First, Kierkegaard distinguishes these higher forms of human relationships from those who unite in a crowd. Numbering oneself within the crowd prevents one from willing the good in truth, because it precludes one from becoming a single individual. Kierkegaard's criticism of the numerical strength of the public in *A Literary Review* helps clarify his notion here. The crowd is simply a

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<sup>64</sup> UDVS 68-69 / SKS 8, 176-177. Pia Søltoft mentioned this particular passage following the presentation of this paper at the annual August seminar at the Søren Kierkegaard Center.

<sup>65</sup> UDVS 137 / SKS 8, 236.

numerical or physical association and contains no real commitment or connection to other people. There is no unifying idea and there are no individuals within the crowd. The crowd is a sort of totality much like the stars in the sky or nature itself are a totality, but there is no understanding or “mutual agreement” between them.<sup>66</sup>

Furthermore, the sort of social relationships for the single individual, the one who wills the good in truth, are not grounded on some *telos* toward which all the members are directed. This move is anticipated in *A Literary Review* because in the present age there is no access to a shared conception of the good which could unify individuals around some common idea. A common project does not ground these authentic relationships. Unity based on some common goal is but another form of the crowd.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, just as willing the victory of the good is double-minded, in that one separates the good’s victory from whatever the good actually is, so is unity at the level of a common project separate from and often purchased at the expense of an actual commitment to other people.<sup>68</sup> Genuine relationships are not grounded on common causes, some sort of legislative agreement, or even a doctrine which gains adherents.<sup>69</sup> Common goals do not constitute genuine human relationships, and Kierkegaard is also clear that disputes and disagreements do not necessarily preclude relationships. Kierkegaard writes, “A person

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<sup>66</sup> In one passage in “On the Occasion of a Confession,” Kierkegaard presents mutual agreement or understanding as the condition for being in a real relationship. Although this may cause difficulties for some of the concepts developed in some of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous works (e.g., the description of Abraham), it poses no problem for his account of a person’s relationships here. *UDVS* 21 / *SKS* 8, 135-136.

<sup>67</sup> *UDVS* 106 / *SKS* 8, 209.

<sup>68</sup> *UDVS* 60-61 / *SKS* 8, 169-170. It may be that there is some reward for performing the good, and one may be initially blessed to have this worldly rewards connected to willing the good in truth. But one should not perform the action for the sake of the reward though these rewards might be a “formative education” (*UDVS* 35 / *SKS* 8, 147-148.) in developing an ethical consciousness. Likewise, the existence of common values, projects, or concerns may help produce an authentic relationship, but these factors are not the foundation of it.

<sup>69</sup> *UDVS* 97 / *SKS* 8, 201.



can dispute with someone, dispute to the extreme, as long as it is assumed that ultimately there is something common, a unity in something universally human, in paying attention to oneself.”<sup>70</sup> Thus, just as becoming a single individual is a necessary condition for willing the good in truth, so is becoming a single individual a necessary condition for genuine human relationships.

Kierkegaard is also critical of relationships grounded in competition. The first reason given for this criticism is related to his criticism of a teleological form of unity. Since there is no goal to which all must strive and attempt to accomplish, there is no need for comparisons between single individuals. Furthermore, each person, individually, stands alone before God, and thus, any sort of relationship forged through each individual pursuing her own self-interest and thereby promoting the “overall good” is inadequate as an account of human relationships. Any comparison between individuals relative to some goal does not create and sustain a relationship. On the contrary, it is the undoing of a genuine relationship. To compare oneself to another is to make them a standard for judging oneself rather than maintaining the standard of willing the good in truth as the single standard by which one should be judged.<sup>71</sup>

The second choice which confronts a person in Kierkegaard’s second stage of the dialectic of community, i.e., the choice to pursue some higher end than one’s own self, moves beyond a model of society or community grounded in competition and self-interest. Each individual self has very similar, if not the same desires, which are both produced and a product of the competition-based society, and this uniformity of desire is tied essentially to the pursuit of egoistic self-interest (cf. 4.1B.) which results in the

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<sup>70</sup> *UDVS* 127 / *SKS* 8, 226.

<sup>71</sup> *UDVS* 146 / *SKS* 8, 243.

Hobbesian “war of all against all.” That is to say, it is only because of the competition involved in this form of society that a person’s desires, attitudes, and such are appropriated from others in one’s society, and furthermore, the similar attitudes, desires, and the like place others directly in competition with others who share those attitudes and desires.

Alliances are likewise described as being dangerous because of their divisiveness. They can exclude the commoner or the noble, the government worker or the beggar, the wise or the ignorant. They create artificial distinctions between individuals that can often undermine social relations insofar as this “... divisiveness [is] in opposition to the universally human.”<sup>72</sup> Alliances fail to recognize that every person has the ability to become a single individual, a position which Kierkegaard also maintains in *A Literary Review*, and hence has the ability to form commitments as the ground of a social relationship. Alliances are ultimately grounded on some idea which, although it may include a great number of people, also excludes others. Such a union cannot be the ground of a genuine relationship, since the relationship is formed as much, and often times more so, by exclusion as inclusion. The criticism of alliances in “On the Occasion of a Confession” anticipates Kierkegaard’s critique of preferential love in *Works of Love*.

And lastly, the sort of relationship Kierkegaard imagines cannot be some sort of mystical unity where the self is lost in a union with an amorphous other. I do not mean to suggest by this claim that there are not elements in Kierkegaard’s thought that are consistent with losing one self or self-denial. These portrayals, however, do not demonstrate a complete account of Kierkegaard’s thought, particularly the relationship

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<sup>72</sup> UDVS 144 / SKS 8, 242.

between the single individual and other people. Kierkegaard's emphasis on the role of the single one who chooses to will the good in truth suggests a robust notion of the self is fundamental in order for one to be properly related to God and also other people. Without a concept of the self distinct from others, there can be no commitment to another. Such a relation would merely be like the relationship between two parts of a person's body or the relation between, say Mars and Jupiter, and it could not constitute a genuine social relationship.

#### *4.3.B. The Confessor's Responsibility to Others*

Via negation, Kierkegaard has dismissed each of the following forms of relationship as incompatible with willing one thing: 1.) it is not the crowd, 2.) it is not a relationship united through a common commitment to some external end, 3.) it is not grounded in one seeking one's own self-interest in competition with others, 4.) it is not based on a commitment which excludes other people (i.e., loyalty), and 5.) it is not a selfless, mystic relationship. But what is the positive content of the relationship? If all of these sorts of relations are excluded, what exactly is left? What sort of relationship is presupposed by Kierkegaard's description of the confessor's attitude toward others?

Kierkegaard deals with these issues when he describes the most important question for the confessor as "...[W]hat is your frame of mind toward others?"<sup>73</sup> Kierkegaard means to suggest by this question that a person's relationships to others are fundamental in determining one's position vis-à-vis God. This frame of mind is characterized in each of the following ways: being "in harmony with everyone – by willing one thing", wanting "for everyone what you want for yourself", and "doing to

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<sup>73</sup> UDVS 144 / SKS 8, 241.

others what you want others to do to you – by willing one thing.” These images are contrasted with being “divisively in a faction”, being “at loggerheads with everyone and everyone with you”, and wanting “the highest for yourself, [only] for yourself and yours.” Willing one thing where only the good can be willed in truth is what precludes one from being in a faction or at loggerheads with others. It requires that one will the good, and insofar as the good is a shared good (which Kierkegaard maintains in this work), one is in harmony with others. Kierkegaard writes, “This willing [one thing] is the eternal order that orders everything, that brings you in harmony with the dead and with the people you never saw, with strange people whose language and customs you do not know, with all the people on the whole earth, who are blood relatives and eternally related to divinity by eternity’s task to will one thing.”<sup>74</sup> Each of the sorts of relationships, which are excluded in my analysis above, are inverted and described positively. In this discourse, social relationships are established by socially-minded individuals who pursue the good of all. But this passage is perplexing because it seems to imply that not only are one’s relationships to other people in one’s actual social environment transformed, but also that one is “in harmony” or in some sort of relationship with the dead, strangers, foreigners from different cultures and contexts, and ultimately with every single person – past, present and future. Each person is related by the “blood” of eternity, rather than by the blood of our ancestors, inasmuch as we each have (or perhaps had – for the dead person) the same task before us, namely, to will one thing. But in what sense can a living person be in harmony or in a relationship with a person she does not know, from a culture to which she is completely unfamiliar? How

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<sup>74</sup> *UDVS* 144 / *SKS* 8, 241-242.

can one be related or united with a dead person? Unfortunately Kierkegaard does not spell out what he means except to say that one is united in willing one thing. In order to fully understand Kierkegaard's claim that individuals can be related to the dead, it is imperative that this claim be compared with a similar claim made in *Works of Love*. After analyzing Kierkegaard's concept of love, I will return in the conclusion of this chapter to consider the relation to the dead.

#### ***4.4 The Concept of and Obligation to Love***

To understand Kierkegaard's concept of loving the dead, it is essential to examine Kierkegaard's concept of love as expressed in his most lengthy exposition on the topic in *Works of Love*. This work deals with some of the same content found in "On the Occasion of a Confession," though *Works of Love* is more concrete and explicit about how one performs or practices love, in that it gives varying degrees of implicit and explicit instructions in multiple deliberations about how one should go about loving others. In a journal entry, Kierkegaard even comments directly on the relationship between the two works:

Despite everything people ought to have learned about my maieutic carefulness, by proceeding slowly and continually letting it seem as if I knew nothing more, not the next thing – now on the occasion of my new upbuilding discourses they will probably bawl out that I do not know what comes next, that I know nothing about sociality. The fools! Yet on the other hand I owe it to myself to confess before God that in a certain sense there is some truth in it, only not as people understand it – namely, that continually when I have first presented one aspect clearly and sharply, then the other affirms itself even more strongly.

Now I have the theme of my next book. It will be called:

Works of Love<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> JP 5:5972 / SKS 20, NB:118.

In this entry, Kierkegaard not only predicts that people will criticize his new upbuilding discourses, of which “On the Occasion of a Confession” is a part, because it appears to leave out the importance of sociality, but he also expresses his understanding of the relationship between *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* and *Works of Love*. It is only with a proper understanding of one’s status as a single individual who is singularly responsible for doing the good that enables one to develop a more substantive ethic as is found in *Works of Love*. In other words, a person’s social and ethical obligations, as found in, say, *Works of Love*, are implicit though in a different context in “On the Occasion of a Confession.”<sup>76</sup> This understanding of the relationship between the two texts shows that the lack of “sociality” in at least this part of these new upbuilding discourses is merely apparent, and that preparing adequately for confession by having a proper understanding of what it means to will the good in truth requires that one have a deep sense of one’s responsibilities and duties toward others. In order to show the connection between the two works and to further illustrate Kierkegaard most concentrated account of ethics (and I do not mean the so-called “ethical sphere;” rather, this ethic is consistent with and constitutive of the life of the single individual who is “alone before God”) and sociality within this middle period of his authorship, I turn now to a discussion of *Works of Love*.

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<sup>76</sup> M. Jamie Ferreira discusses the relation between *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* and *Works of Love*, and it includes an account of the relationship between “On the Occasion of a Confession” and *Works of Love* in her ““The Next Thing”: On the Maieutic Relations between the Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits and Works of Love” in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* vol. 15, ed. by Robert L. Perkins, Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press 2005, pp. 371-396.

*Works of Love* contains two series of fifteen total “Christian deliberations” which are “in the form of discourses.”<sup>77</sup> They discuss the source and object of love, the practical application of the concept of love in daily affairs, and a number of difficult Biblical passages dealing with the subject. There are two Danish terms *Elskov* and *Kjerlighed* translated as love in English. Kierkegaard regularly contrasts three types of love *Elskov*, *Kjerlighed*, and *Selvkerlighed* in the course of his deliberations where *Elskov* is the normal word associated with love and expressed natural affection. This form of love is ordinarily understood only as requited love that provides a mutual benefit of some form to both participants; *Selvkerlighed* is self-love and it is parasitic of *Elskov* and reduces it to mere love of the self, but *Kjerlighed* purifies and perfects *Elskov*. It is unlimited in scope in the sense that anyone and everyone is the object of one’s love, and the demand to love is not conditioned on reciprocity or mutual benefit.<sup>78</sup> It expresses a universal demand, though the application of the obligation to love may change depending on the needs of the individual, the circumstances of the situation, or even one’s own limitations of means and ability. Kierkegaard’s deliberations on the subject challenge ordinary conceptions of love where little distinction is made between these disparate concepts of love. Although these deliberations are in the form of discourses, they are not discourses since the purpose of a discourse is directly to edify the reader whereas the purpose of *Works of Love* is indirect and analytic, that is to say, through a clarification of these important concepts Kierkegaard hopes to challenge readers and to bring them out of

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<sup>77</sup> *WL* 1 / *SKS* 9, 7.

<sup>78</sup> When I refer to Kierkegaard’s concept of love or simply use the term love without qualification, I will consistently use it to refer to Kierkegaard’s concept of love expressed as *Kjerlighed*, unless otherwise indicated in the text. If I mean to distinguish the two terms, I will also make it explicit in the text usually by referring to another form of love as Hong and Hong do in their English translation of *Works of Love*. The title of the book in Danish is *Kjerlighedens Gjerninger*, literally, Love’s works; and the title gives a good indication of which form of love figures most prominently in the text.

“their comfortable way of thinking.”<sup>79</sup> In order to situate Kierkegaard’s concept of love more precisely, I will discuss the object of love, the duty to love, the role of relationships for the concept of love, and the various manifestations and critiques of preferential love.

#### 4.4.A. *The Object of Love*

The object of love is ordinarily understood as the object of an individual’s affection or desire. In his *Lectures on Ethics*, Kant discusses love, distinguishing it from esteem. He describes love as a feeling which “takes delight in others” and explains that this delight is a “delight in their perfection.”<sup>80</sup> The love relation, according to Kant, differs from “esteem.” “Esteem refers to intrinsic worth; love to the bearing which worth has on welfare.”<sup>81</sup> For Kant, love is a feeling that finds another valuable not because the other is intrinsically valuable but because of the other’s effect on one’s own perceived welfare. Harry Frankfurt maintains a similar position, and he defends the view that love is a subjective feeling that attributes value to the object of love. For Frankfurt, the object of love is valuable to the one who loves because he or she loves it. A person does not love another because it is intrinsically valuable; rather the love is the value-maker for the person.<sup>82</sup> The subjective character of love leads Kant to conclude that one is required to esteem or respect rather than love.<sup>83</sup>

The object of love [*Kjerlighed*] for Kierkegaard is not the object of desire or affection. Rather the object of love is “the neighbor.” Kierkegaard’s initial characterization of the neighbor is grounded on the command to “love your neighbor as

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<sup>79</sup> *WL* 469-470 / *SKS* 20, 211, NB2:176.

<sup>80</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963) p. 135.

<sup>81</sup> Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, p. 135.

<sup>82</sup> Harry G. Frankfurt, *Reasons of Love* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) pp. 38-41.

<sup>83</sup> Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, p. 136.



yourself” (Matt. 22:39). The Danish term *Næste*, translated neighbor, literally means the next one. The word neighbor, Kierkegaard says, is derived from the term “nearest” [*Nærmeste*].<sup>84</sup> Nearness is not described in terms of physical proximity because that would cast love as merely a form of preferential love.<sup>85</sup> Nearness, for Kierkegaard, is understood in terms of an ethical or spiritual proximity. The neighbor “is nearer to you than anyone else.”<sup>86</sup> Kierkegaard understands this claim to mean that the neighbor is ethically just as near as one is to oneself. The concept neighbor is the redoubling of one’s own self; “‘the neighbor’ is what thinkers call ‘the other,’ that by which the selfishness in self-love is to be tested.”<sup>87</sup> The concept of the neighbor recast self-love [*selvkjerlighed*] in terms of others such that a person’s concerns and love for oneself is directed toward others as well as oneself.

Because neighbourly love is to love the “other,” and because it serves as a test of self-love,<sup>88</sup> neighbourly love is primarily a state of mind that in various circumstances will perform particular types of actions out of loving motives. It is “a state of mind” because Kierkegaard maintains that “someone living on a desert island” could mentally conform “to this commandment,” since “by renouncing self-love he could be said to love

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<sup>84</sup> *WL 21 / SKS 9, 28.*

<sup>85</sup> Preferential love will be more fully discussed later, but it is what happens to *Elskov* when *Selvkjerlighed* renders it selfish and self-seeking. In many ways, preferential love is similar to the view I attribute to Kant in the preceding paragraph where love is characterized as being grounded in the beloved’s effect on the lover’s own welfare.

<sup>86</sup> *WL 21 / SKS 9, 28.*

<sup>87</sup> *WL 21 / SKS 9, 29.* It is not clear who Kierkegaard is referring to by the term “thinkers.” Hong and Hong make a reference to Hegel’s section of *Science of Logic* entitled “Something and An Other.” It could, however, just as well refer to a host of other thinkers. Fichte, for example, has a rather detailed treatment of the relationship between self and other in a number of works.

<sup>88</sup> See note 59 of this chapter concerning the concept of a “test” in Kierkegaard.

the neighbor.”<sup>89</sup> This claim shows that the characterization of having the proper “frame of mind” toward others by willing the good in truth coheres with and is directly related to Kierkegaard’s concept of love. In loving the neighbor, one transforms and redirects self-love. But the desert island thought experiment shows that object of one’s love could be no one at all.

Although it is possible, in such extreme circumstances, that one love in the Kierkegaardian sense even if there were no others, that is not the final word about the identity of the neighbor. Indeed, neighborly love could lack an object and still be neighbourly love. But since there is an other, love has for its object the other. Neighborly love could have no object, but practically, one is to love all people. The identify of the neighbor as the “next one” shows that the concept of the neighbor is “a multiplicity, since ‘the neighbor’ means ‘all people.’”<sup>90</sup> The very structure of neighborly love is such that “if there is one other person whom you in the Christian sense love *as yourself* or in whom you love *the neighbor*, then you love all people.”<sup>91</sup> By renouncing, or rather redirecting, self-love toward the neighbor, the object of one’s love is directed to all those who are encountered. The “next one” that one meets or encounters is the object of neighborly love. The result is that if one has encountered only one other person, then only that person is the neighbor, but if one has met millions, then one has millions of neighbors that one is obligated to love.

This claim is difficult to swallow as it multiplies one’s responsibilities beyond one’s imagination. But the most important element in this characterization of love is that

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<sup>89</sup> *WL 21 / SKS 9, 29.*

<sup>90</sup> *WL 21 / SKS 9, 29.*

<sup>91</sup> *WL 21 / SKS 9, 29.* Italics are in the original.

one is to love the person in front of oneself, the next one. This notion imposes a limitation that allows for one to perform works of love toward others rather than being paralyzed with inaction due to the multiplicity of one's neighbors. Although everyone is potentially your neighbor, it is the single one before you that is in fact one's neighbor. The identity of this person, whether it be one's beloved, child, parent, friend, or enemy is unimportant from the perspective of this form of love. Love is not directed at a single person as the object of one's affections or desires; rather it is directed to the one that is encountered whomever that may be.

One has an obligation to love the people one sees. This claim does not mean simply that you love the person before you, but that you find the person before you lovable. Seeing a person is not seeing merely their perfections and excellences nor is it seeing their unworthiness. It is seeing the person as they are. All too often, one looks for the lovable qualities in others and grounds one's relationship to the person on those qualities. Or perhaps one wants to mold the person into an image one has of the person so that the person will be more lovable in certain respects. But this is not loving the person one sees; rather it is loving some image one has of the individual. It is a form of loving oneself. To test the other through some mechanism is also problematic, not inasmuch as it undermines one's fidelity to the other, but insofar as it means that one may never have been bound to the other. To test another's love is not faithlessness within a love-relationship, but the lack of the love-relationship as such. This love, furthermore, is not a childish infatuation with the accidents or quirky traits of the beloved. Rather the defects or problems ought not separate and alienate the two united in love, but the two are to cling together more closely in order to remove the weakness or defect. One, of course,

should wish that the object of love have qualities of “perfection,” yet this focus should not undermine one’s love for the object.<sup>92</sup>

In light of this understanding, it is simply impossible to question whether a person is one’s neighbor. The very first person, as well as each additional person, one encounters is the neighbor. One’s neighbor cannot be confused with anyone else since the neighbor is “all people.”<sup>93</sup> To love one neighbor as a neighbor is from this standpoint equivalent to loving all people since if one encountered any other person, then one is obligated to love them in the same way though it may manifest itself differently in particular cases.<sup>94</sup>

Given that genuinely loving one person as a neighbor, or even renouncing self-love appropriately, entails that one loves all people, it would appear that love is related to a certain common property of all people. Although this notion is accurate to some extent, it fails to capture the entirety of the love relation. Kierkegaard writes,

Just look at the world that lies before you in all its variegated multifariousness; it is like looking at a play, except that the multifariousness is much, much greater. Because of his dissimilarity, every single one of these innumerable individuals is something particular, represents something particular, but essentially he is something else. Yet this you do not get to see here in life; here you see only what the individual represents and how he does it. It is just as in the play. But when the curtains falls on the stage, then the one who played the king and the one who played the beggar etc. are all alike; all are one and the same – actors. When as death the curtain falls on the stage of actuality..., then they, too, are all one, they are human beings. All of them are what they essentially were, what you did not see because of the dissimilarity that you saw – they are human beings.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> This paragraph is a brief summary of Kierkegaard’s deliberation on “Our Duty to Love the People We See.” *WL* 154-174 / *SKS* 9, 155-174.

<sup>93</sup> *WL* 51-52 / *SKS* 9, 58.

<sup>94</sup> *WL* 58 / *SKS* 9, 64.

<sup>95</sup> *WL* 86-87 / *SKS* 9, 92.

This passage expresses two positions that Kierkegaard struggles to maintain: on the one hand, individuals, at least within temporality, are different. They not only have different goals, attitudes, desires, vocations, relationships, and even space-time locations, but they are different in a more fundamental sense as well. Kierkegaard often characterizes this difference in terms of the God-relation which is different, at least on this side of eternity, for everyone. But, on the other hand, Kierkegaard also maintains that underlying this difference is a universal quality of humanity, “which is common to all”, an “eternal resemblance, the likeness.”<sup>96</sup> In this passage, Kierkegaard does not explicitly describe what this commonality is other than it being one’s humanity. He is much more descriptive about the nature of difference or dissimilarity than commonality. He claims that the distinctive characteristic of human beings is that each individual is essentially different and distinct from all others.<sup>97</sup> The relationship between love, difference or dissimilarity, and commonality or universality is of central importance.

Loving the neighbor, Kierkegaard says, does not “abolish dissimilarity, neither the dissimilarity of distinction nor of lowliness; nor has it wished to effect in a worldly way a worldly compromise among the dissimilarities; but it wants the dissimilarity to hang loosely on the individual...”<sup>98</sup> Love is not based on cultural reputation or economic well-being, and one who loves does not dispense his or her love based on differences between people. “[I]t surveys equably all the dissimilarities of earthly life but does not divisively take sides with any single one... [T]here is no temporal dissimilarity, neither the lowest nor the most acceptable in the eyes of the world with which Christianity sides

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<sup>96</sup> *WL 88 / SKS 9, 93.*

<sup>97</sup> *WL 230 / SKS 9, 231-232.*

<sup>98</sup> *WL 88 / SKS 9, 93.*

in partiality.”<sup>99</sup> The one who loves the neighbor sides neither with the rich or the poor; rather, he or she provides what the other most needs according to the individual’s particularity and differences. “To love the neighbor is, while remaining in the earthly dissimilarity allotted to one, essentially to will to exist equally for unconditionally every human being.”<sup>100</sup> For Kierkegaard, love does not determine its object based on differences, but it loves according to difference.

To love according to a person’s distinctiveness or difference is what it means to say that “love does not seek its own.” Rather than being committed to one’s own, one is devoted to the “other’s own.” The one who loves has “eternally forgotten” the distinction between “*mine* and *yours*,” and is “eternally conscious of loving sacrificially” being conscious of oneself as being sacrificed.<sup>101</sup> Kierkegaard contrasts love according to distinctiveness with the rigid domineering person and the small-minded person.

The rigid, domineering person “lacks flexibility, lacks the pliability to comprehend others” and “wants everyone to be transformed in his image, to be trimmed according to his pattern for human beings.”<sup>102</sup> On occasion the strong, domineering person may designate a property of another that is to be valued. This property is valued because the powerful person likes it, but not according to the others individuality. The powerful person does not love according to another’s individuality because that would require that the powerful person not define the object of love.

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<sup>99</sup> *WL* 70-71 / *SKS* 9, 77.

<sup>100</sup> *WL* 83-84 / *SKS* 9, 89.

<sup>101</sup> *WL* 269 / *SKS* 9, 268.

<sup>102</sup> *WL* 270 / *SKS* 9, 269.

Small-mindedness is Kierkegaard's name for those who "could not bear distinctiveness;" They lack the courage, humility, and pride to become a single individual.<sup>103</sup> "The small-minded person has clung to a very specific shape and form that he calls his own; he seeks only that, can love only that."<sup>104</sup> Small-mindedness is an assumed or second nature, not the universal nature of humans as such. It is created through habituation and practices. The small-minded person rejects any differentiation from its norm and only loves others who are small-minded in the same way. Each one sticks to the others for strength and rejects any difference. The commitment to one another is based on common characteristics and mutual self-interest as opposed to loving another according to one's individuality.<sup>105</sup> The resulting alliance of the small-minded results in a conception of true love, friendship, and community that is debilitating and destructive.

The practice of neighborly love itself reveals the commonality between humans insofar as all are the objects of one's love, but the love is manifest according to an individual's dissimilarity or difference. The neighbor is not an exceptional category. It is not a concept which includes some people and excludes others. "[N]o human being exists or has existed who is the neighbor in the sense that the king is the king, the scholar the scholar, your relative your relative – that is, in the sense of exceptionality or, what amounts to the same thing, in the sense of dissimilarity – no, every human being is the neighbor."<sup>106</sup> Insofar as we occupy a particular role, as king, scholar, or relative, we are

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<sup>103</sup> *WL 270 / SKS 9, 269.*

<sup>104</sup> *WL 272 / SKS 9, 270.*

<sup>105</sup> *WL 272 / SKS 9, 270.*

<sup>106</sup> *WL 89 / SKS 9, 93-94.*

not like others, but this is not the case when one is a neighbor. “[I]n being the neighbor we are all unconditionally like each other.”<sup>107</sup> The practice of loving the neighbor identifies the universal scope of the concept. But it requires more than simply teaching about the universality of humanity, it requires that one actually love the one before you. Both the rigid, domineering tyrant and the small-minded coterie fail to appreciate and love the distinctiveness and differences of others. The object of one’s love in the Kierkegaardian sense is recognized and loved according to its distinctiveness and difference rather than in spite of them or while ignoring them.

The object of love is the person one sees and is, therefore, potentially anyone. This conception of the object of love allows one to embrace everyone and yet love each one individually according to the other’s particularity while at the same time not making one person the sole object of one’s love.<sup>108</sup> Although I have spent a few pages discussing the object of love, the result is that in contrast with more traditional notions of love – romantic love or friendship – this form of love is not known distinctively by its object. The object is everyone and no one in particular.<sup>109</sup>

#### *4.4.B. The Duty to Love*

Contrary to Kant, who characterizes love as a feeling rather than as an obligation, Kierkegaard explicitly describes love as an obligation that one voluntarily performs. Kierkegaard frames a major section of one of his deliberations around this thesis: “Only when it is a duty to love, only then is love eternally secured against every change, eternally made free in blessed independence, eternally and happily secured against

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<sup>107</sup> *WL* 89 / *SKS* 9, 94.

<sup>108</sup> *WL* 67 / *SKS* 9, 73-74.

<sup>109</sup> *WL* 146 / *SKS* 9, 148. In this passage, Kierkegaard explicitly contrasts this form of love with love of one’s native land or nationalism.



despair.”<sup>110</sup> Love is free, when it is understood as a duty, in that it is neither the product of mere habituation nor given only in reciprocity. The voluntary character of love, however, does not preclude a desire or need to love others. The form of the obligation is an obligation grounded in an infinite debt toward others, and it is this obligation that places one in a proper love-relation with others. Throughout the remainder of this section, I examine Kierkegaard’s characterization of love as a duty, the requisite concept of freedom related to the obligation to love, and the results regarding one’s relationships to others.

Love is a duty – not merely a feeling or desire. This characterization of love is described in relation to the command “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The “shall” indicates the obligatory character of love which overturns traditional conceptions of love such as romantic love and friendship. Although love has existed through many millennia, the obligation to love transforms love beyond the usual understanding.<sup>111</sup> Kierkegaard considers the case of two people who in love swear fidelity to another whether in friendship or marriage. According to an ordinary understanding of love as a feeling or desire, love swears by something higher than itself – namely an oath or promise. The promise is thought to establish one’s obligation to the other, and it is thought to be more obligatory than love (if there is any notion of an obligation to love). Kierkegaard asserts that this is not the case. There is no conflict between the oath of fidelity and love; love itself is an obligation.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> *WL* 29 / *SKS* 9, 36.

<sup>111</sup> *WL* 24-25, 29 / *SKS* 9, 31-33, 37-38.

<sup>112</sup> *WL* 29 / *SKS* 9, 37.

Because love is a duty, it is a free and voluntary undertaking. Love as a duty removes the influence of contingency and chance on love. Love as an obligation is not established by habit.<sup>113</sup> Habituation is always something contingent and open to the possibility of change whereas an obligation is not subject to such contingencies. Habitual practices among lovers, friends, or any other groups of people are not works of love. Nor is spontaneous love free. It is merely the product of one's emotions and desires, and hence precludes love as an obligation.

The criticism of spontaneous love does not, however, entail that love is to be emotionless or that the truly loving person is the one who never actually commits or binds him- or herself to another. Rather, love is described as “a passion of the emotions” but it is also a “requirement” that must be learned.<sup>114</sup> In fact, love as an obligation is described as a need. “Love is a need, the deepest need, in the person in whom there is love for the neighbor; he does not need people just to have someone to love, but he needs to love people...”<sup>115</sup> Kierkegaard first contrasts the freedom found in love with the emotion or feeling of romance, and then he later contrasts love's freedom with those who refuse to obligate themselves to others.

Regarding the former, Kierkegaard says, “To love without passion is an impossibility.” Nevertheless, Kierkegaard is critical of the poet's conception of love – where love is idolized as inclination – and he concludes that given the poet's conception of love, the poet is “quite right” to conclude that the “command [to] love is the greatest fatuousness and the most preposterous talk...” Love in the Kierkegaardian sense,

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<sup>113</sup> *WL* 37 / *SKS* 9, 44.

<sup>114</sup> *WL* 112 / *SKS* 9, 116.

<sup>115</sup> *WL* 67 / *SKS* 9, 73-74. This passage is an indirect reference and criticism of a claim that Karl Bayer makes in the same article from which Kierkegaard draws his dialectic of community or society.

however, “dethrones inclination and sets this *shall* in its place.”<sup>116</sup> Passion is transformed from being subject merely to the whims of inclination to that which is freely imposed upon oneself. The free choice, however, does not entail that passion, emotions, etc. are negated in love. Rather, they are transformed and set in their proper place under the concept of neighborly love.

Concerning the latter, freedom is expressed in terms of one’s need to love others. Freedom is not exemplified by the one who refuses to bind him- or herself to anything and wanders around wherever he or she is taken. Rather, it is an “expression of the greatest riches to have a need; therefore, that it is a need [to love another] in the free person is indeed the true expression of freedom. The one in whom love is a need certainly feels free in his love, and the very one who feels totally dependent, so that he would lose everything by losing the beloved, that very one is independent.”<sup>117</sup> But love does not mean possessing the beloved. Something is dependent when the “law of existence is outside itself.”<sup>118</sup> Thus, duty is liberating since it is self-imposed. Freedom is not merely the absence of constraints; rather it is established by law which is self-imposed and internalized. “ ‘Only law can give freedom.’ Alas we often think that freedom exists and that it is law that binds freedom. Yet it is just the opposite; without law, freedom does not exist at all and it is law that gives freedom... it is precisely law that makes all equal before the law.”<sup>119</sup> Freedom, then, does not result in the isolation of individuals, but it brings them together. As it is inscribed on a city building in Copenhagen, “By law shall

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<sup>116</sup> *WL* 50 / *SKS* 9, 57.

<sup>117</sup> *WL* 38 / *SKS* 9, 45.

<sup>118</sup> *WL* 38 / *SKS* 9, 45.

<sup>119</sup> *WL* 38-39 / *SKS* 9, 46.

one build the land.”<sup>120</sup> Kierkegaard, as with most 19th century Danes, subscribed to this understanding of freedom, and it lies at the heart of his characterization of love as an expression of freedom and obligation.

Kierkegaard, furthermore, contrasts this notion of freedom instituted through the giving of law with “the proud independence that thinks it has no need to feel loved, even though it also thinks it ‘needs other people – not in order to be loved by them but in order to love them, in order to have someone to love.’ ”<sup>121</sup> Kierkegaard criticizes this particular understanding of “independence.” He asserts that needing another person in this sense is an attempt to promote and gratify one’s self-esteem. Genuine love, “that has undergone the change of eternity by becoming duty” does indeed “feel a need to be loved” rather than just to love others; this need is “eternally in harmonizing agreement with this shall; but it can do without, if so it shall be, while it still continues to love – is this not independence?... Unchangingness is the true independence.”<sup>122</sup> Love is a need in two senses: the individual needs to love others, and there is also a need to be loved by others. But one’s obligation to love is not conditioned or grounded on the performance or love of others. Love would be dependent on others if it ceased when the beloved stops loving.

It is love’s status as a duty that prevents love from changing. It does not change itself, and it also does not stop when the beloved does not love. Kierkegaard goes so far

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<sup>120</sup> *Med lov skal man land bygge.*

<sup>121</sup> *WL 39 / SKS 9, 46.* This quotation in this passage is a direct reference (and it is expressed in quotation marks by Kierkegaard even though it is not cited) to Karl Bayer’s article “The Concept of the Moral Community.” Ironically, in a journal entry (*JP 5, 5883 / SKS 18, 284f., JJ:433*) written relatively close to the writing of *Works of Love* Kierkegaard comments positively on Bayer’s stoical understanding of a person’s “need” for another. But the notion is criticized here in *Works of Love*. The only substantial difference between the understanding and use of the text (other than one being explicitly positive and the other being explicitly critical) is that in the journal entry Kierkegaard discusses the importance of indirect communication in that one should look out for the well-being of others even if it means that they end up hating and despising the one communicating.

<sup>122</sup> *WL 38 / SKS 9, 46.*

as to say that it expresses a stronger form of love to love the one who hates one back. Neighborly love, since it is not based on another performance, merit, rank, etc., also implies that changes can never take the the object of love away. Though circumstances and changes can take away the romantic lover, the friend, etc., according to Kierkegaard, no change, not even death, can take way the neighbor.<sup>123</sup> This claim is interesting, in part because it is a way to understand Kierkegaard's earlier claim in "On the Occasion of a Confession" that the one who wills the good in truth is in some type of relation with the dead, and it serves as a precursor to Kierkegaard's next to last deliberation on loving the dead. Kierkegaard, in contrast to his earlier treatment as well as his later treatment, says that neighborly love does not change even in death, since another neighbor will be given. In the conclusion of this chapter, I will return to consider more fully the duty to love the dead.

But why should one's love remain even if the relationship is terminated? Kierkegaard's response to this question depends on one's understanding of the relationship as well as the form of the obligation to love. On the one hand, Kierkegaard denies that a relationship is ever terminated for the one who genuinely loves. This response is anticipated by his earlier claim that not even death can break the relation between one who loves and another. Nevertheless, it is, of course, possible for one party to think of the relationships as sundered, while the love of the other remains. Kierkegaard contrasts the dyadic contract-like relation of lovers with a triadic relation. In the former, the relationship can be broken if one party breaks the contract. In the latter, however, love itself is the third "participant" in the relation, and for the triadic relation to be broken,

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<sup>123</sup> *WL 65 / SKS 9, 71-72.*

then it requires that one first cease loving not only the other person, but all others as well, since the nature of love is not directed at a single person, nor does it exclude a single person from being the neighbor. So long as a person continues to love, even if the relationship is no longer the same as it was before, then relationship remains, at least insofar as it pertains to this form of love.<sup>124</sup> Kierkegaard, furthermore, says that the one who remains in love does not conceive of the “break” as a break. Rather it is merely an incomplete relationship; it has not yet been finished. It is like a compound word with the second half missing and only a hyphen remaining. The one who abides in love sees the “break” in these terms; through love, the person sees the relationship as one that has not been finished, and the relationship remains, though in a different sense.<sup>125</sup>

On the other hand, the form of the obligation to love is characterized as an infinite debt, and this sort of obligation is unable to be discharged, since it always incomplete and unfinished. One cannot fulfil the demands of the obligation and then dispense with the relationship. “[L]ove is perhaps most correctly described as an infinite debt; when a person is gripped by love, he feels that this is like being in an infinite debt.”<sup>126</sup> The idea is not that we have received love, and are therefore obligated to repay love; Kierkegaard says, “[S]uch talk is all too reminiscent of an actual bookkeeping arrangement: a debt is incurred and it must be paid off in instalments; it is love that is shown to us, and it must be paid off in instalments with love.”<sup>127</sup> One receives the debt by “feeling [oneself] gripped by love” and by loving others.<sup>128</sup> The one who gives love is the one who runs

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<sup>124</sup> *WL* 303-305 / *SKS* 9, 301-303.

<sup>125</sup> *WL* 306 / *SKS* 9, 303-304.

<sup>126</sup> *WL* 176 / *SKS* 9, 176.

<sup>127</sup> *WL* 176 / *SKS* 9, 176.

<sup>128</sup> *WL* 176 / *SKS* 9, 176.

into debt – an infinite debt – rather than the one who received love. This sort of obligation conceives of love as a task and an obligation rather than a mere feeling. This fact, however, does not deny the possibility of reciprocity in relationships; but reciprocity is not pursued for reasons of fairness and justice; rather reciprocity of this type of love is possible only if the love is “infinite from both sides.”<sup>129</sup> That is to say, both parties in the relation must love the other regardless of the other’s love. The relationship is infinite in commitment, asymmetrical from both perspectives, and is not conditioned on the performance of the other.

#### *4.4.C. The Role of Relationships in Kierkegaardian Love*

Kierkegaard’s notion of a relationship is, at the very least, somewhat strange, and at the worst non-sensical. I have already indicated how Kierkegaard believes that not only can one be in a relationship with someone when there is no physical or even virtual contact between the individuals (as in the case of many “break-ups”), but one can also be in a relationship to the dead. Although I will not fully discuss the basis for or implications of this view in Section 4.4.C., I will discuss more ordinary, relationships such as the marriage relation, and I will also contrast one’s relationship to “the others” with Kierkegaard’s characterization of one’s relationship to the community at large. Finally I will consider the importance and characterization of the God-relation in terms of the obligation to love.

Kierkegaard claims that “Christianity transforms every relationship between person and person into a relationship of conscience, this also into a relationship of

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<sup>129</sup> *WL* 181 / *SKS* 9, 181.

love.”<sup>130</sup> This claim is the reason why love is a matter of conscience. To characterize love as a matter of conscience is to remove it from the realm of mere feeling and to make a person understand that he or she is a single individual who is accountable primarily to oneself and to God. The love relation as a matter of conscience has an effect on all human relationships as well as one’s relation to God. In what follows I explain how love understands and transforms some of these relationships.

Perhaps the most important relation to consider is the marriage relation. This particular relation is reflected upon often by Kierkegaard, possibly for merely biographical reasons, but perhaps also because of other reasons. In *Either/Or* it is famously written, “Marry or do not marry, you will regret it either way.”<sup>131</sup> Kierkegaard’s authorship, including not only the pseudonymous authorship but also his other philosophical and edifying works, seems to defend various positions on the marriage question. In some places, it seems as if the authentic Christian life is antithetical to marriage which subverts a person’s singular devotion to God, while in other places, marriage is praised and defended as the result of faith.<sup>132</sup>

Although Kierkegaard does not have an entirely consistent position regarding marriage throughout his authorship, his position in *Works of Love* and also in “On the

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<sup>130</sup> *WL* 137 / *SKS* 9, 139.

<sup>131</sup> *EOI* 38 / *SKS* 2, 47.

<sup>132</sup> *Either/Or* and *Stages on Life’s Way* provide the most extended treatments on marriage. In *Either/Or*, marriage is, from A’s point of view, antithetical to the lifestyle of the aesthete, whereas it is the high calling of Judge William. *Stages on Life’s Way*’s treatment of the subject, however, deals with the subject differently. After a lengthy defense of marriage against the usual objections to marriage, the author claims that he does not say, “that marriage is the highest life; I know a life that is higher...” *SLW* 169 / *SKS* 6, 158. The theme that marriage is antithetical to one’s highest religious vocation is repeated often in the authorship. But there are also a number of passages where marriage is treated in a way consistent with the Kierkegaardian view of faith and religiousness. The marriage relation is defended religiously most powerfully in “On the Occasion of a Confession” and in *Works of Love*. This sort of position is also the implied position when Kierkegaard writes in the journals that if he would have had faith, then he would have married Regine. *JP* 5, 5664 / *SKS* 18, 177, JJ:115.



Occasion of a Confession,” which deals with the subject at some length, shows a commitment to marriage as a justified institution for the faithful Christian. But the love of one’s spouse is to be understood in the context of one’s primary obligation to love one’s neighbor. Love [*Kjerlighed*] for the beloved [*Elske*] must first and foremost be neighborly love, and the fact that the other is the beloved is a further specification of one’s particular relationship to the other.<sup>133</sup> To say this does not imply that one loves one’s spouse in precisely the same way that one expresses love toward others. Love is manifested differently in the various kinds of relationships, and therefore, the marriage relationship will be different than, say, a friendship or being brothers. But love within a marriage must be understood within the framework of neighborly love. To love one’s spouse is not to forego the love of others, and although it may create additional obligations toward one’s spouse, it does not create a higher obligation to love. The change that this conception brings about is not necessarily, or primarily, a change in the external customs, habits, and practices of a couple; rather it is fundamentally an internal change in conscience or in the way one thinks of and understands one’s love for one’s spouse.

This general framework – where love transforms the basis for as well as one’s understanding of a relationship such that the relationship is a further specification of one’s obligation to love, even if there are no external, visible changes in the actual relationship – is applicable to all human relationships. The framework separates the single individual and holds one individually responsible for one’s fulfillment of the obligation to love. It is because of this notion of love, obligation, and responsibility that

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<sup>133</sup> *WL* 141 / *SKS* 9, 143.

Kierkegaard is both critical of a relation to “the others” and also finds a place for community. Kierkegaard is explicitly critical of relationships to others, first, insofar as it evades responsibility, and secondly, when it creates an alliance that includes some people and excludes others. “The others” is a term of derision for Kierkegaard. It signifies evasion of responsibility and the loss of selfhood. Kierkegaard explicitly states that reliance on “the others” transforms “all human life... into one big excuse...”<sup>134</sup> The appeal to the “the others” like the “the public” is antithetical to genuine selfhood. Kierkegaard illustrates the point by saying it is like the case where seven people are accused of a crime that only one of the seven could have committed. Each says that “the others” committed the crime; but then it turns out that each one separately said “the others” did it. The resulting impression, Kierkegaard says, is that it “conjure[d] up a mirage that has multiplied the actual seven in an attempt to fool us into thinking that there were many more, although there were only seven...”<sup>135</sup> The result is that “the others,” “the public,” and “the race” all give the impression that there is some entity that stands apart and that exists independently from the individuals who make it up.

Furthermore, Kierkegaard claims that the rhetoric of love often refers only to loving someone preferentially, such that one is allied with some human beings against others. Kierkegaard discusses the usual understanding of marriage as this sort of love. Marriage understood in this way reveals a love where one’s spouse is loved in such a way that “one has nothing at all to do with other human beings.”<sup>136</sup> Kierkegaard is critical of

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<sup>134</sup> *WL 116 / SKS 9, 119-120.*

<sup>135</sup> *WL 116 / SKS 9, 120.*

<sup>136</sup> *WL 142 / SKS 9, 144.*

“culture” for similar reasons.<sup>137</sup> The cultured or those who desire to be cultured exclude those who are uncultured. Culture has never “taught [the cultured person] to love the neighbor...” but instead it “...develop[s] a new kind of distinction, the distinction between the cultured and the uncultured...”<sup>138</sup> This dissimilarity between persons generates a great division among the people, and even if there is a certain social grace and polite condescension from the cultured ones, this type of relationship is fundamentally at odds with actually loving the neighbor – including the uncultured – as oneself. In both his criticism of a certain understanding of marriage and his criticism of 19th century Danish culture, Kierkegaard draws attention to the dissimilarity between alliances directed against others and neighborly love.

Despite this criticism, there is ample room in Kierkegaard’s ethics of love for community. There is, he says, an “innate need for companionship.”<sup>139</sup> Of course, this need must be understood in its proper context, but many confuse a distaste for “the busy, teeming crowd, which as companionship is both too much and too little” with a distaste for society or community as such.<sup>140</sup> Kierkegaard’s idea of genuine companionship, however, can be constituted by only genuine individuals, rather than people consumed and defined by the crowd or the public. This understanding of community is operative as a background concept in *A Literary Review* and “On the Occasion of a Confession,” but it is expressed explicitly in *Works of Love*. Kierkegaard, in his final deliberation in the work

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<sup>137</sup> The term “culture” in Danish is *Dannelse*. It, like its German counterpart *Bildung*, is a much deeper term than its English translation. It could be translated education, development, or culture. 19th century Denmark is regarded as being the most “cultured” period in Danish history, and Kierkegaard thought the emphasis on this form of culture and education was problematic for the common person.

<sup>138</sup> *WL* 59 / *SKS* 9, 66.

<sup>139</sup> *WL* 154 / *SKS* 9, 155.

<sup>140</sup> *WL* 154 / *SKS* 9, 155. Kierkegaard himself may be subject to this criticism in certain passages.

says that since love is a work pertaining to the universally human as opposed to the various differences among humans, then the praise of love brings all together in the “community of the highest,” since it neither sows dissension between the gifted and the ungifted, cultured and uncultured nor does it unite some in a common poverty or mediocrity.<sup>141</sup> Rather, each individual loves all others as her neighbor, and people are united in virtue of one’s status as a neighbor rather than in terms of one’s commonalities with other human beings, whether the commonalities are religious or political, national or cultural. It is this universal obligation to love as well as the performance of one’s duty that unites human beings in genuine companionship. “Only when all of us, each one separately, receive our orders at one place, if I may put it this way, and then each one separately unconditionally obeys the same orders, only then are there substance and purpose and truth and actuality in existence.”<sup>142</sup>

Despite the language of universality and his account of a common duty to love for all people, this obligation should not necessarily be understood as dictating the specific actions that one takes toward others. When describing the importance of internality versus externality, Kierkegaard says that it is possible for two individuals to do opposite things and yet both be “honest, upright, respectable, God-fearing...” This, he concludes, precludes the possibility that all of one’s obligations find their “completion paganly in political or social life” since if one’s obligations are formed in virtue of one’s legal, political, or social situation then one would have more specific descriptions of one’s obligations to others according to the legal or political code of one’s government, or the

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<sup>141</sup> *WL* 359, 365 / *SKS* 9, 353, 359.

<sup>142</sup> *WL* 117 / *SKS* 9, 121.

social norms of one's society.<sup>143</sup> The multiplicity and differences among persons corresponds to a multiplicity of ways for people to fulfil the obligation to love the neighbor as oneself.

As was the case with the marriage relation, a person's relationships to others as members of one's community are not precluded by the obligation to love. Rather, those relations are transformed and understood in terms of the overall obligation to love the neighbor as oneself. There is a place, then, for ordinary human relationships and community within Kierkegaard's ethics of love, and the changes that his ethics of love are to make are primarily internal, that is to say it changes the way one understands one's relationship with others, rather than external changes in the actual practices or customs within the relationship itself. Changes in practices and customs may occur, but they need not.

Throughout this section, I have been discussing a person's obligations to other human beings. The relationship between one's obligations to others and the God-relation, however, has been largely ignored, even though it is a central concept throughout *Works of Love*. Kierkegaard's understanding of the relation between the God-relation and works of love toward other human beings is described in various ways in different deliberations. In what follows, I will synthesize these descriptions with an eye toward demonstrating that the God-relation does not undermine one's other, human relationships. Kierkegaard's

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<sup>143</sup> *WL* 230 / *SKS* 9, 232. To give one example of what I mean: in some social contexts, it may be obligatory for a man to marry a woman. This norm is held by society, and one is expected, so long as one is able, to be married. So long as the *telos* of this norm is fulfilled only in and through one's society, then anyone who chooses not to marry is considered to have a social, or perhaps even a moral, defect. But, if one's obligation to the other is understood in terms of some higher duty, such as loving one's neighbor, then so long as one's decision not to marry fulfills the obligation, then one is justified and required not to marry. This sort of reasoning seems to be Kierkegaard's (retrospective at least) explanation for his own decision not to marry his fiancée Regine Olsen.

view as expressed in *Works of Love* vindicates the explanatory sentence in the journal entry on the dialectic of community, where he says that the primary relation is to God, but it does not demean other relations.

The God-relation in *Works of Love* is characterized as the “middle term” for neighborly love.<sup>144</sup> This description is used in multiple places with multiple shades of meaning. In one passage, one loves God foremost, and this love of God enables one’s love for the neighbor.<sup>145</sup> In another, equality before God is understood as the middle term such that one’s equality to all other humans before God is that which makes one a neighbor.<sup>146</sup> Expressed another way: Genuine love, Kierkegaard argues, requires threeness - the lover, beloved, and love itself, i.e., God. Without the third element, love itself, Kierkegaard asserts that it is impossible for love to move beyond mere mutuality.<sup>147</sup> In another passage, God is described as the judge who guarantees and upholds an individual’s commitment of love to other people.<sup>148</sup>

When describing the connection between the God-relation and a person’s obligation to love others, Kierkegaard hovers between two extremes. He often emphasizes the importance of the God-relation, and he claims that without having a God-relation, it is impossible for a person to genuinely love another. “The God-relationship is the mark by which the love for people is recognized as genuine.”<sup>149</sup> The claim is that unless one’s love toward another ultimately points the others toward God, then it is not

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<sup>144</sup> *WL* 58 / *SKS* 9, 64.

<sup>145</sup> *WL* 58 / *SKS* 9, 64.

<sup>146</sup> *WL* 60 / *SKS* 9, 66-67.

<sup>147</sup> *WL* 121 / *SKS* 9, 124.

<sup>148</sup> *WL* 190 / *SKS* 9, 189-190.

<sup>149</sup> *WL* 120 / *SKS* 9, 123-124.

genuine love, no matter the level of affection and the quality of one's commitment to the other. Kierkegaard furthermore says, "[T]o help another person to love God is to love another person; to be helped by another person to love God is to be loved."<sup>150</sup> This conception of the God-relation and love for others would, at the very least, seem to preclude the atheist or even the non-Christian from being able to love in the Kierkegaardian sense. But it is important to note that Kierkegaard's most extreme comments of this sort are primarily only found in a single deliberation in *Works of Love* – the third deliberation in the first series entitled "Love is the Fulfilling of the Law."

I do not mean to diminish the significance of Kierkegaard's claims here, but it is also important to read the passages above alongside of Kierkegaard's other, more inclusive passages about the connection between the God-relation and love of one's neighbor. Thus, on the other extreme, Kierkegaard claims that the more one loves the "unseen God" the more one "will love the people [one] sees."<sup>151</sup> The reverse, he says, is not true; it is not the case that the more one rejects those one sees one demonstrates or establishes one's relationship to the unseen. If someone maintains that one loves the unseen God but is unable to love those one sees, then the person, Kierkegaard says, has replaced the merciful God who always points "away from himself... saying, 'If you want to love me, then love the people you see; what you do for them, you do for me... into an unreal something, a delusion.'"<sup>152</sup> Contrary to the usual understanding of many portions of the overall authorship, Kierkegaard claims, "God is too exalted to be able to receive a

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<sup>150</sup> *WL* 107 / *SKS* 9, 111.

<sup>151</sup> *WL* 160 / *SKS* 9, 161.

<sup>152</sup> *WL* 160 / *SKS* 9, 161.

person's love directly, to say nothing of being able to take pleasure in what can please a fanatic."<sup>153</sup>

This transposition of human relationships through the image of the God-relation is not an isolated comment in *Works of Love*. It is a relatively consistent theme, and it is strongly expressed in the conclusion of the book. Kierkegaard claims that a Christian like-for-like, where every single one of a person's human relationships are transformed and made into a God-relationship, has replaced the Jewish Taleonic law.<sup>154</sup> This means, for Kierkegaard, that although "a person ultimately and essentially has only God to deal with in everything," one must still remain "in the world and in the earthly circumstances" to which one is assigned.<sup>155</sup> The transformation of all human relationships into the God-relation by means of the command to love ensures that the one-to-one God-relation does not exclude and dispense with one's obligations and relationships to others. On the contrary, it means that there is an identity established between loving God and loving other people. That is to say, to love people is to love God, and likewise, to love God is to love people.<sup>156</sup> The one-to-one God-relation is described as an educator that ultimately brings it about that the pupil has a proper love-relation to other people. Such a characterization is, of course, ambiguous in that one could be devoted to God in such a way that one does not demonstrate love for others (except perhaps in trying to help others into a genuine God-relation, that is, loving another by proselytizing), or one could dispense with belief and love of God altogether and claim that the only important thing is

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<sup>153</sup> *WL* 160 / *SKS* 9, 161.

<sup>154</sup> *WL* 376 / *SKS* 9, 369.

<sup>155</sup> *WL* 377 / *SKS* 9, 370.

<sup>156</sup> *WL* 384 / *SKS* 9, 376.



that one love others. Kierkegaard's comments on the topic, however, seem to preclude both of these possibilities. Devotion to and love of God is described as being ultimate and essential, and, in *Works of Love*, God is the source of the command to love one's neighbor, and love of God is the motivation behind obedience to the command. This love of God flows over into one's relationships to others, and one's love of others is evidence of one having a genuine or proper God-relation. God is neither to be dispensed with nor are human relationships to be eliminated.

It turns out, then, that the example of marriage is instructive, and the God-relation does not expel and reject these more ordinary social relationships. Although love is a matter of conscience rather than a matter of drives and inclinations, feelings, or intellectual calculation, these features of human life – drives and inclinations, feelings, intellectual calculation, etc. are not supposed to be eliminated. Rather, an internal change – “infinity's change in the inner being” – is sought.<sup>157</sup> External circumstances and institutions may be transformed by the internal change, but it is not necessary that they be changed. For this reason, Kierkegaard is able to claim that Christianity is not indifferent “to friendship, family relationships, to love of the fatherland,” that is to say, to patriotism and nationalism. Instead it is concerned with all of them in a “spiritual way.” The goal is not to change the externals but to “seize [them], purify [them], sanctify [them], and make everything new while everything is still old.”<sup>158</sup>

#### *4.4.D. The Concept of Preferential Love, Its Manifestations, and Kierkegaard's Critique*

Although ordinary human relationships including marriage, friendship, and even patriotism and nationalism are not excluded by love, many of the reasons for entering

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<sup>157</sup> *WL* 143, 139 / *SKS* 9, 141.

<sup>158</sup> *WL* 144-145 / *SKS* 9, 146.

into these sorts of relationships are displaced by love. Kierkegaard's critique of "preferential love" in its many manifestations demonstrates this fact. In this section, I describe the characteristics of preferential love, its various manifestations and forms, and elaborate on Kierkegaard's critique of these forms of love. The result of this analysis is that one has a more distinct picture of what a relationship or union grounded in preferential love is like as compared to a union founded in love as such.

*Works of Love* itself is best understood as an analysis and evaluation of two different understandings of love. First, an attempt is made to clarify and distinguish preferential love, which is ultimately merely a form of self-love in the negative sense, and love itself [*Kjerlighed*]; and second, by means of the command to love, we are to displace and redirect self-love outward toward others.<sup>159</sup> Both erotic or romantic love and friendship are described as forms of preferential love. That is to say, the idea of love in both forms of love is "to love this one person above all others, to love him in contrast to all others."<sup>160</sup> The object, form, and results of preferential love are all fundamentally different from its genuine counterpart. Instead of love being directed toward all others, it is directed singularly at a particular individual or group of individuals rather than other individuals. Instead of love being an infinite debt that never ceases, it is established and maintained only in mutuality. Instead of love transforming one's understanding and perhaps even one's practices regarding the other, the ordinary understandings of romantic love and friendship, for instance, remain the same.

Kierkegaard's most lengthy treatment of an preferential love concerns the examples of erotic or romantic love [*Elske*] and friendship. He claims that passionate

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<sup>159</sup> *WL* 20-21 / *SKS* 9, 28-29.

<sup>160</sup> *WL* 19 / *SKS* 9, 27.

preferential love is ultimately a form of self-love. Self-love “selfishly embraces this one and only *self* that makes it self-love,” and it is, therefore, not other-regarding.<sup>161</sup>

Passionate preferential love, e.g., erotic love and friendship, are likewise interested only in one’s own self even though it may appear otherwise on a superficial level. “[E]rotic love’s passionate preference selfishly encircles this one and only beloved, and friendship’s passionate preference encircles this one and only friend. For this reason the beloved and the friend are called, remarkably and profoundly, to be sure, the *other self*, the *other I*... [and self-love] resides in the *I*, in the *self*.”<sup>162</sup> Although one can seemingly give selflessly toward to object of erotic love or friendship, even give away all of oneself and one’s own, it is still a form of self-love. There is a distinct class of subjects or perhaps one subject who is the object of one’s affection, and the relationships are grounded on the qualities of the person or persons. In itself, Kierkegaard says, admiration for another is not necessarily a form of self-love, but when it is directed at a single object with the expectation that the object of one’s admiration will return the admiration in a singular way, it is a form of self-love.<sup>163</sup>

It is also a form of preferential love when one substitutes an imaginary idea of how one thinks or wishes the other should be for how the other actually is. Such a love is an expression of self-love insofar as one is not loving the other person but instead only loves one’s idea of how the other should be.<sup>164</sup> This sort of love is similar to the rigid, domineering person’s love discussed above, where the beloved or the friend is loved only

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<sup>161</sup> *WL* 53 / *SKS* 9, 60.

<sup>162</sup> *WL* 54 / *SKS* 9, 60.

<sup>163</sup> *WL* 54 / *SKS* 9, 60.

<sup>164</sup> *WL* 164 / *SKS* 9, 164.

insofar as he or she fulfils the wishes and thoughts of the tyrant. The idea of the beloved or friend having a distinct and developed self independently of the tyrant is fundamentally at odds with this sort of love.

Kierkegaard's description of love is often presented as a critique of preferential love. "[T]he spirit's love," he says, replaces "erotic love and friendship [on] the throne."<sup>165</sup> Neighborly love is set against love based merely on drives and inclination. One is forced to choose between practicing preferential love and neighborly love.<sup>166</sup> In the remainder of this section, I will explain two ways in which Kierkegaard's account of love is a critique of preferential love. The first way is that preferential love relies on good fortune or luck. Love is not characterized as a "moral task" since any such task would be determined purely based on one's circumstances and inclinations rather than a universal obligation. To fall in love or to find a great friend "is a stroke of good fortune," and if this is the case, then within the parameters of preferential love there can be no universal command to love – either in the sense of erotic love or friendship – since an individual is not able to fulfil the command if it so happened that the person did not fall in love or find the friend.<sup>167</sup> To conceive of love as obligatory, one must dispense with the notion of preferential love in favor of neighborly love.

But why, one may ask, should love be thought of as obligatory? The issue was primarily addressed in Section 4.4.B. on the duty to love, but Kierkegaard also thinks it reshapes and transforms human relationships in a meaningful and important way. In order to justify this claim, I will examine the type of union possible for preferential love and

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<sup>165</sup> *WL* 44 / *SKS* 9, 51.

<sup>166</sup> *WL* 45 / *SKS* 9, 52.

<sup>167</sup> *WL* 50-51 / *SKS* 9, 57-58.

compare it to the union grounded in neighborly love. There are two major passages where Kierkegaard compares relationships of preferential love to those of neighborly love.

In the first, Kierkegaard claims that there are not two distinct selves in the case of erotic love and friendship. Rather, people only love “each other by virtue of the dissimilarity or by virtue of the similarity that is based on dissimilarity (as when two friends love each other by virtue of similar customs, characters, occupations, education, etc. that is, on the basis of the similarity by which they are different from other people, or in which they are like each other as different from other people).”<sup>168</sup> The union of the two entities forms, according to Kierkegaard, a single self. What Kierkegaard means by this is not merely that the two share the same desires, goals, lifestyle, etc., though these are often the same in these cases, but that the joining together is also such that the more united and joined the two become the more divided and separate the two are from others.<sup>169</sup> The two are one self in the sense that the two only look after the self-interest of the members of the union, and therefore, their love is only self-love expanded to include one other (or a group of others) in distinction from everyone else. They represent a single self as it pertains to love understood as a natural determinant, that is to say, love grounded in drives and inclinations.

Neighborly love does not unite two in the same way that preferential love does, since it presupposes two distinct selves. “[L]ove for the neighbor cannot make me one with the neighbor in a united self. Love for the neighbor is love between two beings eternally and independently determined as spirit; love for the neighbor is spirit’s love, but

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<sup>168</sup> *WL 56 / SKS 9, 63.*

<sup>169</sup> *WL 56 / SKS 9, 63.*

two spirits are never able to become one self in a selfish sense.”<sup>170</sup> Neighborly love is neither grounded solely in drives, inclination, nor a similarity of dissimilarities since it is a command; nor is this form of love such that the more one loves one person (or group of persons) the more one draws away from others. This understanding of neighborly love does not, however, preclude the possibility of reciprocity, though in any particular instance it is accidental; that is to say, the love relation does not require or demand reciprocity. If reciprocity exists in a genuine love relation, then it is “infinite from both sides.”<sup>171</sup> Each individual in such a relationship makes the decision to fulfil one’s obligation to love the other, but the decision is not conditioned on the decision of the other (otherwise it would not be neighborly love).

In his second passage dealing with the comparison of the types of unions that come about through preferential love and neighborly love, Kierkegaard focuses on the external products related to a union, the “mine and yours,” or personal property. In both preferential love and neighborly love, he says that there is a cancelling of “mine and yours” in a union of two, but the cancelling is in different respects. To say that “mine and yours” is cancelled is to say that the two properties mine and yours are interrelated and that to dispense with one term is to dispense with the other, since the two only exist in relation to one another. The thief, for instance, discards any notion of what is yours, and therefore, even if the thief fails to recognize this fact, justice demands that there is no “what is mine” for the thief (at least until the punishment is finished).<sup>172</sup> The same is true if what is mine is removed from the equation. Removing what is mine is a form of love

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<sup>170</sup> *WL 56 / SKS 9, 63.*

<sup>171</sup> *WL 181 / SKS 9, 181.*

<sup>172</sup> *WL 267 / SKS 9, 266.*

that is self-sacrificing and self-denying which dispenses with “yours”. To deny in the practice of love what is mine is to make mine yours, but it cannot be yours since the concept of what is yours is only in opposition to what is mine. By doing away with any notion of what is mine, the union that come about because of neighborly love cancels “mine and yours.”<sup>173</sup>

Preferential love, on the other hand, cancels mine and yours in, for example, the experience of erotic love or friendship. The experience is such that the person “feel[s] outside himself, outside what is his own, carried away in blissful confusion, so that for him and the beloved, for him and the friend, there is no distinction *mine* and *yours*, ‘because,’ declares the lover, ‘all that is mine is his..... and what is his..... is mine!’”<sup>174</sup> This cancelling is different from neighborly love’s cancelling in three related respects: first, it is an experience that one undergoes rather than a choice to love that cancels the distinction between mine and yours in preferential love. Second, the cancelling in the latter is only related to the distinction between what is the lover’s and what is the beloved’s, but it is not a total renunciation of what is mine in relation to all others. The cancelling in the former is complete, but in the latter is it limited to a particular relationship. Third, because in preferential love the distinction is abolished only for the lover and the beloved, the union of the two results in a communal “mine” distinct from all others. What is “ours” in the relationship is for us the same way that what is “mine” is for me. The two, once again, seemed to have formed a single self, and erotic love and friendship are in the end “only enhanced and augmented forms of self-love.”<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> WL 267-268 / SKS 9, 266-267.

<sup>174</sup> WL 266 / SKS 9, 265.

<sup>175</sup> WL 267 / SKS 9, 265-266.

It is important to note that although Kierkegaard is sharply critical of relationships based purely on preferential love, he never advocates that a person abandon those relationships. Rather, he suggests, as I argued in the previous section, that neighborly love has the ability to transform and purify these relationships. It is not the case that one should stop loving the object of one's preferential love. "Far from it," Kierkegaard says; rather, only the preferential love for the beloved or the friend should be removed such that one's love for the beloved does not become mere self-love.<sup>176</sup> Furthermore, the command to love the neighbor means that one should love the beloved faithfully. The "love for the neighbor [should] be the sanctifying element" in one's relationships. One is to love one's friend honestly and devotedly, but this love is always grounded in neighborly love.<sup>177</sup>

#### ***4.5 Conclusion***

Kierkegaard's model of love presents an ideal that, however impractical or perhaps impossible to practice, underscores the importance of human relationships, not within the so-called "ethical sphere" of human existence, but as an outgrowth of the God-relation itself. It is an ethic on the other side of the religious for Kierkegaard. It is neither completed nor does it find its ultimate purpose in the community or the nation in the form of laws or customs. It shows that for Kierkegaard, an authentic God-relation does not preclude one from being in relationships with others. On the contrary, not only is one's "frame of mind" toward others transformed by being a single individual alone before God, as "On the Occasion of a Confession" explains, but one's actual relationships and ethical practices toward others are also fundamentally changed as a result of being a

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<sup>176</sup> *WL* 61 / *SKS* 9, 68.

<sup>177</sup> *WL* 62 / *SKS* 9, 69.



single individual. In order to further clarify the connection between the three works examined in this chapter – *A Literary Review*, “On the Occasion of a Confession,” and *Works of Love* – I will first show how the latter two works deal with Kierkegaard’s problematic claim that one can be united to the dead. This notion further illustrates the extent of one’s ethical and social obligations to those radically different from oneself. In the second part of the conclusion, I show how each of the three works relate to Kierkegaard’s “Dialectic of Community.” In the third part, I examine how my account of Kierkegaard’s social thought and his relationship to Karl Bayer sheds light on his relationship to Hegel’s social thought.

#### *4.5.A. Loving the Dead and Being United with the Dead*

I now turn to Kierkegaard’s discussion of loving the dead in the ninth deliberation of *Works of Love*. I begin by clarifying Kierkegaard’s claim that remembering the dead is the highest ideal of love, and I respond to the charge that this claim makes Kierkegaard’s ethic in *Works of Love* unresponsive and asocial. I conclude by drawing out the contrast between loving the dead in *Works of Love* and being in a relationship with the dead in “On the Occasion of a Confession.”

In the next to last deliberation in *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard claims that remembering or recollecting the dead is a work of love, and that it, in fact, is the most unselfish, freest, and faithful form of love.<sup>178</sup> Kierkegaard praises recollecting the dead because it most evidently involves no mutuality. The individual who recollects the dead receives nothing in return from the dead, and the dead person him- or herself does not

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<sup>178</sup> Perhaps the most penetrating and careful examination of Kierkegaard’s ninth deliberation in *Works of Love* is M. Jamie Ferreira “Mutual Responsiveness in Relation: The Challenge of the Ninth Deliberation” in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Works of Love* vol. 16, ed. by Robert L. Perkins, Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press 1999, pp. 193-209.

motivate one by guilt to remember like one's living parents, child, or beloved. In the deliberation Kierkegaard compares two forms of mutuality: heterogeneous and homogeneous reciprocity. The heterogeneous form of reciprocity is when an individual receives some form of direct payment or repayment for love bestowed. The payment is heterogeneous insofar as it is an external good attached to particular sorts of apparent works of love. The homogeneous form of reciprocity occurs when an individual is loved in return in a loving relationship, in short requited love.<sup>179</sup> Although one may disagree with Kierkegaard's suggestion that requited love is a form of "payment" and grounded on some notion of reciprocity, that is not his main point in this passage.<sup>180</sup> He merely wants to establish that recollecting the dead is a more unselfish form of love than reciprocal love, since remembering the dead does not necessarily produce an external good or requited love from the deceased.

Love for the dead, Kierkegaard comments, is similar in many respects to love for children. A helpless child who needs constant care and nurture, yet who, at least at first, does not provide any particular reward for the care and nurture seems to be unselfish in the same way that recollecting the dead is. Yet there are important differences. First, Kierkegaard points out that a child can motivate his or her parents through guilt. A baby's crying serves to motivate parents to provide for the baby's needs, but a dead person does not have a similar motivational device. The absence of a motivating factor in the case of a dead person, according to Kierkegaard, makes loving the dead a freer form of love than loving a helpless child. Second, there is, in most cases, a bright future for a child, where

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<sup>179</sup> *WL* 349 / *SKS* 9, 343.

<sup>180</sup> In fact, Kierkegaard allows for reciprocity within the confines of neighborly love so long as it is "infinite from both sides." *WL* 181 / *SKS* 9, 181.

the child will love his or her parents and even sometimes care for and provide for them in old age. Furthermore, even the smaller pleasures of seeing an infant smile are compelling the parent to care for and nurture the child. But there is no future possibility for the dead person to compel others to remember him or her, and even if there were, say in the form of a will or trust, there would be no requirement to remember the dead lovingly. Furthermore, there is also no possibility of improving one's relationship with the person. One cannot extract a smile from the dead. Kierkegaard concludes that recalling the dead is the most unselfish and freest form of love since it, first of all, does not depend on any form of reciprocity and secondly, it is not likely to be motivated by external factors (e.g., the baby's crying).<sup>181</sup>

Kierkegaard even goes so far as to suggest this as a test for one's love. The test is mentioned in various places and it shows that recalling the dead is the most unselfish, the freest, and the most faithful form of love.<sup>182</sup> In his most lengthy description of the test, Kierkegaard compares examining a person loving the dead to watching a person dance alone or shadowbox. This examination allows one to isolate all the appropriate variables such that one is merely examining how it is that a person loves without one's observations being tainted by the influence of another "actual person." These sorts of observations where the other is absent reveal the first person in the clearest possible light. And examining how one loves the dead removes any possible mechanism for repayment or selfishness, for requited love, for being compelled through guilt, etc., and it shows most clearly how one loves since "... a person [who] relates himself to one who is dead

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<sup>181</sup> *WL* 349-352 / *SKS* 9, 342-346.

<sup>182</sup> *WL* 349 / *SKS* 9, 343, *WL* 351 / *SKS* 9, 345, *WL* 351 / *SKS* 9, 348. See note 59 for a more detailed discussion of the concept of a test [*Prøve*] for Kierkegaard.

[is the] only one in this relationship, inasmuch as one who is dead is no actuality; no one, no one can make himself *no one* as well as the one who is dead, because he is *no one*.<sup>183</sup>

All too often, a person's actual love for another is obscured by external motivating factors and the reciprocity in a relationship. As such, if one truly wants to know about the quality of a person's love, one should examine the way that a person remembers and recollects the dead. The way in which one recollects the dead demonstrates the true character of one's love. Remembering the dead is the ideal of love, and any other manifestation of love is more or less pure, unselfish, free, and faithful to the extent that it approaches the qualities found in remembering the dead. The result is that the highest ideal of love, the purest form of love, is exemplified by two fundamental qualities: first, it is wholly asymmetrical. Just as one's relationship to the dead does not depend on some type of mutual exchange, so should all other relationships be grounded in asymmetrical commitments between individuals. I do not mean that one should not be responsive to the needs of another, but that one's commitment to the other person is not dependent on the actions, needs, or understanding of other people. In a genuine relationship, a person is committed to the other whether he or she is in need or in plenty, whether he or she is loving back or not, and whether he or she understands or fails to understand the person. This asymmetry does not entail that there is, in fact, no reciprocity. Rather, it requires that if there were no reciprocity, one would not terminate the relationship. Reciprocity is

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<sup>183</sup> *WL* 347 / *SKS* 9, 340-341. This passage is particularly interesting for a number of reasons: (1) it relates directly to Kierkegaard's style of indirect communication. Just as the author becomes nothing in order to best know what resides in the reader, so the dead person is nothing. Furthermore, it is not the author who knows what resides in the reader, but the reader him- or herself, just as the person recollecting the dead knows his or her own quality of love by examining one's relationship to the dead. (2) It presents recollecting the dead as the highest ideal to which all other forms of love must approach. It is a "test" [*Prøve*], which entails that it is not a necessary condition for love but merely a sufficient condition. See note 59 for a more detailed discussion of the concept of a test [*Prøve*] for Kierkegaard.

not a necessary condition for a genuine relationship. Thus, mutuality does not preclude one from approaching the highest ideal of a relationship, but making reciprocity a condition of one's relationship would undermine the relation. Kierkegaard's use of recollecting the dead as a test suggest that one should consider recollecting the dead primarily as a sort of thought experiment designed to test the character of one's love.

The second fundamental quality is exemplified by the freedom found in highest ideal of love. Love cannot be compelled or extracted from another. By its very nature, it must be given freely. As above, this quality should be viewed as an ideal or test. A child's mother does not necessarily love her child less than the person recollecting the dead, but one must be careful that one's love for the child is not exchanged for acting out of guilt or from other motivating factors. The test serves as a call to self-examination in order to put one's commitment under fire. Thus, the highest ideal of love is a free, asymmetrical commitment to the other.

Although Kierkegaard's discussion of the topic in *Works of Love* sheds light on his meaning in "On the Occasion of a Confession," it does not fully explain the passage. Even though it is clear that all of the fundamental qualities of love discussed in *Works of Love* are operative in his earlier work, it seems that something more is needed in order to understand Kierkegaard's conception of the individual's relationship to others in "On the Occasion of a Confession". Kierkegaard seems to maintain that one is in some sort of actual relationship with strangers, foreigners, and dead people in "On the Occasion of a Confession", whereas in *Works of Love*, he is more careful about the claims he is making. It may be that his more developed deliberations on the subject in *Works of Love* are simply elaborated more fully and that there is no conceptual difference involved. It is

telling that the question for Kierkegaard in “On the Occasion of a Confession” asks about one’s “frame of mind” toward others.

The transformation of one’s frame of mind may not, however, be all that distinct from the view presented in *Works of Love*. Being in harmony with strangers, foreigners, and the dead is merely the first result of the transformation of one’s frame of mind. There are three other results that are more significant for one’s relationships to real, concrete individuals, though certainly these results are not as captivating as the discussion of the dead. First, one does not make an exception of oneself before the law. Making an exception of oneself would presuppose some sort of distinction between oneself and others which would undermine one’s relationships with others.<sup>184</sup> Second, individuals from various classes and cultures should be treated in a like manner. Each person is recognized as an individual rather than as a member of a class or as a person with a particular vocation.<sup>185</sup> Kierkegaard does not maintain that one’s class or occupation are unimportant. Rather one’s relationships with others should not be based on these classifications. In fact, he claims that one’s relationships with other people are fulfilled through one’s occupation, family life (including one’s relationship to one’s spouse, children, and other family members), and in all of one’s social relations.<sup>186</sup> Lastly, the transformation brings it about that one recognizes each person as universally human. To will one thing, Kierkegaard says, is to recognize a common human concern, namely, that one should will one thing.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> *UDVS* 144 / *SKS* 8, 242.

<sup>185</sup> *UDVS* 144 / *SKS* 8, 242.

<sup>186</sup> *UDVS* 129-131 / *SKS* 8, 229-231

<sup>187</sup> *UDVS* 106 / *SKS* 8, 209, *UDVS* 117 / *SKS* 8, 218-219.

Perhaps it is in these more mundane and practical aspects of everyday relationships that clarify how one can be in harmony with the dead and strange people. One is in harmony with them because one is willing the good in truth. The task of being a human being is to will the good in truth, and one is in harmony with all human beings, even the dead and those who you do not know, when one wills the good in truth. There is a decidedly moral and ethical component to Kierkegaard's discussion of the topic here, which coincides with the more concrete ethical obligations expressed in *Works of Love*. Nevertheless, the focus in each of these two works is rather different. "On the Occasion of a Confession" presents the situation from within one's moral and ethical context (that is to say, from within one's particular vocational calling, one's family life, etc.) from which one must act. *Works of Love* does this as well, when, for example, Kierkegaard claims that one's ordinary relationships are transformed by the obligation to love the other as a neighbor. Still, in *Works of Love*, the primary emphasis is on love itself rather than on the responsibilities that arise out of one's participation in social institutions like one's vocation, one's marriage, or one's community. The close ties between *Works of Love* and "On the Occasion of a Confession" concerning a person's relation to the dead illustrates, at least somewhat, an internal connection between the works of 1846 and 1847, but this connection is further elaborated and presented in the next section as a hermeneutical tool for understanding the role of community and relationships in the overall authorship.

#### *4.5.B. The Dialectic of Community From 1846-1847*

The three stages of Kierkegaard's dialectic of community progressively illustrate the importance of the individual in community structures. In the first stage, the relation

itself, the result of the connection between two individuals is understood to be more important than the individuals within the relation. This stage is where one finds oneself when one becomes aware of oneself as already a participant in some social relation or institution. One may find oneself as, for instance, a member of a family or religious organization. To be conscious of and to consider the importance and place of one's relations with others always arises out of a situation where the person exists in some social relation that privileges the social relation over the individual as a participant in the relation.

This understanding of a person's social constitution is expressed in and criticized in much of Kierkegaard's early authorship. In fact, many of Kierkegaard's works are written according to a dialogical framework expressing directly the social relation by which two or more individuals are purported related to one another. *Either/Or*, for example, is a dialogue through the written medium between the aesthete A and Judge William; *Repetition*, likewise, is the story of how the young man learns about the nature of repetition through his experiences with his muse/loved one and his dialogue with Constantin Constantius. The edifying discourses are addressed directly to the single individual, that is, Kierkegaard's reader, and they express the social relation that exists between the edifying author, Kierkegaard, and his readers. In each of these works the relation between the participants in the dialogue is the starting point for the overall investigation into a particular perspective or work.

Furthermore, this characterization of social relations is like the relation between individuals within "the public" as described in *A Literary Review*. One finds oneself as a member, a number, of the public, and one's perspective is shaped in fundamental ways



by one's status as a component of the public. The individual's existence is constituted by and through one's membership in the public,<sup>188</sup> and one's identity is grounded in some shared identity of all those who make up the public. To say that an individual is inferior to the relation, the public, in this instance, is to say that the individual lacks a genuine self. The self is determined purely by external, contingent factors such as one's environment or a group or set of groups to which one associates. The public takes precedence over all of its members.

Although some form of awareness of the self's dependence on external, contingent factors is a necessary condition for having not only a more developed self but also more developed social relations, the fact that one is aware that one's self is primarily derivative from these sources will not always result in the choice to have a self. That is to say, awareness of this fact is a necessary condition for the development of selfhood and community, but it is not a sufficient condition. The development of selfhood arises out of an autonomous choice; it is a free decision. The choice that confronts one in this stage is whether one is completely determined by externalities such as one's feelings or environment, or whether one will be an individual on the way to higher forms of selfhood. This view appears to express a paradox: it seems to say that selfhood is achieved through an autonomous choice, but an autonomous choice already presupposes a self who is free and undetermined by external factors. To speak, then, of a choice to a

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<sup>188</sup> I am not claiming that Kierkegaard thinks of these sorts of individuals merely as rafts on the ocean who are tossed wherever the current takes them. The relationships is much more complex; one's prior participation in a movement, for example, may predispose one to particular beliefs. Say, for instance, there is an evangelical Christian who initially cares little for economic issues, but ultimately adopts conservative economic views because the Republican party and its members are generally more likely to support certain views that this evangelical has (i.e., conservative views on abortion or homosexuality), but this person ultimately adopts conservative economic views because those views are solidified and concretized behind a particular agenda that largely agrees with the evangelical's core views.

be a self is paradoxical, if not unintelligible. The only response to the dilemma is that the choice itself is the very same event as becoming a self. The two are mutually constitutive of one another, and one can never arise without the other. It is also important to emphasize that the choice to be a self in this stage does not entail any particular idea of the self; the self is not necessarily a moral or responsible self, and it need not have a unified life purpose. The developing self in this stage happens by negation; that is, the person refuses to allow external contingencies to completely shape and direct one's life but instead freely appropriates them.<sup>189</sup>

The choice to be a self is where the second stage in the dialectic of community begins. In this stage, the individual is said to be equal to the relation. Kierkegaard's illustrative comment on this stage refers to "earthly love," that is, to preferential love. Mutuality is the primary characteristic of relationships within this stage. The desire for mutuality presupposes a conception of the self such that one looks to provide primarily for oneself. Even a person's apparently other-regarding actions implicitly contain within this stage the expectation that such actions will be returned by the others. Everyone is considered equal in this stage, at least inasmuch as everyone is thought to be an egoistic, rational actor. It is presumed that everyone ultimately looks out only for one's own, or one's own group, interest. These interests, however, are produced only in relation to the interests of others. That is to say, the interest of each person is modeled at least partly on

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<sup>189</sup> One interesting philosophical result of this approach is that autonomy is something acquired and developed. Although it is appropriate to describe autonomy or freedom as ontologically or metaphysically necessary for genuine selves, since every person who is a self has autonomy, this is different from the traditional view of autonomy where a free choice is the result of autonomy rather than that which produces it. Although it is beyond the scope of this section, such a view may have something interesting to say concerning the relationship between freedom and determinism.

the interest of others. Kierkegaard contrasts the person who has a genuine or primitive self to the self that is acquired through aping others.

[People] can be influenced to do one thing just as well as another, to fast as well as to live in worldly enjoyment--the most important thing is that they are just like the others, that they ape each other, do not stand alone. But God wants neither one nor the other; what he wants is primitivity. Yet this is the effort we shrink from most of all, whereas we relish everything called aping. From this it is apparent what little good it does to bring an objectively greater truth to bear--and then to allow aping. No godliness is achieved by this, for in the divine sense the truth is primitivity. This is why God's word is ordered in such a way that every assertion is accompanied by its opposite. This demands primitivity. But both teachers and followers feel best in aping and by aping--therefore they are lovingly unanimous about it and call it love.<sup>190</sup>

According to this passage, a person can be influenced toward any number of ends because a person is unable to "stand alone." Conforming oneself to the image of others is not only a product of being a mere component of the masses, but it is also an expression of self-interest. Kierkegaard claims that people call aping "love," and his criticism of preferential love is that it is ultimately done out merely for reasons of self-interest.

In the following passages, Kierkegaard is even more explicit in drawing a connection between aping and self-interest. He writes:

If all the millions of people alive approached me all together with the greatest receptivity and said: "What do you want us to do? Do you want us to do as you do?"--I would be obliged to answer: "No, there is not one single person alive who shares my task, and, in my opinion, not one person among these millions shares a task with another"-- --and precisely this is what I must proclaim... [A]s a rule all proclamation aims at collecting people; mine aims at dispersing them, making them single individuals... [M]y task is this: myself an individuality and keeping myself that (and in infinite love God in heaven keeps an eye on this), to proclaim what boundless reality [*Realitet*] every man has in himself when before God he wills to become himself. But consequently I do not have a stitch of doctrine--and doctrine is what people want. Because doctrine is the indolence of aping and mimicking for the learner, and doctrine is the

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<sup>190</sup> JP 3, 632, 3560 / Pap XI 1 A 62.

way to sensate power for the teacher, for doctrine collects men. The proclamation of individuality is: blessedly compensated within oneself--to be sacrificed to men. In the strictest sense my proclamation is a service of the spirit. Everything proclaimed with the aim of collecting men is connected in one way or other to an animal definition of man... [But] man is still an animal-creature, and the indolent inclination to ape and mimic seems to be his second nature. That is why it is so very easy to collect them in a herd; that proclaimer will get thousands who want to learn what he says by rote, perhaps become professors of it... But are not the proclaimers all too frequently to blame when the whole thing becomes aping and copying, for it is to their earthly and temporal advantage... What a tragedy, these thousands and thousands--every single one could grasp the highest, acquire the infinite worth that is his--but all goes to waste, and everything is also done by the politicians and their like to transform them into specimens.<sup>191</sup>

Kierkegaard begins by contrasting his message and task with the proclamation that others give. He claims that he does not want people to do as he does, and he does not even think that any person shares the same task as any other.<sup>192</sup> The demand of uniformity found in these other types of proclamations is itself in the service of self-interest, and the view that all human beings are rational, egoistic agents is an expression of this type of uniformity. To the extent that people accept this view, they are transformed into “specimens” such that one is more able to control and manipulate them and thereby gain some “earthly or temporal advantage.”

A similar criticism is evident in Kierkegaard’s critique of comparison in both “On the Occasion of a Confession” and *Works of Love*. Since, according to Kierkegaard, there is no shared goal or task to which all must strive, it is not only wrong to compare oneself to others, but it is impossible for people to be compared in relation to the fulfillment of

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<sup>191</sup> *JP* 6, 535-537, 6917 / *Pap* XI 2 A 19.

<sup>192</sup> Kierkegaard does not mean that people do not share general or universal moral laws (cf. the obligation to will one thing or the obligation to love the neighbor as oneself), or even that people do not share his more general characterization of his “task” in this passage, that is, of being and remaining a single individual who proclaims that all people should become who they are. Rather he means that in the course of a person’s life these more general tasks must be appropriated freely and be rendered intelligible as one’s own life tasks.

such a task. Each person, as an individual, is said to be alone before God, and a person's task or vocation is itself individual and unique. It follows that any comparison improperly conceives of another person's or group's task as one's own rather than coming to terms with one's own task.

The choice which confronts a person in Kierkegaard's second stage of the dialectic of community, the choice to pursue some higher end other than one's own self-interest, moves beyond a model of society or community grounded in competition and self-interest. For Kierkegaard the highest to which one can be devoted is God; all other ends are ultimately subordinate and understood in terms of the relationship between the single individual and God. While this is Kierkegaard's position, it is important to make two explanatory comments about it: first, having a relation to God does not necessarily mean that a person is pursuing some interest higher than him- or herself. It could be the case that a person believes in God or is religious primarily because the person seeks to either gain some benefit or escape some punishment by means of worship. In which case, the person's relation to God is grounded in self-interest. Second, in making the choice to pursue some higher end other than mere self-interest, it is not necessary that the all relations be subordinate to the God-relation, so long as the end chosen is higher than oneself, that is, the end is chosen not because of mere self-interest but for another reason.<sup>193</sup> By making this sort of choice, the single individual has a more developed form of agency since one's actions are not purely determined by self-interest.

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<sup>193</sup> Kierkegaard may in fact believe that failing to understand and subordinate all ends within the confines of the God-relation is ultimately a form of selfishness. Some passages in *Works of Love*, particularly some of those that describe the God-relation as the "middle term" of love seem to suggest such a view. For a more lengthy discussion of this issue see 4.4.C. where I discuss Kierkegaard's conception of the relationship between the God-relation and relations to others.

The third stage of the dialectic of community is reached when the individuals in a relation are each superior to each of their relations. Kierkegaard illustrates this stage by suggesting that it is like the “highest form of religion.” The individual is primarily and fundamentally related to God and only secondarily to other people. Despite the primacy of the God-relation, it is not the case that one should neglect or abandon one’s relations to others because of the God-relation. This illustrative comment coheres well with the basic views concerning the relationship between the God-relation and a person’s relations with others in “On the Occasion of a Confession” and *Works of Love*, and it reframes the way one conceives of the so-called one-to-one God-relation. Instead of the God-relation severing or rendering unimportant all of one’s human relationships, it transforms the way one ought to understand one’s relationships with others, and it establishes a duty to love all people.

This stage of the dialectic begins when the single individual has chosen to pursue the highest end, that is, God, and has, therefore, subordinated and understood all other ends under God. Although this stage most closely resembles the common image of Kierkegaard’s religious views, he merely conceives of this type of relation as the starting-point of the third stage of the dialectic of community. There is, like each of the previous stages, a choice involved in the progression of the third stage. It is also the case, just like each of the previous stages, that the choice to remain where one begins, that is, where the self is absorbed and lost in some greater social organism, or where an individual only pursues his or her own egoistic self-interest in conflict and competition with all others, is a substantial risk. Although it is possible and arguably reasonable that one should advance in each stage of the dialectic, there is no guarantee that a person will decide to do

so.<sup>194</sup> The risk in the third stage is that the God-relation will be such that a person is rendered incapable of having relationships with other people. This situation could arise by fulfilling the demands of the God-relation, as it would have been for Abraham in *Fear and Trembling* had he actually sacrificed Isaac, and it could arise when a person isolates and alienates oneself from others and even oneself when one fails to live up to a strenuous religious ideal.

Both “On the Occasion of a Confession” and *Works of Love* speak directly to this problem. In the process of preparing for confession, the single individual is challenged to examine oneself compared to the standard of willing the good without condition, reservation, or concern for any sort of reward, and Kierkegaard claims that this examination of oneself, if carried out thoroughly, will result in the transformation of one’s frame of mind toward others. One is responsible for what happens in one’s marriage, friendships, parent-child relations, work relationships, and other social relationships, and the standard of “willing one thing” holds one responsible for how one acts or reacts in those relationships no matter how the other acts or responds. For Kierkegaard, the God-relation does not dispense with a person’s relationships with others but it heightens one’s responsibility toward others.

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<sup>194</sup> I say “arguably reasonable” because the decision in each case is rational and reasonable at least when viewed retrospectively. It is not clear, however, that these retrospective reasons are adequate for the person who only, for instance, recognizes self-interest as the only value (The case would be much more complicated in the first stage since the individual is said to lack a self.). It, of course, would be possible for a person guided only by self-interest to be other-regarding insofar as looking out for others contributes to one’s self-interest, but it would require a change in moral understanding for a reason other than self-interest to be compelling to the individual. That is, one would have to have a sort of moral conversion in order to make the choice to pursue some higher end than self-interest. This sort of consideration indicates that the locution of “choice” implies more than a sheer choice in that the sort of reasons that one finds compelling do not seem to be a matter of choice. A reason is generally found to be compelling because it fits in a particular narrative that is dominant, or at least important, for a particular person. It may be that understanding everything in terms of self-interest is a consistent, coherent way of understanding human relations, but that it fails primarily because it does not fit within the narratives of most human experiences of relationships with others.

A person's duty to love all people is, for Kierkegaard, a command given by God.<sup>195</sup> This duty, Kierkegaard claims, requires that one understand human relations in terms of the God-relation. All of a person's human relationships are, by this command, transformed into the God-relation. This is what Kierkegaard means when he claims that God always directs people to love others as one's way of loving him. Although "a person ultimately and essentially has only God to deal with in everything," one must still remain "in the world and in the earthly circumstances" to which one is assigned.<sup>196</sup> This claim from *Works of Love* vindicates Kierkegaard illustrative comment in his journal entry on the dialectic of community. All human relationships are transformed into the God-relation by means of the command to love, and this not only entails that there is a strict identity established between loving God and loving other people, but it also ensures that the God-relation itself does not exclude or dispense with a person's obligations and relationships to others. The choice in the third stage of the dialectic of community is the choice to have one's God-relation reshape and transform the way one understands and acts in one's relationships with others. This understanding not only precludes the view that Kierkegaard's conception of the single individual is antithetical to human social relations, but it establishes the opposite view – that other people are not obstacles to overcome on the path to selfhood and to God but are instead an essential part of a person's becoming a self and coming to God.

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<sup>195</sup> The *Euthyphro* dilemma is often presented as a problem for Divine Command Theory. There are two horns to the dilemma: either a command is (or ought to be) obeyed simply because God willed it, in which case it is arbitrary, or it is (or ought to be) obeyed because it is justified, right, or moral, and there is, therefore, no need to appeal to God. Kierkegaard never directly responds to the dilemma in *Works of Love*, and it would go well beyond the limits of this chapter to fully discuss how one could respond to the dilemma in defense of Kierkegaard's claims about it being important that the obligation to love is a divine command. I will suggest, though I will not substantiate my claim here, that the a proper answer has something to do with Kierkegaard's characterization of the obligation to love as an "infinite debt."

<sup>196</sup> *WL* 377 / *SKS* 9, 370.



The progression of the dialectic of community internally within *A Literary Review*, “On the Occasion of a Confession,” and *Works of Love* shows that there is at the very least a concentrated attempt at developing a role for the social in 1846 and 1847. The fact that this development proceeds from where much of the earlier authorship leaves off suggests that the social dimension of Kierkegaard’s thought is tied to the earlier authorship, and even though some of the issues are reframed and reconsidered in the latter authorship they are not abandoned and an argument can be made that the social themes during 1846 and 1847 prepare one for the social critique of 19th century Danish culture and the established Church.

#### *4.5.C. The Relationship Between Kierkegaard’s and Hegel’s Social Thought*

I have indicated previously that Karl Bayer, whose thought Kierkegaard deeply appreciated, was a student of Hegel. Bayer adopts the language, argumentative style, and many concepts from his mentor. The connection between Hegel and Bayer along with Kierkegaard’s appropriation of Bayer’s theory of community reveals a new dimension to the relationship between Kierkegaard and Hegel. In this section, I will describe the current scholarship concerning the relation between Hegel and Kierkegaard, and then I will explain how my understanding of Kierkegaard’s social thought reveals a new aspect to this on-going discussion.

Although this view is no longer as universal as it once was, Kierkegaard is generally regarded as a strict opponent of Hegel’s philosophical system. There is a substantial amount of apparent textual support for this type of view, but it has maintained its dominance primarily because of historical and institutional reasons rather than for

textual reasons.<sup>197</sup> These historical and institutional reasons prefigure the way that many people interpret critical comments directed explicitly at Hegel. One of the most recent and in depth attempts to understand the relationship between Hegel and Kierkegaard is Jon Stewart's *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*. Stewart attempts to point out the inadequacy of what he describes as the "standard view" of the relationship between Hegel and Kierkegaard. Stewart states that the standard view envisions the relationship as a "purely negative one" where Kierkegaard "... rejected Hegel's philosophy wholesale and... used aspects of it only to ridicule them, often ironically. Kierkegaard is thought to have been entirely original and to have taken leave of his philosophical predecessor right from the beginning."<sup>198</sup> In other passages, Stewart associates the "standard view" with those who would maintain that Kierkegaard was a "critic of Hegel"<sup>199</sup> and "engaged in a campaign against Hegel"<sup>200</sup>.

Stewart's thesis is "that from the perspective of Kierkegaard's own assessment, he never had the great anti-Hegel campaign that much of the secondary literature has ascribed to him. On the contrary, Hegel had a quite positive influence on him."<sup>201</sup> Stewart is critical of these standard approaches to the relationship between Hegel and Kierkegaard for textual, historical, and philosophical reasons. Stewart situates Kierkegaard's authorship within an intellectual culture which includes both Danish Hegelians and their opponents. He argues that this social and historical context indicates

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<sup>197</sup> The reception of Kierkegaard's thought in the early 20th century and the traditional understanding of the developmental of 19th century continental philosophy are the primary contributors to the dominance of this understanding. This basic view is reinscribed in introductory textbooks as well as volumes on the history of philosophy. Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, pp. 4-14.

<sup>198</sup> Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, p. 3.

<sup>199</sup> Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, p. 9.

<sup>200</sup> Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, p. 11.

<sup>201</sup> Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, p. 631.

not only that Kierkegaard was primarily critical of Danish Hegelians (as many others have commonly maintained as well) rather than Hegel himself, but furthermore that Kierkegaard's critique of these Danish Hegelians establishes "a positive influence of Hegel on Kierkegaard" where "... there are many more points of comparison and similarity between the two thinkers than are generally recognized."<sup>202</sup>

Stewart intends the defense of his thesis to be a direct challenge to Niels Thulstrup's thesis in his book *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel* which is that "Hegel and Kierkegaard have in the main nothing in common as thinkers, neither as regards object, purpose, or method, nor as regards what each considered to be indisputable principles."<sup>203</sup> Although the sheer magnitude of historical information Stewart brings to bear on the discussion is unparalleled, there have been a number of scholars who have made claims similar to Stewart's central thesis (though not quite as radical). For instance, Wilhelm Anz, an influential mid-20<sup>th</sup> century German Kierkegaard scholar, argued that Kierkegaard's vocabulary, argument structure, and method are derived largely from the German Idealist tradition from Fichte to Hegel.

More recently, the commonalities between Hegel and Kierkegaard have been analyzed regarding particular topics such as the notion of dialectic and the development of the self in each of the two thinkers. Stephen N. Dunning in his book *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness* argues that while the content of Kierkegaard's thought differs from Hegel's thought, the form of his work adapts and appropriates a number of Hegelian

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<sup>202</sup> Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, p. 32.

<sup>203</sup> Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, trans. George L. Stengren (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 12.

approaches.<sup>204</sup> In particular Dunning analyzes the continuity between Kierkegaard's theory of stages and Hegel's dialectics. This similarity, Dunning argues, shows that Kierkegaard implicitly used Hegel's own methods for very different aims than Hegel himself. Thus, although Dunning maintains that Kierkegaard uses some form of Hegel's method, he used it in order to question the content of Hegel's philosophical system.

In *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard*, Mark C. Taylor argues that there is much similarity between Kierkegaard and Hegel regarding the development of self.<sup>205</sup> Taylor argues that both Kierkegaard and Hegel conceive of the development of self as a journey, though becoming a self means different things for each of the two thinkers. Both Dunning and Taylor have equally demonstrated that the relationship between Kierkegaard and Hegel is more complicated than that of simple opposites. They both indicate structural similarities as well as very important differences between the two thinkers. Although this approach may seem obvious, it nevertheless is quite distinct from the way the relationship between Kierkegaard and Hegel has been traditionally conceived (cf. Thulstrup's thesis above) though most recent scholarship is more sensitive to Kierkegaard's debt to Hegel.

Stewart's work, however, goes much further than Anz, Dunning, or Taylor. He performs a concrete and detailed study of Kierkegaard's corpus from his earliest published piece "From The Papers of One Still Living" (1838) to *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849) as well as a detailed study of Kierkegaard's Danish interlocutors. He shows how an overwhelming majority of the overt references to 'Hegel' or 'Hegelianism' are

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<sup>204</sup> Stephen N. Dunning, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

<sup>205</sup> Mark C. Taylor, *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard*.

actually references to Danish Hegelians such as Martensen, Heiberg, and Adler. Stewart concludes with a developmental thesis regarding the relationship between Hegel and Kierkegaard. He argues that Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel develops over time beginning with an initial more Hegelian period (1834-1843) which includes his earliest journal entries, several minor publications, and Kierkegaard's dissertation (or Master's thesis<sup>206</sup>) *The Concept of Irony* (which Kierkegaard later describes as an example of what a "Hegelian fool" he was). This period ends with the publication of *Either/Or* where "Hegel's influence continues."<sup>207</sup> The second period (1843-1846) begins with the publication of *Fear and Trembling*<sup>208</sup> and culminates in 1846 with the publication of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and was when most of *The Book on Adler* was written which includes the last direct references to Hegel. This period is the shortest of the three periods and the most interesting to philosophers because of the particular texts in this period. During this period, Kierkegaard engaged in what Stewart terms "outward polemics against Hegel and speculative philosophy."<sup>209</sup> The third period of Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel ranges from 1847 to his death in 1855. The primary work from this period that Stewart discusses is *The Sickness Unto Death*. It demonstrates that Kierkegaard was well versed in "Hegel's dialectical method and in this aspect can be regarded as being positively influenced by Hegel."<sup>210</sup> But this period is characterized by a

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<sup>206</sup> Although Kierkegaard's degree was a Master's degree (as well as a vocational degree for clergy), in a relatively short period of time, the academic program Kierkegaard was in and for which he received his degree began awarding Doctoral degrees for those who completed the work Kierkegaard had already completed.

<sup>207</sup> Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, p. 600

<sup>208</sup> Although *Repetition* and *Fear and Trembling* are published together and on the same day, Stewart argues that *Repetition* is a transitional text since its primary inspiration is Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

<sup>209</sup> Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, p. 605.

<sup>210</sup> Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, p. 613.

general indifference to Hegel himself. Kierkegaard never mentions Hegel directly in this period, and yet still uses Hegelian vocabulary, style, and methodology. His critiques of his contemporaries (especially H.L. Martensen) are no longer clothed in criticism of Hegel.

Two aspects of Stewart's argument have created the most controversy. First, Stewart's discussion of the second period has caused a significant amount of controversy because he maintains that Kierkegaard should primarily be viewed as targeting Danish Hegelians with his "outward polemics" against Hegel. Stewart even argues that particular passages in this period can be interpreted as defending Hegel against those who would interpret him improperly even if Kierkegaard did not think himself doing this. This interpretation is controversial because the weakest aspect of Stewart's argument is when he argues for a deep philosophical or conceptual divide between Hegel himself and his Danish students.<sup>211</sup> Many of their views (especially Heiberg and Martensen) appear very similar to the positions adopted by other "right Hegelians"; and if Stewart fails to establish that Danish Hegelians are bad exemplars of Hegelian philosophy, then merely pointing out that Kierkegaard cloaks his criticism of Heiberg, Martensen, or Adler in a critique of Hegel is insufficient to show that Kierkegaard is not critical of Hegel as well. Although the occasion or reference which prompted Kierkegaard to make the criticism may well have come from one of the Danish Hegelians, the criticism would apply to Hegel insofar as the particular view accurately represents Hegel's views as well. In some cases, then, Stewart's attention to Kierkegaard's Danish contemporaries as well as his focus on particular passages which reference Hegel in his discussion of the second period

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<sup>211</sup> Merold Westphal challenges Stewart on precisely this point in his review of *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* in *The Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter*, 48: Sept. 2004.

actually leads him to underestimate some of the broad philosophical disagreements between Hegel and Kierkegaard.<sup>212</sup> Stewart addresses this problem directly by showing that Kierkegaard's Danish contemporaries (as well as Kierkegaard himself) saw themselves working within the tradition and lineage of Hegel – just as, say, Feuerbach and Marx work in the 'Hegelian tradition' – even though they reject specific ideas and elements in his thought. Although I do not think that Stewart position is entirely correct concerning this first point, I ultimately find Stewart's argument insightful, provocative, and informative; and his works serves as a model for understanding the relationship between the social philosophies of Hegel and Kierkegaard.

Stewart is also willing to admit that it may very well be the case that there are cases where "Kierkegaard is indeed criticizing Hegel directly on some substantive philosophical point."<sup>213</sup> According to Stewart, these broad disagreements between the two thinkers indicate "that Kierkegaard and Hegel are engaged in fundamentally different kinds of projects: while Hegel is primarily interested in providing a philosophical explanation of the world in terms of concepts, Kierkegaard is primarily interested in the religious life of the individual."<sup>214</sup> The usual portrayal of Kierkegaard with his polemic aim at Hegel results from scholars not having sufficiently understood how each thinker understands his project, and "Kierkegaard's famous 'critique' of Hegel has been

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<sup>212</sup>Cf. the relationship between faith and knowledge in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, *Philosophical Fragments*, and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* versus Hegel's account in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* as well as *The Philosophy of Right*. For Hegel, faith is something to be overcome and integrated with knowledge just as mere belief should become knowledge. For Kierkegaard, however, faith is distinct from mere belief, and faith is unable to be integrated into knowledge. In his review in *The Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter*, Westphal takes Stewart to task on precisely this point regarding: (a) the role of doubt in philosophy and faith, (b) the distinction between the realm of thought and the realm of freedom, and (c) the understanding of faith and knowledge in *The Philosophy of Right* and *Fear and Trembling*.

<sup>213</sup> Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, p. 633.

<sup>214</sup> Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, p. 633.

misunderstood in large part precisely because of the mistaken classification of Kierkegaard as a philosopher.”<sup>215</sup> This argument is the source of the second major controversy concerning Stewart’s argument. Although Stewart makes no claim about which method is to be preferred categorically, he does not think that Kierkegaard fits within the history of 19<sup>th</sup> century European philosophy, at least as the discipline was understood during the period. He claims that Kierkegaard is better understood as “ a moralist, [a] social critic, or simply [a] religious thinker.”<sup>216</sup>

My account of Kierkegaard’s social philosophy addresses both of the issues that Stewart raises. First, the specific content of Kierkegaard’s social philosophy provides a framework that shows a much greater overlap on questions of interpersonal relationships and community in the thought of Hegel and Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard indirectly adopts some of Hegel’s views when he appropriates Bayer’s theory of community. The relationships between Hegel and Bayer as well as Bayer and Kierkegaard shows a much stronger connection between Kierkegaard and Hegel on issues in social philosophy than Stewart has demonstrated about their views in general. I am not committed to the view that Kierkegaard has more in common with Hegel than ordinarily recognized in areas of faith and religion, and it is this claim that has resulted in much of the controversy surrounding Stewart’s analysis of the relationship between Hegel and Kierkegaard. Furthermore, Kierkegaard’s contemporary interlocutors are important for understanding the relationship between Hegel’s and Kierkegaard’s social philosophy, and this connection supports my argument in a more direct way than do the figures that Stewart identifies. Kierkegaard is critical of the Danish Hegelians (e.g., J.L. Heiberg and H.L.

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<sup>215</sup> Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, p. 650.

<sup>216</sup> Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, p. 650.



Martensen) treated in Stewart's work, but Karl Bayer, whom Kierkegaard appreciated, was Hegel's student. Bayer's conception of the relationship between freedom and thought, and the relationship between community and morality, as well as the method he employed in his description of the development of community are all derived from his mentor. Insofar as Kierkegaard was influenced positively by Bayer in areas where Bayer was profoundly influenced by Hegel, and, indeed, Kierkegaard adopted almost word-for-word Bayer's dialectic of community, then there is a much more concrete connection in issues pertaining to interpersonal relationships and community between Hegel and Kierkegaard than Stewart has established in his much broader project concerning their relations in general.<sup>217</sup>

Second, I maintain that the most appropriate interpretations of Hegel's social and political philosophy has much more in common with Kierkegaard's own views than has been ordinarily admitted by Kierkegaard scholars.<sup>218</sup> I suggest this is partly because the interpretation of Kierkegaard as champion of the radical, isolated individual has only recently subsided, and furthermore because many Kierkegaard scholars have an inadequate and outdated conception of Hegel's social philosophy.<sup>219</sup> I suspect that many

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<sup>217</sup> Stewart limited his study to Danish Hegelians and thus, Karl Bayer is outside the parameters of his study.

<sup>218</sup> The view that Hegel was a defender of a totalitarian or an authoritarian state is a poor interpretation of Hegel's political philosophy. These views are inconsistent with Hegel's claim that the rational state respect individual and particular interests of its citizens. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 282. The following works are examples of what I take to be poor interpretations of Hegel's political philosophy since they all criticize Hegel's political philosophy because of its authoritarian implications. Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1941) p. 178. ). Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, v. II (London: G. Routledge & Sons, 1945). Charles Taylor. *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

<sup>219</sup> Gregor Malantschuk, a relatively early Kierkegaard scholar, portrayed Hegel's philosophy as a regression "to a type of paganism" where the state is deified with the individual subordinate to it. Malantschuk's criticism deals with Hegel's view of the state, but it is primarily a religious criticism. He argued that Hegel's "regression" undermines any belief in the transcendent God. Gregor Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Way To The Truth*, trans. Mary Michelsen (Montreal: InterEditions, 1987) p. 15-16.

people familiar with Kierkegaard and Hegel would agree with my claim to some extent, so long as I limited my claim to Kierkegaard's portrayal of the so-called "ethical sphere" rather than it also applying to Kierkegaard's social views within or after the religious sphere. But my defense of Kierkegaard's social views does not arise out of the ethical as it is portrayed in the ethical sphere. Rather, I have shown that the highest form of human community is further developed by means of the God-relation. I have illustrated this claim by appealing to Kierkegaard's dialectic of community which culminates in a form of community where the development of the individual also develops one's commitment and responsibility to others. Furthermore, of the three works that illustrate my views about Kierkegaard's social thought, two of them – *Works of Love* and *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* – are written from the standpoint of someone on the other side of the religious sphere. My claim, supported by both textual and historical evidence, is that Kierkegaard's fully developed concepts of interpersonal relationships and community as expressed in both religious and non-religious texts are much more in line with Hegel's views that is often admitted.

This second point shows the limit of Stewart's characterization of Kierkegaard as merely a moralist, social critic and a religious thinker. Although Kierkegaard addresses his most central topics – the nature and life of faith, the paradox, the importance of subjectivity in religiousness – from the standpoint of a religious thinker rather than from the perspective of a 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, it is not the case that Kierkegaard's concerns are wholly distinguishable from the general philosophical projects advanced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Kierkegaard's dialectic of community, its significance in the middle period of his authorship, and his direct appropriation of the social and political

philosopher Karl Bayer's views of community shows that there is a line of continuity between Kierkegaard and his philosophical predecessors concerning the relation between the individual and community.

In a personal letter, Kierkegaard applies this idea to political developments in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. He claims that the political developments in Europe are a "vortex" [*Hvirvel*] – a series of movements back and forth, like a typhoon, that lacks a fixed point. The calls for revolution and political change in Europe were, Kierkegaard thought, grounded in terms of competing teleological visions of how government should operate and function. Kierkegaard's criticism is that such a foundation for political change can only result in back and forth struggle between two (or more) competing visions of how society should be. While the current government is enacting its political agenda, the reformers overreact in their opposition to it. Eventually, the reformers will win out and enact their political agenda as an opposition party, and the old vanguard will overreact against the reformers and so on and so forth. The result is that the split in society grows ever larger encompassing a greater number of people and groups. These movements are in constant conflict with one another and each one is unable to stop the other just as a gadfly [*Bremse*] is unable to stop a train.<sup>220</sup>

In light of this situation, what most people believe about political movements is mistaken. Kierkegaard explains:

Most people believe that so long as one has a fixed point *to which* one wants to get, then motion is no vortex. But this is a misunderstanding. It all depends on having a fixed point *from which to set out*. Stopping is not possible at a point *ahead*, but at a point *behind*. That is, stopping is in the motion, consolidating the motion. And this is the difference between a political and a religious movement.

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<sup>220</sup> *LD*, 260-261, Letter 186 / *B&A*, vol. 1, 206-207. The same Danish word [*Bremse*] means gadfly or dragonfly as well as a brake.

Any purely political movement, which accordingly lacks the religious element... is a vortex, cannot be stopped, and is... the illusion of wanting a fixed point ahead, which is wanting to stop by means of a gadfly [*Bremser*]; for the fixed point, the only fixed point, lies behind.<sup>221</sup>

Kierkegaard little theory of motion is an account of the proper source of political change.

There is no *telos* that grounds social advances and revolutions. In fact, presenting and striving toward a teleological image of society contributes to the problem at hand.

Political injustice and failure can only be remedied by means of a clear and fixed standard that unites those already engaged in the conflict. Kierkegaard characterizes this “fixed point” as “that single individual,”<sup>222</sup> and it is this type of individual – rather than the content of one’s religious beliefs – that makes a movement religious rather than political.

Socrates who called himself a “gadfly” [*Bremse*] exemplifies this strategy of revolution. “[W]ith his gadfly’s sting he drove them forward in such a way that they really moved backward, or in such a way that Sophistry perished and the single individual came to his senses at the fixed point behind.”<sup>223</sup> Socrates showed how the *telos* toward which the Sophist aimed was not fixed at all. The only fixed point, on the contrary, is in the individual and in inwardness. The Sophist makes the same mistake that the 19<sup>th</sup> century political reformers made – that is, they presented alternative visions of where they were going rather than coming from an ethically developed and secure foundation. Kierkegaard likewise walks away from politics because it asks the wrong question – it asks where “one should go instead of asking whence one should depart.”<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> *LD*, 262, Letter 186 / *B&A*, vol. 1, 207.

<sup>222</sup> *LD*, 260-261, Letter 186 / *B&A*, vol. 1, 206.

<sup>223</sup> *LD*, 262, Letter 186 / *B&A*, vol. 1, 262 .

<sup>224</sup> *LD*, 263, Letter 186 / *B&A*, vol. 1, 208.

This concept is related to Kierkegaard's idea of 'the corrective' and it illustrates the importance of achieving unity through internal dissent rather than external revolution and change. As I showed in Chapter Two, Kierkegaard always considered his overt as well as his indirect criticisms are an attack from the inside intended to strengthen the whole.

Kierkegaard's social thought is best viewed as a development and continuation, even though it is critical regarding some points, of Hegel's social thought. Although I have argued that one overshoots the mark by trying to show a greater similarity between Kierkegaard and Hegel on matters of faith and religion, I maintain that Kierkegaard's social thought confirms Stewart's general thesis that there are much greater similarities between the two thinkers than is ordinarily assumed, at least as it pertains to each of their social philosophies.

Furthermore, understanding Kierkegaard's debt to Hegel and Hegelians in the development of his social philosophy is not just important for understanding Kierkegaard's thought. Just as Marx provides an insight into aspects of Hegel's social and political thought (e.g., the unsolved problem of poverty in *The Philosophy of Right*), so might an understanding of Kierkegaard's social philosophy provide a better understanding of portions of Hegel's social thought. One issue, in particular, that I think Kierkegaard's understanding of a presupposed unity which underlies social and political differences may retroactively shed light on how Hegel (or Hegelians) can resolve a conflict between, for example, a person's private interests and the universal will of the state, especially since Bayer's theory of community is an appreciative critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. Hegel resolution, it seems, relies on having a single monarch who is

the embodiment of the whole state,<sup>225</sup> and while Hegel is correct that this monarchial view need not limit the freedom of the state's citizens, it does suggest that unity is not ultimately grounded in relationships between human beings. Rather, the people of the state are only one in the monarch. This point is made explicit in §279 in *Philosophy of Right*. This passage, interestingly enough, is one of the few sections in Hegel's writings that Kierkegaard examined very closely dealt with directly and explicitly in his published writings.<sup>226</sup>

Although this topic may seem esoteric, it has important ramifications for understanding how unity can be forged in a pluralistic society that lacks a single unified national "Spirit." The monarch is the concrete embodiment of the unity of Hegel's State, and all individual differences in the populace are unified in this single individual. But for Kierkegaard, unity is not grounded by looking to the monarch, but it is instead grounded in the mutual development of individuals with the capacity to enter into and maintain committed human relationships. Unity is found by looking back to oneself as an individual who is able to make commitments to other people no matter the outcome.

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<sup>225</sup> For a fair and detailed examination of the topic for Hegel, see Thom Brooks "No Rubber Stamp: Hegel's Constitutional Monarch" *History of Political Thought*, v. 28.1, Spring 2007, pp. 91-119.

<sup>226</sup> *CI 162 / SKS 1*, 211. Jon Stewart discusses this passage in his article "Hegel: Kierkegaard's Reading and Use of Hegel's Primary Texts" *Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries*, v. 6, tome 1, ed. Jon Stewart (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007) pp. 106-108.

## **Chapter Five: Narrative Theories of Selfhood: A Model for Understanding the Kierkegaardian Self?**

In my fourth chapter, I defended a three-stage dialectic of community that showed the development of the self in relation to one's role in and obligations to the community. In this chapter, I relate the development of selfhood within the dialectic of community to a narrative theory of selfhood (henceforth, NTS) in order to demonstrate how subjectivity relates to the social dimension of human life. Narrative theory is already rather influential in literary theory and psychology, and it is becoming more prominent within the field of philosophy. Philosophers who have dealt with the subject range from Charles Taylor and Paul Ricoeur to Alasdair MacIntyre and Daniel Dennett.<sup>1</sup> The subject has also received considerable treatment within Kierkegaard scholarship due to MacIntyre's treatment of Kierkegaard and his pseudonymous work *Either/Or* in *After Virtue*. John Davenport and Anthony Rudd published a volume of essays in response to MacIntyre's view of *Either/Or* entitled *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre: Essays on Freedom, Narrative, and Virtue* including a reply by MacIntyre.<sup>2</sup> The term 'narrative' is mentioned in the title, and it is a guiding thread throughout the essays.<sup>3</sup> One essay in particular even claims that there is little difference between MacIntyre's and Judge Wilhelm's views about narrative and virtue.<sup>4</sup> The issue received more attention when John Lippitt criticized the

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). MacIntyre, *After Virtue*. Daniel Dennett, "The Reality of Selves," *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> John Davenport and Anthony Rudd, *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre* (Open Court: Peru, Illinois, 2001). Alasdair MacIntyre, "Once More on Kierkegaard" *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*, pp. 339-355.

<sup>3</sup> Four essays (in addition to two critical responses by MacIntyre and Phillip Quinn) in the volume discuss the role of narrative theory for understanding Kierkegaard. Jeffrey S. Turner, "To Tell a Good Tale: Kierkegaardian Reflections on Moral Narrative and Moral Truth," pp. 39-58. Anthony Rudd, "Reason in Ethics: MacIntyre and Kierkegaard," p. 131-150. Norman Lillegard, "Thinking with Kierkegaard and MacIntyre about the Aesthetic, Virtue, and Narrative," pp. 211-232. John Davenport, "Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics: Kierkegaard and MacIntyre," pp. 265-323.

<sup>4</sup> Rudd, "Reason in Ethics," p. 138-139.

“MacIntyrean Kierkegaardians” for trying to understand *Either/Or* in terms of “narrative unity,” and for failing to address some problems with narrative theory in general and MacIntyre’s view in particular.<sup>5</sup>

Although the particular approach one takes to *Either/Or* is relatively unimportant for the purposes of my project, this discussion has raised a number of important concerns that are directly relevant to my work including Kierkegaard’s views on selfhood, narrative, and sociality. I have defended the view that Kierkegaard’s thought has a definitive social component. This view is consistent with Kierkegaard’s characterization of the unique one-to-one God relation as well as his later attack on 19<sup>th</sup> century Danish social institutions, but it is grounded in the three works written and published in 1846 and 1847, that is, *A Literary Review*, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, and *Works of Love*. In this chapter, I will argue that a NTS is useful for understanding Kierkegaard’s concept of self, and I will show that this model of selfhood allows for, and even requires, a distinctive social dimension of selfhood. In order to show this, I outline what I take to be a compelling narrative account of selfhood. In doing so, I will explain the reasons for conceiving of selfhood in terms of narrative by analyzing alternative narrative theories of selfhood.

### ***5.1. Three Narrative Theories of Selfhood***

There are numerous narrative theories of selfhood, and it is difficult to classify them all. It is especially difficult since narrative theory is used in many different disciplines with very different aims. Psychologists who appeal to the theory see a therapeutic value of interpreting selfhood in terms of narrative, while literary theorists see it as a useful tool for analyzing texts. Philosophers think that it will solve some lingering problem in, for example, metaphysics or ethics. Because of these different

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<sup>5</sup> John Lippett, “Getting the Story Straight: Kierkegaard, MacIntyre, and Some Problems with Narrative” *Inquiry* 50.1, 2007.



disciplinary aims and approaches and also because of the differences among narrative theories within a particular discipline, it is difficult to discuss narrative theories of selfhood as a whole. As such, I am limiting myself to three philosophers who have defended narrative theories of selfhood – Daniel Dennett, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Marya Schechtman.<sup>6</sup> These three theories are representative examples of a broad cross-section of views. They show that there is no single NTS, and I will adopt elements of each of these approaches in order to explicate what I take to be a compelling NTS for understanding Kierkegaard’s concept of self.

It is difficult to understand what the phrase ‘narrative theory of selfhood’ means partly because the term ‘narrative’ is often used in different and misleading ways. In many cases, it is not even clear how the term ‘narrative’ itself is being used. Lippitt, for instance, claims rightly that although many Kierkegaard scholars employ the concept of narrative extensively, none of them offer “a fully fleshed out account of exactly what they mean by the term ‘narrative’.”<sup>7</sup> A simple definition of ‘narrative’ is easy enough to provide, but it accomplishes little. Peter LaMarque provides a simple definition of narrative as follows:

So what exactly is narrative? To narrate is to tell a story but the minimal conditions for storytelling or for what counts as a story are indeed minimal... [A]t least two events must be depicted in a narrative and there must be some more or less loose, albeit non-logical, relation between the events. Crucially there is a temporal dimension in narrative, not just in the sense that component sentences are tensed but there must be a temporal relation between events, even if just that of simultaneity. ‘The sun shone and the grass grew’ is a narrative but ‘Bill kicked the ball and the ball was kicked by Bill’ is not because the latter does not involve two events temporally related but a single event represented in logically equivalent sentences.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Dennett, “The Reality of Selves.” MacIntyre, *After Virtue*. Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Lippitt, “Getting the Story Straight: Kierkegaard, MacIntyre, and Some Problems with Narrative,” p. 60fn12.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Lamarque, “On Not Expecting Too Much From Narrative,” *Mind and Language* 19:4, 2004, p. 394.

In a narrative, one understands the component elements of the narrative in relation to the whole structure. Nevertheless, a single sentence can express a ‘narrative,’ and if the concept of narrative is that broad, then it alone, without further clarification, will do little work for us in understanding narrative theories of selfhood. Thus, it is helpful to discuss the different forms and manifestations of narrative theories of selfhood. This approach demonstrates the multiplicity of views falling under the label. When discussing Dennett’s, MacIntyre’s, and Schechtman’s views, I will illustrate the similarities and differences in their views in terms of the following four criteria:

- (1) Does the theory allow for a realist conception of self? There are three ways to understand this question. First, to be a realist about the self is just to affirm the genuine existence of the self. It denies that selfhood is a fiction simply created by a narrative, and it means that one rejects both the claim that narratives create the events they describe and the claim that narratives always distort their subject matter. Second, it allows for the possibility that both the subject and other people can be wrong about a particular conception of the self, and third, it deals with the reality of self-deception about one’s own self. If a theory is realist in some respects but not in others then I will call it quasi-realist.
- (2) Narrative requires a narrator, a source. Is the person *qua* self the narrator, or do we attribute the title of narrator to the person in some other capacity, or perhaps, even to some other source entirely? The way a theory characterizes the source of a narrative distinguishes narrative theories of selfhood from one another.
- (3) Is the narrative model primarily or exclusively about a particular genre of narrative? Some narrative theories of self conceive of fiction as the *sine qua*

*non* of narrative theory and ignore other genres, for example, historical narrative. Because of this focus on fiction, some theories will confuse notions that are unique to fictional narratives with narrative theory as a whole. Other theories, developed with a desire for greater objectivity, conceive of narrative only as a literary narrative. That is, a self is an object similarly accessible to all people just as a text is similarly accessible to readers.

- (4) Is the NTS primarily descriptive, primarily normative, or some combination of the two? A descriptive NTS claims that all (or most) people conceive of themselves in terms of a narrative. They, in fact, see themselves within a greater descriptive account of how their life is progressing. A normative NTS claims that there are moral virtues associated with understanding one's life in a narrative. To adopt a descriptive NTS does not entail that one adopt the normative theory. Likewise, to adopt a normative NTS does not entail that one adopt the descriptive theory.

These four evaluative criteria will be applied to the views of Dennett, MacIntyre, and Schechtman in order to illustrate the different types of narrative theories of selfhood in the philosophical literature. I am interested in showing that the narrative relationship between the subjective, intersubjective, and objective aspects of life is helpful for understanding how Kierkegaard's emphasis on inwardness and subjectivity is inextricable from his views about the social development of the self. The four criteria I have chosen are not the only ways that NTS differ from one another, but these are the most important differences for the purposes of my project. Nevertheless, this taxonomy is not limited to these three views. I hope that it will be useful for classifying other narrative theories of selfhood.

### 5.1.A. Dennett's "The Reality of Selves"

Dennett's NTS has a prominent role in his overall account of consciousness as a product of evolutionary development. A theory of self, Dennett asserts, must be able to explain how beings with selves came from beings without selves.<sup>9</sup> It must be able to explain how humans who now conceive of themselves as selves arrived at this place. As such, Dennett is primarily concerned with providing a description of how narrative functions in the formation of identity or selfhood. Dennett conceives of self-construction as a biological drive, and he claims normal human beings will construct a self-narrative, even if the person does not understand precisely what he or she is doing. Just as a beaver constructs a dam because it has a biological desire to stop the sound of running water and just as a spider spins its web without realizing that it is doing so, so the human creates a self.<sup>10</sup> Human beings make a self by expanding its boundaries by identifying some objects as one's own (e.g., the person who claims, 'I was hit' in a car accident) and by limiting one's boundaries by denying responsibility for some of one's actions (e.g., involuntary motion).

Humans do this through the use of language and, more specifically, narrative. Humans "are almost constantly engaged in presenting ourselves to others, and to ourselves, and hence representing ourselves – in language and gesture, external and internal."<sup>11</sup> We use this language to weave "self-protective strings of narrative" just as the spider spins her web. We control and protect the account of who and what we are by how, when, and what we tell ourselves and others.<sup>12</sup> Because there is a biological root to our story-telling, it turns out that it is not we, ourselves, who tell the stories,

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<sup>9</sup> Dennett, "The Reality of Selves," p. 414.

<sup>10</sup> Dennett, "The Reality of Selves", p. 416-417.

<sup>11</sup> Dennett, "The Reality of Selves", p. 417.

<sup>12</sup> Dennett, "The Reality of Selves", p. 418.

but it is the stories that tell us who we are. Rather than the self being the source of narrative, it is the product that seems “as if [it flows] from a single source.”<sup>13</sup> The narratives we tell predispose others to view us as “unified agents.” Self is an “artifact of the social processes that create us”<sup>14</sup> forged by one’s own “autobiography.”<sup>15</sup>

Dennett maintains that the “reality of selves” is rather different from what we ordinarily take them to be. The self is indeed a “center of narrative gravity,” but it is merely an abstraction.<sup>16</sup> The biological organism is real, but its unity and its representation of itself are fictions. The self is merely a representation that is improperly identified with the biological organism. The self is an image conditioned by natural selection to increase a biological organism’s control over its environment. The self is real, but it is an abstraction that exists only as long as the narrative which defines it. Furthermore, the self need not always exist in the same body. If a narrative were adopted in some other medium (biological or artificial), then the self would continue to exist.<sup>17</sup>

As I have mentioned, Dennett’s NTS is presented as a descriptive account. He refrains from making value judgments about those who have multiple selves, those who have fractions of selves, or those who have no selves whatsoever, but he also thinks that most human beings do, in fact, construct what functions as if it were a single self. The self is a product of narrative rather than its source. Since the self is simply an abstraction created by the biological organism, the narrator – the source of the narrative – is not the human *qua* self but the human *qua* biological organism.

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<sup>13</sup> Dennett, “The Reality of Selves”, p. 418.

<sup>14</sup> Dennett, “The Reality of Selves”, p. 423.

<sup>15</sup> Dennett, “The Reality of Selves”, p. 425.

<sup>16</sup> Dennett, “The Reality of Selves”, p. 429.

<sup>17</sup> Dennett, “The Reality of Selves”, p. 430. Dennett does not claim that this actually takes place, but it is theoretically possible.

Dennett's account is also a clear expression of an anti-realist NTS. Although he claims that the self is "real," he means something drastically different by the term than is ordinarily meant. His account, though it does not discuss the possibility directly, leaves little room for a person to be wrong about who one is. To be wrong about one's self implies that there is something accessible to which we can compare the narrative self, but since the narrative creates the self as an abstraction, there is no criteria by which we can judge the accuracy of a narrative. There are no intersubjective or objective criteria for judging whether an agent is deceived about oneself.

At least part of the reason that Dennett is not a realist about the self is because he only conceives of narrative as fictional narrative. Even though he does not explicitly say that fictional narrative is his model of narrative, the only references he makes about particular narratives are to fictional works (including Peter Rabbit, Moby Dick, and Snoopy comics). A fictional narrative does, it seems, create the events that it describes, but this is not true for all narratives. A historical narrative does not create the events that it describes but is ordinarily judged by how faithfully it represents the occurrences and facts of a given situation. In saying this, I am not claiming that every work within the historical genre is accurate or unbiased, but it is, at the very least, appropriate to ask the question, 'Is this the way it actually occurred?' in those types of narratives. A narrative that "created the events" described would not be a historical narrative, since it would not be appropriate to ask about the truth of such a narrative

To summarize: Dennett's NTS: (1) is non-realist, (2) conceives of a self as a product (rather than the narrator) of narrative, (3) considers all self narratives fiction, and (4) is a descriptive account of self. The most attractive aspect of Dennett's account is that it entails no problematic views concerning the metaphysical status of

the self. The self is an abstraction, and it has the same metaphysical or ontological status as other abstractions.<sup>18</sup> The least attractive aspects of Dennett's theory, at least in light of my goal in this chapter, is, first, that he is a non-realist about the self and second, that his account is unable to explain how it is that humans are moral agents responsible for their actions.<sup>19</sup> Dennett not only spends less than a complete paragraph on the topic, but his account also makes our biology rather than we ourselves responsible for our actions.<sup>20</sup>

### 5.1.B. MacIntyre on Narrative Selfhood

MacIntyre's narrative view of selfhood is expressed most clearly in *After Virtue*. Contrary to the views of existentialists and "those analytical philosophers who have constructed accounts of human actions which make central the notion of 'a' human action,"<sup>21</sup> MacIntyre considers narrative theory as an appropriate way to explain the fact that human actions are only properly understood in terms of an agent's psychological and social context in the past, present, and future. MacIntyre claims that virtues are attributes of human life as a whole. This notion implies two things: first, actions are meaningful because they are situated within the larger scope of one's life. Second, one's social roles and obligations are not distinguishable from one's identity as a self.<sup>22</sup> Narrative theory operationalizes MacIntyre's attempt to understand a person's actions by appealing to a broader temporal and social situation. He claims that his view of human action commits him to a "concept of a self whose

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<sup>18</sup> Even though his account does not appeal to any metaphysical theory of selfhood, it is not clear that Dennett's evolutionary account of the development of selfhood is anything more than a "just so" story driven by his conception of the nature of human beings rather than any empirical evidence.

<sup>19</sup> My evaluative comments about all three views are relative to the reasons why I find a NTS attractive. As I mentioned earlier and as I will show later, a NTS can show how subjective, intersubjective, and objective aspects of selfhood converge in a narrative understanding of the self.

<sup>20</sup> Dennett, "The Reality of Selves," p. 430.

<sup>21</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 209.

<sup>22</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 204-205.

unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death as narrative beginning to middle to end.”<sup>23</sup> But what precisely does MacIntyre mean by narrative? How does it unify the elements of a life, and what constraints does MacIntyre propose for his NTS?

The closest MacIntyre comes to clarifying the concept of narrative is in his description of what takes place in a conversation. MacIntyre says that conversations are narratives, albeit small ones. “I am presenting both conversations in particular then and human actions in general as enacted narratives.”<sup>24</sup> When overhearing or participating in a conversation, MacIntyre says that one’s “ability to grasp the thread of the conversation will involve the ability to bring it under some one out of a set of descriptions in which the degree and kind of coherence in the conversation is brought out...”<sup>25</sup> These descriptions are the genres to which we classify conversations, though they are not necessarily identical with literary genres. The content of the narrative is classified (presumably implicitly) into a genre. The first aspect of MacIntyre’s concept of narrative is that it has a particular genre. Second, narratives are joint productions. That is, they are worked out, like conversations, through agreement and negotiation with others in a social milieu. This fact is plainly true of conversational narrative, though less obviously so for literary narratives. I will return to the idea that narratives are joint productions when I discuss MacIntyre’s constraints on narrative production.

Third, narratives have a beginning, middle and an end. Even though the narrative may describe fundamental changes and new insights, and even though there may be “digressions and subplots” the narrative of a life is still structured

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<sup>23</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 205.

<sup>24</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 211.

<sup>25</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 211.



temporally.<sup>26</sup> MacIntyre's idea of an "end" to the narrative is rather strange. It is not necessarily the same type of end as the end of a novel. There is a measure of choice in enacting the narrative of one's life, though it is constrained by one's community and environment. MacIntyre says, "[I]t is crucial that at any given point in an enacted dramatic narrative we do not know what will happen next."<sup>27</sup> There are two points to make about the unpredictability of a narrative. First, although narrative structure demands unpredictability about the actions of particular individuals, the behavior of social types can be predicted with a great deal of success by social scientists. The descriptive process of the social scientist expresses general tendencies often with clear exceptions. Thus, it is possible for the social scientist to quantitatively describe the general tendencies of types of human beings even though the narrative of a particular person of that social type may defy the general prediction. It follows that the genre of narrative that we associate with a particular person's life may change depending on how the future turns out.<sup>28</sup>

Second, the narrative which composes the unity of a human self is found, at least initially, in the search for a *telos* for one's life. The unity of human life "is the unity of a narrative embodied in a single life... The unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest."<sup>29</sup> The discovery of a *telos* that directs and unifies a human life is not accomplished in the beginning of the narrative of the human life, and the search itself unifies the self in the place of some final end. Of course, as MacIntyre notes, quests sometimes fail and lives are sometimes failures. That is, some lives are not directed toward a final end and some have given up the search. But teleology is

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<sup>26</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 211.

<sup>27</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 215.

<sup>28</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 90-92, 215.

<sup>29</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 219.

crucial for having and understanding one's life as a single narrative, and it is, therefore, crucial for selfhood.

A narrative structure unifies a life by making a person's actions intelligible in a distinctive matter. Narratives take place in a setting of some sort, whether it be an institution, a social practice, or some other venue, but in all cases the setting is contiguous with other environments. It is connected to other settings and it has a history.<sup>30</sup> We understand actions only when they are placed within two related contexts: (1) the context of a person's intentions, both short- and long-term, in performing an action, and (2) the social setting that makes those intentions understandable.<sup>31</sup> To say that actions are intelligible only when placed in their intentional and social context is identical to saying that actions are intelligible when they have their place within a larger narrative.<sup>32</sup> Thus, for MacIntyre, "Narrative history of a certain kind turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human actions."<sup>33</sup>

The question of narrative intelligibility is not simply a metaphysical question about the identity of a person over time. Rather the relationships of identity and selfhood, on the one hand, and narrative intelligibility and accountability on the other, mutually presuppose one another. Narrative gives us a way to understand that certain actions are our own. An intelligible action is one where one can understand it as coming from a particular source given the source's intentions, past experiences,

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<sup>30</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 206.

<sup>31</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 208.

<sup>32</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 210.

<sup>33</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 208. MacIntyre is critical of those who attempt to analyze discrete actions independently of the agent's intentions or the social situation. He claims, "[T]he characterization of actions allegedly prior to any narrative form being imposed upon them will always turn out to be the presentation of what are plainly the disjointed parts of some possible narrative." *After Virtue*, p. 215. This claim also shows that there is a sense in which the events do not exist apart from the narrative structure. I will return to this issue when discussing to what extent MacIntyre is a realist about the self.

desires, and so forth. Individuals are responsible for their intelligible actions since they are the authors of those actions.<sup>34</sup>

It is also important to recognize the constraints placed on life narratives. One constraint is that a life narrative arises from one's community of origin. "The story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity."<sup>35</sup> A further social constraint is that many other people participate in the joint production of a person's narrative. MacIntyre explains:

[W]e are never more than co-authors of our own narratives. Only in fantasy do we live what story we please. In life, ... we are always under certain constraints. We enter a stage which we did not design and we find ourselves part of an action that was not of our making. Each of us... plays subordinate parts in the dramas of others, and each drama constrains the others.<sup>36</sup>

The crucial question for MacIntyre is not about one's own narrative authorship but instead about one's participation in the narratives of others. "We enter into human society... with one or more imputed characters – roles into which we have been drafted – and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed."<sup>37</sup>

MacIntyre further illustrates how he gives priority to the intersubjective aspect of narrative selfhood when he claims, "I am what I may justifiably be taken by others to be in the course of living out a story that runs from my birth to my death..."<sup>38</sup>

Because a human being is both the subject and object of one's own narrative and because the person is also a participant and object in the narratives of others,

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<sup>34</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 208-209.

<sup>35</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 221.

<sup>36</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 213

<sup>37</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 216.

<sup>38</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 217. Just after this particular quotation, MacIntyre insists on a subjective dimension to each person's self-narrative. Nevertheless, the subjective dimension of narrative plays a secondary role to the social dimension of narrative.

other people are justified in asking about a particular action if it is out of accord with what other's have justifiably taken one's narrative identity to be. One should be open to these sorts of questions, and one should even feel the need to give an account to oneself, if an action is unintelligible in light of one's narrative. Likewise, other people who are participants in your narrative should be open to giving an account of their incongruent actions for the same reasons.<sup>39</sup>

With an understanding of what MacIntyre means by narrative, intelligible action, and selfhood, we are ready to analyze MacIntyre's theory of narrative selfhood according to the four criteria. First, MacIntyre, contrary to Dennett, thinks of his NTS as both descriptive and prescriptive. It explains human experience in a compelling way, and it is also the case that humans ought to conceive of their lives as a unity, which is accomplished through understanding oneself narratively.

Unfortunately, MacIntyre is not as clear concerning the other three criteria. In order to treat each of these questions, I will first identify three problems with MacIntyre's conception of narrative. First, he minimizes the role of subjectivity in narrative construction. Second, his notion of narrative truth is problematic, and, third, he confuses narratives about a life with the life itself. These issues problematize MacIntyre's basic views about narrative identity.

These three problems arise because MacIntyre maintains both that events and facts do not exist outside of a narrative structure and that narrative can express accounts that are "both true and intelligible."<sup>40</sup> MacIntyre is critical of any account of human actions that excludes the importance of narrative. He rejects the Sartrean claim that all narratives misinterpret human actions because according to MacIntyre, there are no unnarrated human actions to compare with the narrated ones. Actions described

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<sup>39</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 217-218.

<sup>40</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 213.

outside the scope of a narrative structure “will always turn out to be the presentation of what are plainly the disjointed parts of some possible narrative.”<sup>41</sup> In some sense then, MacIntyre conceives of narrative as a constitutive feature of facts and events.

The first problem with MacIntyre’s NTS is that it minimizes the role of subjectivity in the production and appropriation of narratives. It is not clear in MacIntyre’s account how a personal narrative is produced. He never identifies explicitly the narrating subject, and if events do not exist outside the scope of narrative then it is not clear how narratives are produced. Because of his concern in situating selfhood in terms of a broader community narrative, it is most likely the case that the self, at least initially, is something acquired passively from the roles imputed to a person from one’s community. If this is MacIntyre’s view, then there is something correct about it. A narrative view of selfhood implies (as Dennett also maintains) that one appropriates many elements of one’s social and physical environment in the development of self. But MacIntyre goes too far when he characterizes narrative selfhood as a property wholly dependent upon others. “[T]he narrative concept of selfhood requires... [that] I am what I may justifiably be taken by others to be...”<sup>42</sup> Selfhood is about how others “take” a person. Selfhood does not, according to this view, necessarily imply anything about an agent’s subjective states.<sup>43</sup> Cases of dementia are examples where MacIntyre’s approach may be helpful, since in those cases, a person’s subjective awareness of her own identity is rightly dismissed in favor of how others justifiably understand the person. There are

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<sup>41</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 215.

<sup>42</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 217.

<sup>43</sup> I suspect MacIntyre would deny my claim, but it is also clear that the way other people take a person holds a more prominent position for MacIntyre than any subjective understanding of the self. MacIntyre claims, “I am the *subject* of a history that is my own and no one else’s, that has its own peculiar meaning.” *After Virtue*, p. 217. This claim is made just after MacIntyre asserts that “I am what I may be justifiably be taken by others to be.”

examples, however, where other people are mistaken about a person's identity, even though they are justified in understanding the person in precisely that way. Consider the case of Robert Hanssen, the FBI agent turned Soviet spy.<sup>44</sup> After 20 years of service with the FBI, he was eventually arrested in 2001 as a spy working for the U.S.S.R and Russia. For a number of years, there were little to no indications that Hanssen was a double-agent. He had no ideological ties to communism or the U.S.S.R, and he appears to have been a devout Catholic. He voluntarily approached Russian intelligence, and he claimed that he only did it for the money. Hanssen's colleagues, at least for a number of years, justifiably took him to be a faithful employee of the FBI, even though they were mistaken about his allegiances and his identity. Although this is an extreme example, it shows that there is something amiss about MacIntyre's view of selfhood. MacIntyre pays too little attention to the *one* who appropriates her identity from her community. MacIntyre has taken that which is a justifiable constraint on narratives (i.e., that one ought to be able to explain one's actions even when those actions appear to conflict with one's purported identity) and made it the defining characteristic of selfhood. Robert Hanssen ought to be able to explain why it is that he acted as a faithful FBI officer, even when he was acting against the interest of the FBI; but in MacIntyre's account it appears as if Robert Hanssen is a faithful FBI employee simply because others justifiably take him that way. MacIntyre is in a difficult position here: either he recognizes that the intersubjectively accessible identity of an individual is not the distinguishing mark of identity as such, or perhaps he could say that people were not justified in taking Hanssen as a faithful FBI officer. In which case, it is not clear what would count as

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<sup>44</sup> David Wise, *Spy: The Inside Story of How the FBI's Robert Hanssen Betrayed America* (New York : Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2003).

justification for thinking that any person is who they claim (and appear) to be.<sup>45</sup>

MacIntyre has minimized the place of subjectivity in the development of self and set intersubjectivity in its place. Intersubjectivity plays a role in the formation of self, but it is not the complete or even the primary story.

The second problem with MacIntyre's view is that it is not clear how MacIntyre can maintain that a narrative is "true" if any event outside the scope of a narrative is "plainly the disjointed parts of some possible narrative."<sup>46</sup> If events really do not exist prior to their narration, then it is not clear how the predicates about truth and falsehood apply to narratives. MacIntyre clearly does not mean that narratives are true insofar as they "create" the events they describe. He claims that a person is "a story-telling animal... [who] becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth."<sup>47</sup> This claim implies that narratives can be true or false, and since a person becomes a teller of true stories, it follows that there is some criteria for distinguishing true and false narratives. Narratives about people's lives are true to the extent that they are able to represent accurately the person's life, but this presupposes that there is something to represent. It presupposes that events happen and that people live lives prior to those lives being expressed in narrative.<sup>48</sup>

This mistake is not simply a theoretical problem for MacIntyre's theory of selfhood, since it shows that MacIntyre confuses a narrative of a human life with

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<sup>45</sup> Perhaps one could claim that others were not justified in taking Hanssen as a faithful officer because his betrayal was ultimately revealed. This response is unsatisfactory because (a) it does not help explain the problem for those people who took Hanssen to be a faithful FBI officer prior to there being evidence for thinking that he was a double-agent, and it does not address the problem for the other examples where a person's identity will always be concealed as Hanssen's was for a time.

<sup>46</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 215.

<sup>47</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 216.

<sup>48</sup> I am not claiming here that a true narrative will capture all aspects of a person's life or that no important elements will be obscured or minimized in the story. Narratives, at least the one's we know of, are presentations from a particular human point of view. They express a story from a particular perspective, but the perspectival character of narratives in general does not preclude talk of truthful or false narratives.

human life as such. This conclusion follows from the preceding analysis, but there are also passages where MacIntyre explicitly makes this mistake. As an illustration of his NTS, MacIntyre asks, “[T]o what genre [does] the life of Thomas Becket belong...”<sup>49</sup> In his response, he considers the three different literary genres, including hagiography, saga hero epic, and tragedy, and he concludes that, “The true genre of the life is neither hagiography nor saga, but tragedy.” As Peter Lamarque points out, MacIntyre has confused a narrative of a life with the life itself. This type of mistake is similar to confusing the proposition about some state of affairs with the actual state of affairs. Lamarque writes: “[H]e asks not about genres of *narratives* but, in a crucial slip, what genres people’s *lives* belong in. This merging of life and narrative is a mistake. A narrative, being a story, must be narrated, but a life need not be narrated.”<sup>50</sup>

MacIntyre’s slip underscores a conceptual problem about the possibility of subjective narration in MacIntyre’s NTS. Narratives are always stories about the past. The future is only a part of a narrative insofar as it figures into a person’s goals or expectations, and the present can never be captured in narrative since any attempt to make the present an object of reflection is to think about a moment that has already passed. MacIntyre concedes that narratives are understood retrospectively,<sup>51</sup> but he should remember Kierkegaard’s dictum that although “life [is] understood backwards... it must be lived forwards.”<sup>52</sup> Life need not be narrated, and it is only by means of life, a particular type of life, that narratives are possible. This problem becomes more acute for MacIntyre since he conceives of the narrative of a person’s

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<sup>49</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 212.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Lamarque, “On Not Expecting Too Much from Narrative,” *Mind and Language* 19:4 (2004), p. 402.

<sup>51</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 212.

<sup>52</sup> *JP* 1 450 / *SKS* JJ:167



life as a complete story with a beginning, middle, and an end. But, of course, a person cannot narrate or appropriate the story that includes one's own death. Therefore, the story of a person's life cannot be told until after the life has been lived. It is for this reason that MacIntyre has to make selfhood something that is achieved on one's behalf by others. "I am what I may justifiably be taken by others to be in the course of living out a story that runs from my birth to my death."<sup>53</sup> It follows from this that a person cannot know the true and intelligible narrative which constitutes one's identity because whatever narrative the person presently understands as the story of her life may change before (or even after) one's death; and in death, one is no longer able to subjectively appropriate any narrative of one's now completed life.<sup>54</sup> By not considering a person's own subjective self-understanding as primary, MacIntyre makes the mistake of confusing "complete narratives" with actual lives. He wants to maintain some intersubjective constraint on personal narratives, but he achieves this result by wedding himself, ultimately, to a view of selfhood that is subjectively unimportant to an agent.

In the preceding analysis, I have established that MacIntyre's NTS is both descriptive and prescriptive, and I have shown that, for MacIntyre, a person's community, rather than the person him- or herself, shapes and produces a person's identity.<sup>55</sup> It remains to be seen to what extent MacIntyre is a realist about the self, and whether he equates narrative theory in general with fictional narratives.

MacIntyre's views on these subjects are complicated, and one could find passages to support multiple contradictory interpretations. As such, I maintain that MacIntyre

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<sup>53</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 217.

<sup>54</sup> One could, perhaps, appeal to an afterlife in order to make sense of MacIntyre's view.

<sup>55</sup> This solution to the problem of narrative production only works to a certain degree. It is not clear how one could explain how a community produces a narrative for its members. These could be adopted from some other source, but at some point one will have to deal with Dennett's problem of origin.

simply presents an ambiguous theory concerning the reality of the self and narrative as fiction.

On the one hand, MacIntyre defends positions that are often associated with non-realist theories of self. The self is inextricably tied to the narrative of its life, and people are always already participants in a narrative structure. MacIntyre explicitly claims that actions described allegedly prior to the imposition of a narrative will only be actions that are components of some possible narrative.<sup>56</sup> They are simply actions that have been stripped of their narrative context. Presumably the same could be said for the narrative construction of selfhood. Insofar as the self is produced in narrative, talk of a self prior to the imposition of a narrative is talk about a self stripped of its implied narrative context.

On the other hand, MacIntyre does suggest that people can be mistaken about their own identity as well as the identity of others. As an example of the latter, MacIntyre identifies one particular narrative as the best narrative for understanding the life of Thomas Becket. This example shows that MacIntyre is a realist about the self in that other people can be wrong about a person's identity. He also maintains that people can be wrong about their own identity. He explicitly claims that a person is who they are taken to be by other people, and this claim implies that I could be mistaken about my own identity if it does not cohere with the way that other people view me. His basis for making this claim is not unproblematic, but he clearly wants a realist conception of selfhood.

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<sup>56</sup> To talk about describing an action requires that there be some state of affairs that renders the action intelligible. To say that an action cannot be *described* outside of a narrative context does not entail that an action must be *performed* within a narrative context. MacIntyre pays too little attention to this distinction.

Furthermore, as Lippitt claims, MacIntyre's promotion of unifying narratives raises the problem of self-deception.<sup>57</sup> Most people feel no need to unify every aspect of their lives in one complete narrative. The point "is not that I do not need to decide how to balance the demands of work and family commitments, for example, in my life. It is rather that I should not necessarily feel any obligation to bring each and every aspect of my life under one grand narrative."<sup>58</sup> There is no need, for instance, to unify my interest in Kierkegaard with my being a fan of professional football, but the MacIntyrean ideal proposes a complete unity of one's life. This ideal is antithetical to the way humans seem to live their lives, and it, therefore, opens the possibility of self-deception. This issue is more acute for MacIntyre since life narratives are essentially perspectival. In any given situation, there are multiple, often contradictory narratives that relay important elements of an event. Some narratives may encompass more points of view or be consistent with a greater number of perspectives, but it is often not possible for there to be a single, overarching narrative about an event. Narratives are always fragmentary.<sup>59</sup> It follows from this that any attempt to provide a single narrative that encompasses all aspects of a situation or series of events, particularly a complete life, is likely to either (1) minimize (or exclude) events that conflict with the overall narrative or (2) result in the construction of false memories where the purported event never occurred, but one remembers it as if it occurred. The unifying narrative could very well be a fiction that conflicts with the way a life was actually lived. Gordon Marino expresses the point like this: "[H]istorical narratives, personal

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<sup>57</sup> Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight," p. 46-47.

<sup>58</sup> Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight," p. 46.

<sup>59</sup> Lamarque and Lippitt describe the nature of narrative in this way. Lamarque, "On Not Expecting Too Much from Narrative," p. 40. Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight," p. 48. This view is also consistent with Nietzsche's perspectivism. See, for example, Maudemarie Clark's discussion in her book: *Nietzsche On Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). I discuss this claim in more detail in Section 5.2.A.

or otherwise, that roll smoothly and comprehensively along usually do so because they plow everything under.”<sup>60</sup>

MacIntyre, then, is a realist about the self in at least this respect: he claims that some narratives are more truthful and intelligible than others. But his claim that events are always already embedded within a narrative structure seems to suggest that the events could not be considered outside of a narrative structure, and furthermore, his desire for a single unifying life narrative that connects birth to death raises the problem of self-deception. Both of these points count against the thesis that MacIntyre has a realist conception of selfhood. It follows that MacIntyre is a quasi-realist about selfhood.

Regarding MacIntyre’s model of selfhood, many commentators have suggested that fiction or literary narrative plays too much of a role in his thought.<sup>61</sup> I agree with this claim insofar as MacIntyre privileges a third-person perspective concerning the self over the first person subjective perspective of selfhood. In this way, MacIntyre seems to conceive of all narratives like novels or books which present a beginning, middle, and an end. As I have mentioned above, this view implies that deception is known only from a 3<sup>rd</sup> person perspective. I do not think, however, that MacIntyre attributes the same status to a narrative self and a fictional story. A fictional story is evaluated on the basis of its intelligibility and literary merits (drama, character development, etc.), but the narrative of a person’s life is evaluated, according to MacIntyre, according to its intelligibility and its truthfulness.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Gordon Marino, “The Place of Reason in Kierkegaard’s Ethics,” *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*, p. 120.

<sup>61</sup> Lippit, “Getting the Story Straight,” pp. 44-45. Lamarque, “On Not Expecting Too Much from Narrative,” p.402. Riceour, *Oneself as Another*, p.. 158-159.

<sup>62</sup> It is not entirely clear which of these two views some critics are suggesting. Lamarque, for instance, talks about the three genres discussed in relation to Thomas Becket, and he claims that MacIntyre has become “seduced by the parallels with *fictional* narrative,” and he criticizes the three choices of genres for Thomas Becket’s life narrative – that is, hagiography, hero saga, and tragedy. He asserts that “these

As I understand MacIntyre, his NTS: (1) is quasi-realist, (2) conceives of selfhood as a product (rather than the narrator) of narrative, (3) adopts a third-person, objective account of self that makes selfhood an object similar to the way that a text is an object for a reader, and (4) is both prescriptive and descriptive. There are a number of problems with MacIntyre's account, and I attribute the majority of them to (3). Despite the many positive aspects of MacIntyre's claim that actions can be rendered more intelligible by placing them within their historical and social context, his actual NTS leaves much to be desired.

### *5.1.C. Schechtman's Narrative Constitution View of Self*

Schechtman's NTS is the most comprehensive and well-developed of the three views discussed here. She calls her view of selfhood "narrative self-constitution."<sup>63</sup> She claims that it adequately characterizes what we mean when we discuss questions of selfhood insofar as it captures and illuminates the motivating factors that justify inquiry into questions of selfhood. There are four features that motivate the study of selfhood, which Schechtman refers to as the "four features," and they are "the relation between personal identity and survival, moral responsibility, self-interested concern, and compensation."<sup>64</sup>

The task for a theory of self is not to explain how or when a self comes into existence. Rather, it is to characterize what we mean when we use the term 'self.' Personal identity should not be slavishly devoted to reidentifying objects over time (or

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genres need not be confined to the literary but his examples... suggest the higher reaches of literature and biography." "On Not Expecting Too Much from Narrative," p. 402. LaMarque shifts between criticizing MacIntyre for adopting a fictional model of narrative and a broader literary model. The former does not include biography and does not allow for a narrative to be false, whereas the latter would allow for considerations of truthfulness to play a role. If truthfulness is a relevant criteria for evaluating life narratives, then Lamarque is mistaken when he equates MacIntyre's model of narrative with fictional narratives.

<sup>63</sup> Schechtman, p. 93.

<sup>64</sup> Schechtman, p. 93.

through possible worlds), but it should focus on understanding what “actions, experiences, beliefs, values, desires, character traits, and so on (hereafter abbreviated “characteristics”) are to be attributed to a given person.”<sup>65</sup> Questions about reidentifying a self raises different sorts of philosophical problems than questions about what a self is. Schechtman claims that this “characterization question,” to which narrative self-constitution supplies an answer, is closely tied to the four features.

Schechtman’s narrative self-constitution view of personal identity provides a way of distinguishing which characteristics properly belong to an agent from those that do not. Following MacIntyre, Schechtman attributes characteristics to an agent insofar as the characteristics “hang together in a way that makes what she says, does, and feels psychologically intelligible... [where we have a] a sense of how to understand them coexisting in a single subject – [with a] sense of who this person is and what the guiding principles of her life are.”<sup>66</sup> Even though an action may be completely understandable in general, it may be less intelligible if performed by a particular agent (for example, the generally Stoical person who cries over a flat tire). We generally understand which characteristics belong to an agent by means of a person’s self-narrative. A person’s self-narrative does not view “the incidents and experiences that make up his life... in isolation, but [he] interprets [them] as part of the ongoing story that gives them their significance.”<sup>67</sup>

Having a self-narrative is, according to Schechtman, a constitutive part of personhood. Schechtman weaves the concepts of personhood, moral agency, and narrative selfhood all together in an intimate connection. She writes:

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<sup>65</sup> Schechtman, p. 73.

<sup>66</sup> Schechtman, p. 97.

<sup>67</sup> Schechtman, p. 97.

Personhood – at least insofar as it acts as the underpinning for moral agency, compensation, self-interested concern, and I contend, survival – involves more than rudimentary consciousness... At the core of this view is the assertion that individuals constitute themselves as persons by coming to think of themselves as persisting subjects who have had experience in the past and will continue to have experience in the future, taking certain experiences as theirs. Some, but not all, individuals weave stories of their lives, and it is their doing so which makes them persons. On this view a person's *identity*... is constituted by the content of her self-narrative, and the traits, actions, and experiences included in it are, by virtue of that inclusion, hers.<sup>68</sup>

The tight connection between narrative and moral personhood demonstrates the extent to which Schechtman's NTS is both descriptive and normative. I will return to this topic later, but for now it is sufficient to note the central place of subjectivity in Schechtman's theory. Her view implies that a subject's self-conception is central to identifying the subject as a person and as a moral agent.

Although Schechtman emphasizes the subjective character of narrative identity, she also holds that personhood "is an intrinsically social concept." That is, "The very concept of personhood is inherently connected to the capacity to take one's place in a certain complex web of social institutions and interactions – to act as a moral agent, enter into contracts, plan for one's future, express oneself and in general live the life of a person."<sup>69</sup> Achieving personhood is both subjective and intersubjective insofar as an individual personally appropriates "her culture's concept of a person." A culture's concept of a person is what, for Schechtman, grounds the limitations and constraints on what counts as an identity-constituting narrative. The narrative in most cases should be consistent with the narratives that others tell about an individual. Schechtman calls this the "objective" account of a person's life; but it is more properly understood as the intersubjective account. For Schechtman, subjectivity and intersubjectivity are fundamental components of selfhood.

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<sup>68</sup> Schechtman, p. 94.

<sup>69</sup> Schechtman, p. 95.

Schechtman's account of narrative selfhood addresses directly or indirectly all of the evaluative criteria that I have outlined above. I will now consider how she addresses each of those questions beginning with her realism. Schechtman's view is the most realist NTS of the three considered. She explicitly deals with cases of self-deception or repression in her account. She maintains that narrative selfhood explains a person's actions and belief, and that one's "identity-constituting narrative [must] fundamentally cohere with reality."<sup>70</sup> This "reality constraint" sets the acceptable parameters for identity-constituting narratives. A personal narrative can be wrong insofar as it commits a person to views that are either plainly false or unwarranted given the available evidence, and this undermines one's claim to personhood.

The motivation for the reality constraint is that it is important for people "to be able to engage in certain kinds of activities and interactions with others, and living the life of a person requires living in the same world as other persons."<sup>71</sup> Social interaction presupposes that participants agree on, at the very least, the basic contours of their world. Schechtman's reality constraint is essential for genuine social interaction, and it is, therefore, constitutive of personhood. Those fundamentally out of step with reality cannot have the same level of personhood as those who can meaningfully participate in social exchange.

Schechtman discusses two types of violations of the reality constraint: 1) general factual errors about human beings and one's environment,<sup>72</sup> and 2) interpretative errors where the interpretation, though not necessarily mistaken, is not a good explanation of the data available.<sup>73</sup> The delusional person who thinks he is

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<sup>70</sup> Schechtman, p. 119.

<sup>71</sup> Schechtman, p. 119-120

<sup>72</sup> Schechtman, p. 120.

<sup>73</sup> Schechtman, p. 125-126.



Napoleon and the conspiracy theorist who thinks all people are out to get him both have diminished capacities as persons, but the person who merely makes minor, easily revised factual mistakes or who has a particular way of viewing the world (angry, good-hearted, suspicious, etc.) maintains the ability to interact meaningfully with others.<sup>74</sup>

Not only does Schechtman think that an individual can be mistaken about who one is, but she also explicitly discusses the way that her NTS handles cases of self-deception or, to use her terminology, self-blindness. Cases of self-blindness are instances where one's articulated "explicit self-narrative diverges from one's implicit self-narrative."<sup>75</sup> An "implicit narrative" is perhaps the strangest and most insightful aspect of Schechtman's NTS, since it suggests that a narrative need not be narrated. An implicit narrative is the set of principles that organize and structure an individual's actions and experiences. To say that a narrative is implicit suggests that a narrative exists and explains a person's actions, even if no one is aware of it. It may be the case that an individual's psychological state explains one's actions, but it is strange to understand an unconscious psychological state as a narrative. This notion conflicts with Schechtman's early emphasis on the subjective qualities of narrative self-constitution.

Furthermore, her claims about implicit self-narratives commit her to some problematic positions. First, she asserts that a person can understand themselves by means of a self-narrative even "without conscious awareness" of the narrative or the

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<sup>74</sup> Schechtman, p. 128-130. Schechtman maintains that diminished personhood is a matter of degree. Even person who egregiously violate the reality constraint can maintain reasonably effective social relationships, though there will be limitations on the person's ability to fully participate in social interactions. Schechtman, p. 129-130.

<sup>75</sup> Schechtman, p. 115.

set of organizing principles that shape an individual's implicit narrative.<sup>76</sup> Second, it forces her to consider the possibility that narrative may not be able to do the sort of work that she is proposing here. She writes, "It does not matter much whether we say that identity is determined by a person's self-narrative or by his psychological organization, so long as it is understood that the psychological forces constituting identity are dynamic and active – things a person *does* – rather than static and passive features she *has*."<sup>77</sup> But to say that unconscious organizing principles are "active" is simply mistaken.<sup>78</sup> A basic awareness of a set of organizing principles is a prerequisite for having direct control over them. One way to resolve the problem is to suggest that certain constitutive components of an individual's identity are received passively in addition to those components that are freely and actively chosen. Schechtman's emphasis on the activity of identity construction seems to preclude this sort of response. Many of the problems that this issue raises for Schechtman's NTS are left unaddressed, and she does not seem to recognize the extent of the problem. In Section 5.2.B, I will return to this issue and explain how a NTS can address the problems that arise for Schechtman's concept of implicit narrative.

Schechtman's notion of an implicit narrative reveals two features of her NTS. First, it shows that a human organism can produce a life narrative unconsciously. According to Schechtman, beings that have a psychological organization or pattern to one's life, held consciously or unconsciously, have a self-narrative. The self is constituted by these organizational patterns, and since narratives do not have to be explicitly articulated, Schechtman can simply maintain that the individual has an

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<sup>76</sup> Schechtman, p. 116.

<sup>77</sup> Schechtman, p. 117.

<sup>78</sup> Schechtman concedes as much when she says that people are alienated from their unconscious actions insofar as they lack control of them. Schechtman, p. 117-118.

implicit narrative that delineates a distinct self. The source of the narrative is found in an individual's psychological states, and it is this narrative that produces the self.

Second, Schechtman, contrary to Dennett and MacIntyre, does not presuppose some notion of fictional or literary narrative. Neither does her view presuppose spoken narrative.<sup>79</sup> In fact, it may not require any narrative at all, since Schechtman admits that an implicit narrative may not be an actual narrative.

As I mentioned above, Schechtman's NTS is both descriptive and normative. She closely ties the concepts of personhood and moral agency to an individual's self-narrative. A person without a well-developed self-narrative will have a diminished capacity for achieving social interaction and personhood. Following MacIntyre, Schechtman believes that narrative is a useful tool for understanding human actions and it is a crucial element necessary for being a person in the broader moral community.<sup>80</sup>

Regarding the four evaluative criteria, Schechtman (1) is a realist about selfhood in all respects, (2) thinks that the way an individual organizes and frames her experiences, whether consciously or unconsciously, produces the self, (3) does not adopt any particular model of narrative, fictional or literary, as the sole representative of narrative theory, and (4) has a descriptive and prescriptive NTS. As I have mentioned above, the most problematic aspect of Schechtman's theory is that she makes use of the concept of an implicit narrative that does not actually have to be narrated. The most attractive aspect of Schechtman's theory is that she shows how

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<sup>79</sup> For Schechtman, identity-constituting narrative, though it does not actually have to be articulated, must be capable of articulation. Schechtman, p. 114.

<sup>80</sup> I am not sure what to make of Schechtman's claims that, even though she is making a strong normative claim about the importance of narrative in forming members of the moral community, there are other valuable forms of existence other than personhood, p. 99-100. Later she even claims to be "agnostic concerning the superiority of one mode of existence over [another]." p. 102.

subjective, intersubjective, and objective standpoints are all important in the development of selfhood. She claims:

[A] person exists in the convergence of subjective and objective features. An individual constitutes herself as a person by coming to organize her experience in a narrative self-conception of the appropriate form (something that individual human beings do as a result of being socialized into their culture). ‘Appropriate form’ is not something determined arbitrarily, but rather something that comes out of the complex lifestyles and social interactions definitive of personhood.

The subjective appropriation of narrative is of primary importance, but a person’s narrative must be constructed in such a way so as to allow for interpersonal relationships (the intersubjective feature of narrative selfhood) which would not be possible without Schechtman’s “reality constraint” on identity-constituting narratives (the objective feature of narrative selfhood).

## ***5.2. Kierkegaard and Narrative Selfhood***

These three, rather different, narrative theories of selfhood demonstrate that there is no single unifying feature about narrative theories. Although each use the term ‘narrative,’ each view has much more developed concepts about the nature of narrative identity than the simple account outlined above where narrative components are only understood in terms of the larger story. The four evaluative criteria show how each of the views treat important topics differently from the other narrative theories of selfhood. Whereas Schechtman sees her own project as vindicating a psychological continuity theory of identity, Dennett’s view has much more in common with a bodily continuity theory (since he relegates selfhood to the realm of fiction).<sup>81</sup> MacIntyre is primarily concerned with a notion of self that reveals the social and moral dimension

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<sup>81</sup> A historical example of a psychological continuity theory is Locke’s theory of personal identity. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Eric Olsen defends bodily continuity theory in his “Is Psychology Relevant To Personal Identity?,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 72 (1994), p. 173-86.

of selfhood, and Dennett barely even comments about the moral implications of his view.<sup>82</sup> Dennett's theory treats the self as a fictional creation, whereas MacIntyre and Schechtman are realists to varying degrees. MacIntyre seems to think that a person's life narrative is just like a life presented in literary form, whereas it may not be appropriate to call Schechtman's "implicit narrative" a narrative in any sense.

There is no single NTS, and if one is to use (or criticize) the concept, one must be clear about what one means by invoking the notion of narrative selfhood.<sup>83</sup> I will propose a particular NTS that is informed by Kierkegaard's view of the self expressed in his pseudonymous work *The Sickness Unto Death*. Although I begin with the simple account of narrative outlined above, I will illustrate the view by explaining how the NTS outlined here deals with the four evaluative criteria. I will then discuss the benefits for narrative identity theory (5.2.A) and for understanding Kierkegaard (5.2.B) of taking a narrative approach to selfhood.

#### *5.2.A. Characterizing Narrative Selfhood*

As I have mentioned above, I accept a simple definition of narrative. Narratives are stories, though there are a multiplicity of styles and modes of expression. In the story, there must be multiple events and some type of relationship between events. Furthermore, the meaning of the component parts of the narrative are understood only in relation to some of the other components of the narrative, if not the entire narrative. As it pertains to theories of self, very little follows from these relatively trivial observations about the nature of narrative. The strength of a NTS is established by how we further clarify the type and structure of identity- or self-

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<sup>82</sup> Dennett treats the subject in less than a complete paragraph. The only substantive comment he makes is that the only kind of moral responsibility worth having is a moral responsibility that abandon's any notion of a separate soul from the body. Dennett, "The Reality of Selves," p. 430.

<sup>83</sup> Many critics of narrative theories of selfhood point out the multiplicity of views, but then they often proceed to criticize narrative theories of selfhood as a whole.

constituting narratives. What sort of self is constituted by narrative? What follows about personal identity and related questions concerning, for example, moral responsibility and desert? I will clarify what I take to be a compelling narrative account of selfhood by describing how it addresses the evaluative criteria I have presented above. Although I maintain that my proposed NTS is more compelling than alternatives, the success of this particular theory is closely related to my overall project of modulating the roles of subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and objectivity for the human self. The resulting NTS elucidates Kierkegaard's theory of self and narrative theory as it pertains to personal identity.

A NTS ought to hold to a realist conception of the self. To say that a NTS is a realist theory of self is to affirm the genuine existence of the self. Such a view maintains that concepts of selfhood are useful theoretical resources for explaining and understanding human actions, and it denies the claims that a self is necessarily a fictitious creation or a distortion of a person's true identity. It follows from this that a person can be wrong about who one is, in both trivial and non-trivial ways. The motivation for adopting a realist NTS arises from concerns about a person's ability to form and interact in social relationships. A realist conception of self is required if a self is to live, on the one hand, in a social world with other selves, and, on the other hand, in a world that is able to be investigated and known by others.

The theory of self presented in *The Sickness Unto Death* is a realist theory of self. The self is identified with spirit, and it is described as the "relation that relates itself to itself... the self is not the relation but is the relation's relating itself to itself."<sup>84</sup> This characterization presupposes three different notions of self. There is the self as the relating, the self that is related, and the self that is the product of the

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<sup>84</sup> *SUD* 13 / *SKS* 11, 129.

relation. It follows from this characterization that the second form of self is there prior to the act of relating; this form of self is treated as a given rather than a product of self-creation. This notion of the self as in some respect given grounds the often repeated claims about self-deception and despair (a misrelating of self to self).<sup>85</sup>

This approach to selfhood reveals an objective dimension to the way that a person understands herself while retaining a subjective notion of selfhood. The self as the relating of self to self is a process, an action where the self is developed; but the materials used in the relating are there prior to the development of self. In fact, all the constitutive parts of selfhood are there prior to the emergence of the self. In *The Sickness Unto Death*, these elements of selfhood consist in one being a human being, that is, a physical-psychical synthesis, for whom it is possible to understand and incorporate (or misunderstand oneself or reject aspects of one's nature) both aspects of the following dyads: the infinite and the finite, the temporal and the eternal, freedom and necessity, the physical and the psychical.<sup>86</sup>

This understanding of selfhood is particularly amenable to being understood in narrative terms. The constitutive elements of narrative selfhood are there prior to any narration. Not only are the historical facts and events that are described in a narrative accessible to the narrating subject (and often to others as well) prior to his narration, but he also has all of the necessary capabilities for constructing a narrative prior to there being a narrative self. These capabilities include, at least all of the following:

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<sup>85</sup> The author of *The Sickness Unto Death* repeatedly deals with these themes. One passage where the misrelation of self to self is discussed is *SUD* 15 / *SKS* 11, 131. One passage where self-deception about a person's own state of despair is discussed is *SUD* 26-27 / *SKS* 11, 142-143.

<sup>86</sup> *SUD* 13 / *SKS* 11, 129. In one passage, Anti-Climacus claims that understanding oneself only as a psychical-physical being denies spirit, and a failure to understand oneself as spirit is a failure to be a self. It is a form of despair since it denies one aspect of the nature of selfhood (the human being as one who incorporates and synthesizes polarities in the self). It is important to point out here that this claim only implies that conceiving of oneself *only* as a psychical-physical being (as most animals probably are) is problematic. It would also be a form of despair to deny one's psychical or physical nature *SUD* 25 / *SKS* 11, 141.

being conscious of oneself as distinct individual, a capacity for self-reflection, and the ability to express oneself in language.

When I refer to historical events being accessible prior to being included in a narrative, I am not implying that all narratives capture historical events just as the actually occurred. On the contrary, I maintain that narratives, by their very nature, express a particular point of view on a situation or series of events. Suppose I am watching a football game on television, and I look at the clock and I wonder how long I have been watching television. The second act of wondering takes a second-order perspective on my first-order action of watching television. I am reflecting on my own actions, and like all acts of reflection, I understand the object of my reflection from a particular point of view, my own. This point of view is distinct from the reflection of others on the same act. My own reflection involves wondering when the game will end so that I will get to watch my favorite team play in late game. Another person may reflect on my action and wonder how much time I have wasted by watching television. In these two cases, my action is understood from the two different points of view. All acts of reflection are directed at an object, and this object, even in cases where one is reflecting on one's own act of reflection, is never identical to the one who is reflecting. Narratives, as a type of reflective understanding, always express a distinct point of view, and they can only render an action or event intelligible retrospectively.

Narrative perspectivism does not imply that the expressed point of view is necessarily inaccurate or mistaken. In point of fact, to claim that all narratives are inaccurate presupposes that there is some truthful expression of the way things really are to which we can compare a narrative. Although the perspectival character of narrative complicates questions about the truth of narratives, it does not rule out those



questions. The historical events and facts that are described in a narrative and the capacity to construct a narrative are necessary preconditions for constructing a narrative self, and this notion corresponds well to the given self described above.

This way of characterizing the relation between the events described in a narrative, the act of narration, and the narrative product is helpful for elucidating some difficulties for narrative theories of selfhood. First, it draws a distinction between the three forms of self: the historical, empirical self that is accessible to inquiry, the subject who narrates and is the active self, and the narrative self which expresses an understanding of how the empirical self relates to the active self. The empirical self is an intersubjectively accessible object of study that allows us to compare the accuracy and quality of narratives. There is also a subject who observes and inquires about the events described, and there is a narrative self who connects the object and subject in a narrative structure. This characterization of narrative selfhood coheres well with the view of self presented in *The Sickness Unto Death*, even though the language of narrative is never used in the work. This view also provides an interesting insight into Kierkegaard's journal entry where he claims, "life must be understood backwards... [but] it must be lived forwards."<sup>87</sup> A person can only narrate or understand one's own life (or the life of another) retrospectively. The narrative self is one avenue for understanding life, but it is only possible because there is a subject living the life of a person.

There is a further point that needs to be made in relation to this characterization of narrative selfhood. Conceiving of the self in these three different respects - as a narrating subject, historical self, and a narrative self - is structurally similar to the Kantian and Fichtean ways of describing the self. For Kant, the

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<sup>87</sup> JP 1 450 / SKS JJ:167

transcendental subject is an *a priori* necessary condition for the possibility of experience, and the transcendental subject is distinguished from the empirical self. The empirical self is what one is conscious of when one examines one's own particular experiences and psychological states. We distinguish ourselves from others with reference to our empirical selves rather than our transcendental selves, but the activity of the transcendental subject makes empirical self-consciousness possible.<sup>88</sup>

Fichte makes a similar distinction in his *Wissenschaftslehre*. In order "to discover the primordial, absolutely unconditioned first principle of all human knowledge", Fichte appeals to the activity of the I which posits itself absolutely. This I can only be represented with a corresponding object, a not-I, something of which the I is conscious. For Fichte, the I is limited and determined by the not-I, but the I is also that which makes the not-I possible. This apparent contradiction is resolved via an act of imagination. The imagination has the power to unite objects because it actively brings opposites together, and the opposites in this case are the finite I and the finite not-I.<sup>89</sup>

Kant and Fichte characterize three different aspects of the self – the self as an object, the self as active subject, and the self as the relation between the self as object and active subject. These three ways of understanding the self (or aspects of the self) cohere well with the account described here. The primary difference is that in a NTS emphasis is placed on the narrative of the self – that is, the relation between the empirical and narrating self – rather than the narrating active self. The result is that the narrative self represents a unique, concrete being who is represented in a variety of ways – often accurately and inaccurately – who is active in the act of narration but

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<sup>88</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* ed. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) pp. 219-226, 245-266. A84/B116-A94/B129, B129-169.

<sup>89</sup> J. G. Fichte. *The Science of Knowledge (Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre)* translated by P. Heath and J. Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), I, 91-122.

passive insofar as she receives the content that makes up the self from outside herself including her physical environment and social community.<sup>90</sup>

There are three strengths of this understanding of the self. First, it provides a way to understand how one can emphasize and prioritize the role of subjectivity in the development and formation of selfhood, while at the same time maintaining a place for evaluating the accuracy and objectivity of self narratives. The self is something which is always accessible for those who consider it. As such, a narrative can be mistaken insofar as it mischaracterizes the historical, empirical self which is accessible to both oneself and other people. Nevertheless, selfhood is still produced only by the subject, even though a subject will appropriate concepts, attitudes, and social roles from one's environment. The publicly accessible components of selfhood check against self-deception and explain how one could have a false self (or be in despair to use the language of *The Sickness Unto Death*).

The second strength of this view is that it can account for some problems that arise for a NTS. The characterization of the narrative self as an activity or process of relating the historical, empirical self to the narrating subject accounts for some of the difficulties in prominent narrative theories of selfhood. It shows how one can maintain a "reality constraint" without making selfhood dependent on other people like MacIntyre does. One evaluates the accuracy of a self narrative by comparing it with other narratives about similar events or facts. It also follows from what I have said about realism and about the relationship between the different manifestations of the self that I am not committed to adopting a single genre of narrative as the model of identity-constituting narratives. My commitment to a realist theory of self precludes viewing narratives as merely a fictional narrative creation. Furthermore,

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<sup>90</sup> Fichte's view of self, if an interpreter focused on the role of imagination, might be compatible with this view.

since I distinguish the historical or empirical self who “lives life forward” from the narrating self and the narrative self, I do not commit MacIntyre’s mistaken of equating a narrative of human life with a human life as such. I am, therefore, not adopting literary portrayals of life as the model of the narrative self.

This view also addresses some problems that arise when one appeals to a non-narrated “implicit narrative,” while at the same time using the basic idea to specify the object of a person’s narrative identity. That is, we can identify the object, the character, the given self, who will be the subject of a self-narrative. This character has a set of principles that organize its experiences and actions, but this fact neither implies (a) that these experiences are organized in a unified narrative, nor (b) that the principles themselves are “active” as Schechtman suggests. Having organized experiences and actions are constitutive features of narrative, but they must be expressed in word or thought. The subject plays a central feature in reflecting on these patterns of organization and understanding them within a larger whole. That is, the way in which a person’s experiences and actions are structured “implicitly” is that they are given in such a way that a person is able to appropriate the experiences and actions as one’s own through narrative. Having organized experiences and actions is a necessary condition for narrative selfhood, but it is not sufficient. The narrative itself expresses the relationship between these constitutive elements of the narrative and the narrating subject. In an identity-constituting narrative, the narrator is related to the character of the narrative by means of the self-narrative. A self-narrative expresses the identity the narrator and the main character as one and the same. This view shows how the narrative self is both passive and active. The production of a narrative is active insofar as one takes up social roles or imposes one’s own meaning on a series of events, but the content of the narrative is passive in that it is received as a given

from other sources – it is not created by the self. The narrative object, the character is there to be narrated, while the narrating subject makes the character one's own.

The third strength of this NTS is that it explains the connection between personal identity and one's social relationships with others. A person is connected to others through a common connection to particular historical events and the historical self, which are elements of multiple narratives. Selfhood is inherently social insofar as our social roles and interpersonal relations are constitutive of our identity through our participation with others in our own personal narrative as well as the narratives of others. The chief strength of a NTS is its ability to show the interconnections between subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and objectivity in narrative. Adopting a narrative understanding of Kierkegaard's theory of self is motivated by the desire to incorporate the social element into Kierkegaard's thought, but it also helps resolve some lingering theoretical problems in narrative theories of selfhood.

#### *5.2.B. Why view the Kierkegaardian Self as a Narrative Self?*

Although I have pointed out ways in which Kierkegaard's theory of self is expressed similarly to a NTS, I have yet to explain the primary motivation for discussing the relationship between Kierkegaard's account of self and narrative selfhood. I have provided some textual support for my claim that Kierkegaard's self can be understood narratively, but the account of the self in *The Sickness Unto Death* is not the primary reason for preferring this sort of interpretation of Kierkegaard's view of selfhood. There are two reasons to view Kierkegaard in this way: (1) it coheres with and explains Kierkegaard's views about the mutual development of self and community in his dialectic of community by showing how an emphasis on subjectivity can be understood without minimizing the social or objective dimensions of existence. (2) It provides a way to understand the overall authorship that does not

diminish the significance of the social period of Kierkegaard's thought in 1846 and 1847. I have argued that Kierkegaard maintains that the social dimension to human existence plays a more important role in his thought than is ordinarily assumed. In my fourth chapter, I showed how Kierkegaard described the progression of the dialectic of community as the development of both the community and the individuals that make up the community. A community has the task of developing individuals, and developed individuals are necessary for genuine community. A well functioning community will educate its constituents so that they can further develop the community. The separation of the self from the public in *A Literary Review* describes the subjective isolation and the beginning of the individual's education. Willing the good in truth in "On the Occasion of a Confession" and loving one's neighbor in *Works of Love* demonstrate the ways in which personal development manifests itself in fulfilling interpersonal and communal duties to other people. A NTS coheres with and provides a way to understand Kierkegaard's views here. Although a narrator – a subject – produces a narrative, the narrative is constituted by the appropriation and adoption (or rejection) of the social roles one occupies in a community. A subject is never an isolated subject – a person's identity is always related, at least in some capacity, to one's physical or social environment.

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of reading Kierkegaard's theory of the development of self as a narrative is that the incorporation of the subjective, intersubjective, and objective aspects of selfhood provides a way to understand the authorship as giving a central place to the social dimension of Kierkegaard's thought, while at the same time not ignoring the earlier emphasis on the individual and the one-to-one God relation or the later attack on the Danish Church. In this schema, the early works from *Either/Or* through *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, describe the

development of the individual vis-à-vis the one-to-one God relation. Ethical duties within this period are understood as subordinate to the God-relation, and the highest expression of the individual is represented by the figure of Abraham who spurns human relationships, represented by Isaac, in order to commit himself absolutely to God. There is a real risk, if the authorship is only considered up to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, that one could easily take the Kierkegaardian self as fundamentally and ultimately detached from every human relationship for the sake of the God-relation. But the resulting concept of self is of an individual who is able to stand alone against other people, the culture, the mores of his day. Thus, the first period of the authorship is analogous to the role of subjectivity in the formation of narrative selfhood.

The type of individual described in the early authorship is, furthermore, essential for the types of social relationships and ethical commitments described in “On the Occasion of a Confession” and *Works of Love*. Only when an individual is willing to stand alone for the good against the masses is a person able to have the proper frame of mind for understanding one’s obligations to other people. Only when an individual is willing to love the neighbor – not only in words and thoughts but in specific actions, regardless of who the neighbor is or whether the neighbor returns the love – only then is one able to make the type of commitment that is constitutive of genuine interpersonal relationships. The three works in 1846 and 1847 – *A Literary Review*, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, and *Works of Love* – describe the social dimension to Kierkegaard’s thought. These works show the ethical and social dimension to Kierkegaard’s theory of self. One does not reject one’s social obligations to one’s spouse, child, or neighbor, to give a few examples, in order to fulfil the demands of the God-relation. Rather one’s already existing social

relationships are transformed and purified by means of the God-relation. This social period of Kierkegaard's authorship corresponds to the incorporation of the social or intersubjective in narrative selfhood.

The final period of Kierkegaard's authorship, for my purposes, begins in 1848 with the presentation of idealized Christianity and culminates in his attack on Christendom. Rather than viewing the attack literature as an aberration or a rejection of Kierkegaard's earlier portrayals of Christianity, it is a claim about how the narrative of Christian Denmark and Christendom is a farce. It denies the accuracy of the dominant narrative of the time that Denmark was a Christian nation, and Kierkegaard attempts to show, by appealing to New Testament Christianity that this narrative is mistaken.<sup>91</sup> I do not mean to suggest that the narrative analogy is the best or only way to read the authorship, but merely that it explains how one can understand the authorship without ignoring or diminishing the significance of the social aspect of Kierkegaard's body of work or his theory of self.

### ***5.3. Conclusion***

In chapter three, I described Kierkegaard's concept of self in such a way that there was no explicit conflict between oneself and others. In chapter four, I employed Kierkegaard's dialectic of community to show that the Kierkegaardian self is a social self. In this chapter, I have presented a NTS as a model for understanding how to relate the subjective and intersubjective self in Kierkegaard's thought. This model highlights the central place of sociality in Kierkegaard's thought, and it can also help resolve some lingering problems for narrative theories of selfhood.

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<sup>91</sup> Kierkegaard's view of New Testament Christianity is not without its problems, but this view still shows how the attack literature, even if mistaken, is continuous with Kierkegaard's earlier work.



## **Chapter Six: The Importance of Understanding Kierkegaard's Social Thought**

I have provided a holistic account of Kierkegaard's social thought that showed how Kierkegaard's self is really a social self. Kierkegaard's criticisms of sociality and having dealings with others are well known, and I began my argument by describing how these criticisms are instances where Kierkegaard conceives of his work as a corrective. Then, I addressed two of the most sustained critiques of community and interpersonal relationships in Kierkegaard's authorship by showing the implicit social dimension in the account of Abraham in *Fear and Trembling* and the critique of the Danish Church at the end of Kierkegaard's life. These two components of my argument are the negative thesis in my project insofar as they show that Kierkegaard never precludes the possibility of a social dimension to his thought. The negative thesis show three things about Kierkegaard's social thought: (1) his critiques of society, community and interpersonal relationships in general are often expressed in such a way that there is good reason to consider the possibility that there is an implicit subtext that indicates the social dimension of his critiques; (2) Kierkegaard's well developed accounts of faith, subjectivity and religiosity as expressed in, for example, *Fear and Trembling* and the final attack on the Church are consistent with a social reading of Kierkegaard's project. Thus, it is possible to incorporate these primary Kierkegaardian themes into an overall account of Kierkegaard's work that does justice to his social thought. (3) It follows from (1) and (2) that Kierkegaard need not be interpreted as an atomistic thinker who privileges the individual over social relationships. This third point prepares the way for my positive thesis that there is a clearly articulated account of the importance of human relationships

and community in Kierkegaard's thought that has important historical and philosophical implications.

I defended my positive thesis in three ways. First, I showed that there are a large number of texts that revealed the priority of human relationships in Kierkegaard's overall thought. In one significant journal entry that outlines Kierkegaard's 'dialectic of community,' he explains how the individual and the community mutually constitute the other. This entry provides a framework for understanding the relationship between Kierkegaard's earlier emphasis on inwardness and subjectivity and his later work concerning sociality and ethics in human relationships. Three of Kierkegaard's works in 1846-1847 – *A Literary Review*, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, and *Works of Love* – are consistent with and confirm the general framework provided in the dialectic of community passage. This interpretation is useful for resolving particular textual and philosophical problems that arise in these three works including Kierkegaard's claim in the latter two works that a person can be in a meaningful relation with the dead.

The second way I defended the positive thesis was by situating Kierkegaard's social thought in its immediate historical and intellectual context. This context shows that Kierkegaard appropriated the social views of Karl Bayer as the primary source for his dialectic of community. Karl Bayer was an appreciative, though not uncritical, student of Hegel, and his theory of community is closely related to Hegel's. The historical connection between Kierkegaard, Hegel, and Bayer shows that Kierkegaard's understanding of human relationships and sociality ought to be understood in the context of post-Kantian social and political philosophy. Kierkegaard treats similar subjects, borrows terminology and contributes to an underappreciated strand of thought that

emphasizes the role of the individual in the development and growth of community. This line of argument has implications on our understanding of Kierkegaard's relationship to Hegel and to post-Kantian European social and political philosophy more generally.

The third way I defended my positive thesis was by showing how a Kierkegaardian narrative theory of selfhood can provide a philosophically interesting model for understanding the relationship between subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Although Kierkegaard asserts that the subjectivity of the early authorship is related to the social character of life in the later authorship, he never explicitly clarifies or explains how the two are related. In order to illustrate how the two might be related, I presented a Kierkegaardian narrative theory of selfhood as a framework for understanding the relationship between subjectivity and intersubjectivity in the self. This issue has become a prominent issue in Kierkegaard scholarship in relation to MacIntyre's criticism of *Either/Or* in *After Virtue*. I argued that three prominent narrative theories of selfhood – Dennett's, MacIntyre's, and Schechtman's – have significant problems that can be addressed with a Kierkegaardian narrative theory of selfhood. Such an account shows how subjective notions of self are related to the social dimension of human existence.

The thesis that Kierkegaard has something meaningful to say about interpersonal relationships and community is supported by each of these arguments. The implications and contributions of this study to Kierkegaard studies, post-Kantian European social philosophy, and narrative identity theory are closely tied to each of these arguments. Within Kierkegaard studies, my holistic account of the social dimension within Kierkegaard's corpus reveals the priority of ethics and sociality in his overall thought. Although a significant number of Kierkegaard scholars now recognize a distinctive social

and moral dimension to Kierkegaard's thought, the community is still somewhat divided on this issue. Despite some general sympathy for my position, there has never been a systematic study of this aspect of his thought that (1) addresses the authorship as a whole (rather than just Kierkegaard's edifying works or *A Literary Review*), (2) gives an account of how the earlier, pseudonymous authorship and the later attack literature are consistent with Kierkegaard's social views, and (3) situates Kierkegaard's project in the context of 19<sup>th</sup> century Danish and European social thought. Most of the prior work on the topic has been very limited in scope or simply addresses a single work or two, and none of it deals with the relation between Kierkegaard's social thought and his contemporaries and intellectual forbearers. This project fills this gap in Kierkegaard studies.

This account also has implications for our understanding of the relationship between Kierkegaard and Hegel and the development of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century European social philosophy. My account of the connection between Kierkegaard and Bayer as well as between Bayer and Hegel shows how Kierkegaard is indebted to Hegel and that there is more similarity between the two thinkers than is ordinarily admitted regarding the relationship between the individual and other people. Although this historical claim is interesting in its own right, my argument also provides a new way of imagining 19<sup>th</sup> century social thought. Rather than characterizing unity as a product of a common teleological purpose that tends to exclude those who either are explicitly excluded by the imagined idea of unity (e.g., nationalism excluding immigrants or ethnic minorities) or who simply fail to appropriate the idea for themselves, unity is something that is presupposed in one's practices and activities as a human person. As Kierkegaard says, it

is something that lies behind rather than something to which we strive toward, and this presumed unity allows for multiplicity and difference to flourish against a backdrop of a deep and shared commitment to one another. What is shared here is not a set of social and moral customs (as it is, for example, in the Greek *Sittlichkeit* which is the complex set of social relations embodied in social mores, religious custom and the like); nor is it an abstract notion of the human person stripped of the particularities of human existence. Rather, what is shared is the fact that one is able to become an individual who is able to make an internal commitment manifested in external practices and actions toward another person such that one's commitment is able to be maintained even against public or societal pressure. For Kierkegaard, this type of individual is the foundation and ground of genuine unity. Much more needs to be said in order to spell out explicitly the differences between this conception of unity and how it reframes 20<sup>th</sup> century developments in social thought and political theology but for now, I will simply indicate that Kierkegaard's social thought is relevant to the topic and that this is an area that requires further study.

Finally, this study also aids in the development of narrative identity theory. The distinction between the three operative notions of self – the historical, empirical self; the subjective narrating self; and the narrative self as the relation between the self as historical, empirical object and the self as the narrator – provides a framework for discussing the overall value and limits of narrative identity theory. A Kierkegaardian narrative theory of selfhood is able to address objections better than alternative accounts. The constitutive components and attributes of selfhood are operative and available prior to the construction of a narrative self and they are necessary conditions for the possibility of self-narration. As such, this particular narrative theory of selfhood adopts a realist

theory of self. But it also explains the fluidity and malleability in how we characterize and understand ourselves. That is, the way in which a person develops and conceives of him- or herself plays a fundamental role in how the subject and other people characterize and understand the person. This overall project fills a gap within Kierkegaard scholarship, and it also makes an initial contribution that will require further elaboration in both post-Kantian European social and political philosophy and narrative identity theory.

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## Vita

1. **Personal:** Born – McKinney, TX, 6 May 1978

2. **Education:**

- M.A. University of Kentucky – Philosophy, 2005
- M.A., Texas A&M University – Philosophy, 2002
- B.S., Liberty University – Interdisciplinary Studies, 2000

3. **Professional Positions:**

- Graduate Assistant in Philosophy, University of Kentucky, 2002-2006
- Adjunct Instructor, Eastern Kentucky University, 2005
- Graduate Assistant in Philosophy, Texas A&M University, 2001-2002

4. **Scholastic and Professional Honors:**

- J. William Fulbright Grant to Denmark, Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre, 2007-2008
- American-Scandinavian Foundation Grant, Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre, 2006
- Dissertation Year Fellowship, University of Kentucky, 2006-2007
- Summer Fellows Program for Research, Hong Kierkegaard Library, 2005
- Commonwealth Research Award, University of Kentucky, 2005
- Daniel R. Reedy Fellowship: Quality Achievement Fellowship Award, 2002-2004
- Winner, Graduate Student Essay Contest, Texas A&M University, 2002

5. **Professional Publications:**

Essays:

- “The Role of Others in ‘On the Occasion of a Confession’.” *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, v. 12, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser, Walter De Gruyter.
- “Karl Bayer: Kierkegaard’s Attempt at Social Philosophy – An Examination of Kierkegaard’s Relationship to Karl Bayer.” *Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries*, v. 5, ed. Jon Stewart, Ashgate. (invited)
- “D.G. Monrad: Kierkegaard on Politics, the Liberal Movement, and the Danish Constitution.” *Kierkegaard and His Danish Contemporaries*, v. 6, ed. Jon Stewart. Ashgate, forthcoming. (invited)
- “J.L.A. Kolderup-Rosenvinge: Kierkegaard on Walking Away from Politics” *Kierkegaard and His Danish Contemporaries*, v. 6, ed. Jon Stewart. Ashgate, forthcoming. (invited)

Book Reviews and Published Interviews:

- Review of Susan Buck-Morss’s “*Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left*”, *disClosure*.
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