

Introduction

We must see the need of having nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men to rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood.

—Martin Luther King Jr.¹

[I was] consecrated and dedicated by the highest approval of Divine Governance to becoming a vexing “gadfly,” a quickening whip on all this spiritlessness, which in secularized mediocrity has blabbered Christianity down into something meaningless, into being spiritless impotence, suffocated in illusion.

—Søren Kierkegaard²

Right now we look like a cricket. What is a cricket? King of the insects; a little, tiny animal. All the cricket can do is [say] “cricket, cricket, cricket.” Just a noise, that’s all. But you know, if that cricket gets in the ear of the lion and scratches inside, there is nothing the lion can do. There is nothing; there is no way the lion can use his claws and jaws to destroy the cricket. The more the lion scratches himself the deeper the cricket goes.

—Reies López Tijerina³

A ONE-DIMENSIONAL AND SOMETIMES UNSYMPATHETIC READING OF Søren Kierkegaard has prevailed. That approach has portrayed him as an asocial, acosmic “single individual,”⁴ to use sociological terms; or as the father of existentialism, in philosophical jargon.⁵ But listening more

1. King, *Testament of Hope*, 291.

2. Pap. XI, 3 B53 n.d., 1854, JP, 6943. In my citations of quoted journal entries, the first citation is from the Danish edition (*Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*) and the second from *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers* (hereafter JP).

3. Busto, *King Tiger*, 1.

4. Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard*, xxi.

5. This is definitely a caricature of existentialism. For a vigorous interpretation of

closely, one discovers that the misuse of his pseudonymous books, as well as the selective forgetfulness of his last writings, have been the cause of many misunderstandings. I am more in agreement with those scholars who clearly distinguish the early and late stages in Kierkegaard⁶ and have been studying more carefully the late period. In order to substantiate my point, I would like to draw attention to his second authorship.⁷ It is my contention that in such understudied writings, through the use of a simple and sometimes more direct style, Kierkegaard, while making his powerful critique of Danish Christendom, addresses economic issues in a very enlightening way.⁸

Therefore, the critical point of this study is to assert that within Søren Kierkegaard's larger attack upon Christendom, his critique of economic matters is a fertile field for exploration. This will do justice to his thought despite many misreadings and will, above all, illuminate our current socioeconomic and political situation from the theological

Kierkegaard and existentialism, see Miranda, *Being and the Messiah*, 1–26. See also Garaudy, *Marxism in the Twentieth Century*.

6. Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*; Nordentoft, *Kierkegaard's Psychology*; Nordentoft, *Søren Kierkegaard. Bidrag til kritikken af den borgerlige selvoptagethed*; Plekon, "Introducing Christianity into Christendom," 327–52. Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*.

7 By "second authorship," I am referring to the works written after *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* until his death in 1855. Kierkegaard planned to close his cycle of books with *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. An important shift is noted in this second period especially due to Kierkegaard's dispute with the media in 1846 and, above all, because of the political and social European revolutions of the late 1840s. Those events were the direct cause of the end of the Danish absolute monarchy in 1848–1849. Among the authors who make this distinction of the two Kierkegaards are Nordentoft, Kirmmse, Lindhardt, Bukdahl, Sløk, Deuser, and Plekon. This period includes the numerous entries in his diary, besides the following books and articles: *Two Ages: A Literary Review*, *The Book on Adler*, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, *Works of Love*, *Christian Discourses*, *A Crisis and the Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, *The Point of View for my Work as an Author*, *Armed Neutrality*, *Two Minor Ethico-Religious Treaties*, *The Sickness unto Death*, *Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, *Training in Christianity*, *An Edifying Discourse*, *An Open Letter to Dr. Rudelbach*, *On my Work as an Author*, *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, *For Self-Examination*, *Judge for Yourself*, some articles in *The Fatherland*, "This Must be Said, so Let It Now Be Said," *The Moment*, "Christ's Judgment on Official Christianity," and "The Unchangeableness of God."

8. The problem of interpreting Kierkegaard in conservative ways comes partly from Walter Lowrie, his biographer and first English-language translator, who was himself an aristocrat. Lowrie influenced interpretations of Kierkegaard. See Pérez-Álvarez, "Walter Lowrie," 204–5.

point of view. It is a commonplace misconception to view Kierkegaard as a well-to-do theologian who had nothing to say about social and economic issues.⁹ In spite of that, it is my conviction that he is not only of interest but a very important interlocutor for our present time.¹⁰

A few scholars have introduced a new paradigm from which to read Kierkegaard (particularly his late writings), namely, from a social and political perspective. However, it is my claim that Kierkegaard's language about economics has not been fully appreciated. Furthermore, we can derive relevant contributions to the theological arena, such as Christianity's preference for the poor, the critique of dominant ideologies, the relinking of theory and practice, the denunciation of a competitive society, the illegitimacy of irresponsible wealth, the critique of the romanticization of poverty, and so forth. Consequently, this research is undertaken in order to demonstrate how the later Kierkegaard is worthy of our attention—in our case, specifically in relation to economic affairs.

The development of Kierkegaard's economic ideas should not be studied apart from his entire historical setting. Kierkegaard studies that have been undertaken from the biographic, hagiographic, and pseudopsychological approaches are legion. Therefore, I will refrain from utilizing those methods in this investigation. Instead, I will place Kierkegaard within his sociopolitical and economic context. At the same time, since I plan to deal with particular issues and concepts related to money and poverty, I will make use of the thematic method, developing it through a historical approach. In doing so, I will be quoting Kierkegaard extensively, in an attempt to counterbalance earlier misinterpretations with a general examination of the Dane's historical evolution.

It would not be right to interpret Kierkegaard without taking into consideration the specific socioeconomic, political, and cultural situation connected with his task of doing theology. His social critique starts with his concrete location, i.e., the Danish Golden Age (1800–1860). Denmark had been an absolute monarchy since the late seventeenth century. The crown as well as the families of the oligarchy shared the

9. González, *A History of Christian Thought*, 373. See also Best and Kellner, "Modernity, Mass Society and the Media," 36.

10 The relevance of Kierkegaard's thought for today is such that the idol of right doctrine is still alive in the Latin American context. Cf. Alves, *Protestantism and Repression*. For a blunt treatment, cf. Khan "Opposition within Affinity," 189–203.

rule of society. King Frederick VI substantially improved the conditions of peasants during his twenty-year rule until 1807. In spite of that, even in the late 1840s, 90 percent of Danes belonged to the menial agricultural working class.¹¹ It was not until 1848–1849 that, through a bloodless revolution, Denmark became a constitutional monarchy, pressured by economic, political, and nationalistic motives. From that followed the emergence of a new social class of emancipated peasants who, within the new representative government, were granted male suffrage. In addition to other changes, Kierkegaard passionately awaited the constitution of the new Danish folk church (*Folkekirke*), but it never materialized. The revolutionary events of 1848–1849 had prepared the ground for Kierkegaard's shifting of focus, but it was not until his last years (1852–1855) that this changing of paradigms was more obvious. That conversion did not happen in a political or social vacuum but rather in the midst of relevant historical events.

This research will be limited to Kierkegaard's "second authorship," that is, the books he wrote after his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, with which he supposedly had planned on ending his writing for good. Throughout this developmental approach, I am including both the Dane's published and unpublished writings. It is my contention that Kierkegaard's unpublished literature will shed much light on his published writings.

This study will focus on primary sources. Yet, critical secondary sources will be consulted as well, in order to better understand the way Kierkegaard's thought took shape. Special emphasis will be placed upon his treatment of economic ideas on both the structural and the individual level, within the historical matrix of Golden Age Denmark.

In order to reach the goal of this dissertation, I propose three chapters. The first is devoted to an in-depth analysis of the philosophical, economic, and social context of mid-nineteenth-century Denmark. This chapter focuses mainly on three areas: First, it provides a general historical overview of Kierkegaard's relationship with the academic world inside and outside his country and of his intellectual contacts with Hegel, Schelling, and the Young Hegelians. Here we find the irritating gadfly stinging his audience in the field of the ideas by questioning the idealistic rationalization of Christianity and the elitist and bour-

11. Kirmmse, "Out with it!" 16–17.

geois conception of the same. The second subdivision gives expression to Denmark's succinct economic history, particularly to the history of its colonies, which have been neglected in dealing with Kierkegaard. At this point, I will highlight revealing connections between the flourishing Golden Age Continental Denmark and its slavery and trade enterprises. We will perceive a different economic angle of Kierkegaard's family business and of notable Danish figures. Finally, I address the social-religious landscape in order to situate and appreciate Kierkegaard's contributions in the economic sphere. I explore the role clergy played in society as an instrument of social control, and I introduce the topic of the "ordinary person," namely, the poor peasantry and the urban proletariat with whom Kierkegaard sided.

The second chapter delves into Kierkegaard's economic language together with his important semantic differentiations of the concept of poverty and its correlation with wealth. In this segment I analyze Kierkegaard's views concerning his years of transition (from 1846 to 1852). The goal of this chapter is to fully grasp Kierkegaard's treatment of the interplay between wealth and poverty. The revolutionary gadfly manifests his concern with concreteness, actuality, specifically with economic matters, from the social, cultural, political, and religious dimensions. We delve into Kierkegaard's appraisal of social institutions such as the church, the theater, and the university alongside its top representative figures. Lastly, a word must be said about the well-disseminated portrait of Kierkegaard as a bourgeois. Consequently, I take issue with Kierkegaard's own fortune and his use of it, which will reveal the correspondence of his thought with his practice.

Central to the third chapter is Kierkegaard's radicalization of his judgments on economics. This is an important and neglected dimension of Kierkegaard's final, devastating critique of Christendom in Golden Age Denmark. This part is undertaken in order to demonstrate that economic issues are of major significance throughout Kierkegaard's final, prophetic years of 1852 to 1855. The first, socially conservative Kierkegaard planned to close his career as an author on February 1846 with his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. However, the effervescent years of the late 1840s played an important role in his thought. A month after he had finished writing *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, he wrote his *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age*, followed by other works such as *Works of Love*, *The Sickness unto Death*, *Training*

in *Christianity*, and “*For Self-Examination*” and “*Judge for Yourself*.” In these major books Kierkegaard shows his move to a radical social critique. The shift of 1848–1849 from an absolute Danish monarchy to a democratic government, within the general framework of other political European revolutions of the same time, announced relevant social transformations. Since these expected changes were delayed, at least in the ecclesiastical arena, by 1852 there is a clear shifting of paradigms in Kierkegaard’s thought. During this period, he orchestrated his assault on the gospel of the prosperous, which consisted of the ideology of adaptation that privileged the rich to the detriment of the poor. He also denounced the hidden economic agendas of the religious and political rules of the state-church monism, better known as Christendom. I thus deal with the molesting gadfly’s task of combating the oppressive, self-complacent and static world order, as it had been sanctioned by the academy and the clergy. Within this historical framework and as part of my task of linking Kierkegaard’s thought with social and political events, I introduce three lesser time periods: the Voluntary Silence Stage (1852–December 18, 1854), the *Fatherland* Stage (December 18, 1854–May 1855), and the *Instant* Stage (May 26, 1855–October 1855). His treatment of economic themes (not in individualistic but in structural terms) will be more obvious in this segment of the research.

Finally, the fourth chapter summarizes and highlights the findings of the preceding pages by showing the relevance of the Dane’s thoughts for today.