Kierkegaard

ODD Circle Tue 31 March 2009 at *The Blue Mugge* pub

Notes using the BBC radio 4 programme In our Time (IoT), March 2008, with the title *Kierkegaard – Fear and Trembling in Copenhagen*.
Those notes adapted a little for 'Scandinavian Politics and Culture' weekend at Wortley Hall, November 2013.

1. Why discuss Kiekegaard when several of our group may never have heard of him and some find 'intellectual' and philosophical discussion daunting? We may begin by re-visiting an earlier basic question: what have theologians and philosophers done for us? Melvyn Bragg's comments in his Newsletter on the programme make a good starting point.

2. “K. was the first philosopher I met in my late adolescence who seemed to speak directly and simply to where I... was having difficulty in standing. His Christianity made it easy to identify with him because I had been brought up in a strong and persistent Anglican tradition. .. His joust with Reason appealed to those of us who wanted there to be thought and feeling which went beyond reason but could not reason our way to that”.

3. “One of the distinguishing marks of K's work is his love of the paradox. He wrote: 'One must not think slightingly of the paradoxical for the paradox is the source of the thinker's passion...'”.

4. “His view of human existence as a process of becoming rather than simply being a static thing is extraordinarily attractive... the idea of changing from one person to another inside the same body... remains something both attractive and something that feels true.”

5. The three philosophers on IoT discussed key questions about the significance of K. and his continued relevance. K's engagement with Socrates, believing that 'Truth happens in the ebb and flow of conversations', where irony and dialectical questioning is important. Dare we claim that this happens occasionally in our pub discussions?

6. "K. was a Christian but against the Church... Christendom socialised Chritianity" which is essentially about the inner life. Institutionalised Christianity inevitably becomes complacent. K. want to unsettle that.

7. K. '...did not reject Reason as such' but emphasised its limitations, its finite perspectives. What limits? Man's 'creatureliness'. We are temporal beings, always in the process of becoming. There are elements in this process which cannot be rationalised.

8. Socrates believed that the Truth was eternal. For K. as a Christian, he believed Christianity is historical and Truth comes into being in that way.... is communicated through stories, for example the Biblical account of Abraham and Isaac 'a classical lyric'. Our philosophers find K. very insightful on 'love' ('the sheer demanding-ness of love'; 'love is about duty to yourself as well as to others').