

PHILOSOPHY REPORT

August report by Annie Clouston and Ian Reid

This month we discussed Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher (1813 -1855) was a prolific writer, mostly using pseudonyms, not so much for anonymity but as an effort to be an objective observer of himself, rather than a subject in his own writing. He regarded this as enabling him to be more free. He had a strong belief in the importance of indirect communication, including the use of sarcasm and irony. His copious journaling is an exemplar.

He is regarded as The Father of Existentialism. We were specifically interested in Kierkegaard's thoughts on God, and how man related to God through Faith. Kierkegaard proposed three Life Views: conceptions of life and its purpose; *The Aesthetic Sphere*, *The Ethical Sphere* and *The Religious Sphere*.

Most live as Mass Men (Philistines) ie those who live life as others do, a member of the herd, the failed self. However the individual may develop awareness, realising that the bonds that bind him to society are chains, and thus he can be free to explore other possibilities. He will then enter the sphere of *Aestheticism*. He avoids commitment to anything, including relationships because they bind and inhibit the exploration of possibilities. Kierkegaard was more hopeful of the refined aesthete, one who "indulges in the fanatical hope of an endless journey from star to star" but who nevertheless experiences an emptiness of existence. Nihilistic indifference emerges between pleasures, typically - I don't feel like doing anything. Refined aesthetes may then seek a higher existence in the *Ethical Sphere* but this will still not provide the remedy for Existential Despair which is Faith, which exists in the *Religious Sphere*, and a belief in a Transcendent Source.

Faith

Kierkegaard acknowledges that there is no evidence for God, only objective uncertainty, unreachable by intellectual effort, but there is risk:

"Without risk there is no faith. Faith is precisely the contradiction between the infinite passion of the individual's inwardness and the objective uncertainty. If I am capable of grasping God's objectivity, I do not believe. If I wish to preserve myself in faith I must constantly be intent on holding fast the objective uncertainty, so as to remain out upon the deep, over seventy fathoms of water, still preserving my faith."

It must be an individual relationship:

"Every call from God is always addressed to one person, the single individual. Precisely in this lies the difficulty and the examination, that the one who is called must stand alone, walk alone, walk alone with god."

To get back to practicalities, when he died his nephew, knowing how strongly Kierkegaard rejected the institutions of religion, believing as he did in a personal not mediated relationship with God, did not want him to be buried by the Church. However, Kierkegaard's brother, a Bishop of the Lutheran Church thought otherwise and had more power. His nephew was prosecuted for attempting to prevent the burial!

Annie Clouston

Nietzsche

Nietzsche coined the phrase 'God is dead'. What he was really meaning was that theories or beliefs in general, not just Christianity, were declining. He foresaw the consequences of this decline and prophesied there would be a growth in nihilism. In the present time 'we' are looking for a cause or asking 'what is it all for?' or 'we are surviving for what?' He believed that the lack of belief in the existence of God was not just because of the growth of natural sciences but also because of psychological insights into the individual. However he also thought that we were all fallible and

that there could be a metaphysical world after all. He considered that religious beliefs could be replaced by culture.

Ian Reid