

Søren Kierkegaard's Illness and Death

It would... not be without interest if one could from present-day knowledge shed light on the nature of illness ¹

Søren Kierkegaard was a well-known author when in the autumn of 1855 at the age of 42 and seriously ill he was admitted to Det kongelige Frederiks Hospital in Copenhagen. Behind him he had a comprehensive authorship of 5,000 pages of published volumes and in addition 8-10,000 pages of diary and journal entries ².

Kierkegaard made his *début* as an author in 1843 with the pseudonymous, two-volumed work *Either/Or*, and soon afterwards followed works such as *Fear and Trembling*, *Philosophical Fragments*, as well as *Stages on Life's Way*. Kierkegaard's last pseudonymous work was *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. In this work Kierkegaard clarifies his position regarding Hegel's system of thinking, his theory about the soul (*Geistteori*), where he claims that speculation is not the way to the truth. The crucial thing is the fervour, the sincerity with which a particular person maintains what he or she considers to be the truth. Kierkegaard expresses it slogan-wise with the phrase 'subjectivity is the truth'.

As one can read in his *About my Work as an Author* and *The Point of View of My Work as an Author*, Kierkegaard is a religious author. His fundamental view of religion is deep-rooted, not only in his works under his own name, as for example *Eighteen Edifying Speeches*, *Works of Love* and *For Self-Examination*, but also in the pseudonymous works. That he is a religious author does not mean that he is a devotional author. Kierkegaard does not wish to make Christians of us or tell us how we should conduct our lives. What he does wish to do is to make us aware that the Christian life is a possibility for existence, as is the case with aesthetics and ethics. For Kierkegaard one is not a more 'genuine human being' because one is at a religious rather than an aesthetic or ethical stage.

Shortly before he was admitted to Det kongelige Frederiks Hospital, Kierkegaard issued a number of pamphlets under his own name which he called *The Moment*. Over the years Kierkegaard had been seething inwardly about official Christianity, about Bishop J.P. Mynster's (1775-1854) doctrines, and his pamphlets were statements against the church as a connecting link between the believer and God, and against the clergy as witnesses of the truth. It was a violently emotional and scathingly ironic attack on what he found was a misconceived perception of Christianity's mission. The church and the clergy saw it as their noblest duty to reassure their flock. But for the radical Kierkegaard this was a misconception. For the believer Christianity ought to be an eternal source of disquiet; symbolized by the Christian

paradox, in the thought's 'outrage' against the historical assertion that God became incarnate in Jesus Christ. This irrational, unreasonable and unverifiable claim is for Kierkegaard something which it is difficult to accept. The distinctive feature of the believer is that he or she believes, (precisely) because it is at variance with reason, a way of thinking which has its philosophical roots in the Roman Father of the Church Tertullianus (c. 160-200).

Kierkegaard managed to publish 9 pamphlets but only managed to write the tenth and final one before he became ill and was admitted to Det kongelige Frederiks Hospital.

After this short discussion of Kierkegaard's work and fundamental basic view (of religion) I shall now say something about the hospital to which Kierkegaard was admitted. I shall mention the two doctors who in all probability treated Kierkegaard, and I shall mention the hospital's lady supervisor. I shall subject Kierkegaard's case-book to textual criticism and interpretation besides making a commentary, which nobody has ever done before, and I shall try to discover which illnesses he did not suffer from and which can be eliminated on the basis of the case-book. I shall of course also make a (plausible) suggestion as to what he died of. During my reading of the case book – which in this article is reproduced in an interpretive version – I will take the opportunity to bring to light and comment on some of its information³.