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“Postmodernity and the Moral Life” (5-3-1)

Questions

1. **What does Hollinger say about the postmodern ethos?** According to Hollinger, the postmodern ethos questions traditional conceptions about meaning.
2. **What is the postmodern impulse as described by Hollinger?** The postmodern impulse is a reaction against rationalism, pursuit of truth, certainty, and confidence in the progress that so characterized the past few centuries. It is a questioning of the Enlightenment and the modern scientific agenda that so blithely envisioned a new world free of old bondages and limitations. Postmodern thought assails the unity of all things and questions the modern vision of universal truth.
3. **Explain one of the results of fragmentation.** As a result of fragmentation, writes Hollinger, we lack the ability to discern which values and virtues are most significant for the moral life and which ideas and images can truly guide our ethical thinking.
4. **How does the “hermeneutic of suspicion” work in practice?** The “hermeneutic of suspicion” puts the emphasis back on the reader rather than on the author and his or her attempts to convey meaning.
5. **How did Kevin Vanhoozer describe the dilemma of postmodern thinkers?** Vanhoozer observed that “there are no ‘givens’: no eternal truths, no limits on what we can say or how we can differentiate the world.”

Vocabulary

- **Metanarrative:** the grand idea or foundational construct that people use to explain reality and bring coherence to their world
- **Logocentrism:** a term coined by Jacques Derrida to describe the Western culture's love affair with rationality, meaning, and truth
- **Hermeneutic of suspicion:** the belief that one must be suspicious of the ideological backdrop to all interpretations

Summary

Characterized by its tendency to call “traditional conceptions about meaning into question,” postmodernity could be described as either a “reaction to modernity” or an iteration of modernity. In this chapter, Hollinger outlines four vital elements of postmodernity and its influence on moral life. These four elements include deconstruction, fragmentation, tolerance, and the therapeutic. First, Hollinger argues that postmodernity casts doubt on metanarratives and the belief that truth or certainty can be determined. This assertion, known as deconstruction, has reassessed all previous traditions and belief systems that undergird society. Second, fragmentation has compounded the matter, “creating a world in which people experience reality in bits and pieces without cohesion or a common reference point.” Fragmentation has produced silos among human thought and processes, eliminating standard frames of reference or boundaries from which to draw. Third, tolerance represents the highest of virtues in postmodernity, Hollinger explains. Instead of accepting all views, however, tolerance is expressed as the right for people to be unoffended. Finally, the therapeutic, Hollinger writes, caters to the self above all moral concerns. In conclusion, Hollinger admits that some good has

arisen from postmodernity. Yet, he primarily voices concern about how it could devolve into nihilism.