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Philosophy

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Reading Questions

Pascal, "The Wager" (Pensees) – pp. 356-359

1. Explain Pascal's "Wager" about belief in God. Why should someone believe, according to Pascal? Pascal's "Wager" is the concept that the decision to believe in God or not is a wager because there is no conclusive proof either way. Pascal argues that if God exists and you believe in Him, you will gain the reward of eternal life in heaven. However, if you do not believe in God and he does exist, you will suffer an infinite punishment in hell. Therefore, it is better to believe in God and potentially gain an infinite reward than to not believe and risk an infinite punishment.

2. Later in the reading, Pascal has an imagined conversation with someone who understands the wager, but still can't commit to belief in God. What advice does Pascal give for that person? In the imagined conversation, Pascal advises the person to act as if they believe in God, even if they do not feel a genuine belief in their heart. He says that by going through the motions of religious belief and surrounding him with others that believe, the person may eventually come to believe in God.

Kierkegaard, "Faith and Subjectivity" (Concluding Unscientific . . .) – pp. 376-382

1. Why does Kierkegaard think that proving or disproving the Bible is not the real issue when it comes to faith? He believes that faith is about an individual's relationship with God,

rather than the hard facts. He believes that faith is a personal, subjective experience that cannot be determined by objective evidence or rational argument.

2. Explain Kierkegaard's distinction between "objectivity" and "subjectivity" when it comes to living life and searching for truth. Objectivity, according to Kierkegaard, involves a detached, impersonal perspective that seeks to understand reality through observation and rational analysis. While, subjectivity involves a personal, inward-looking perspective that seeks to understand reality through the lens of one's individual experiences, emotions, and beliefs. Objectivity seeks to establish universal, objective truths that apply to everyone, regardless of their individual experiences or perspectives. While, subjectivity recognizes that truth is not always universal and objective, but is often shaped by one's personal experiences and perspectives.

3. Explain some of the problems Kierkegaard looks at when he discusses trying to get to God through approximation and objectivity. Kierkegaard argued that trying to approach God through approximation and objectivity is problematic because it can lead to a sense of distance, self-deception, and spiritual arrogance. He believes that the evidence will only take you so far in your faith and that you will grow distant from God. He suggests that a personal and subjective encounter with God, based on faith and humility, is necessary for a meaningful and fulfilling relationship with God.

4. What is Kierkegaard's ultimate definition of truth for an "existing" individual? Why does this definition involve uncertainty, not objective certainty? Kierkegaard's definition of truth for an "existing" individual involves embracing uncertainty and making a personal commitment to living an authentic life. He argues that truth is not simply a matter of objective facts or empirical observations, but requires a personal engagement and commitment to a

particular way of life. This subjective commitment is necessary for a meaningful and fulfilling life, as it involves a deep sense of authenticity and personal responsibility.