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Intro to Philosophy

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Reading Questions Wk 8

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 based on the premise that we cannot know for certain whether God exists or not. However, Pascal argues that it is still rational to believe in God, because the potential benefits of belief are so great that they outweigh any potential costs. In other words, Pascal suggests that if we believe in God and He exists, we gain eternal happiness in heaven, while if we do not believe in God and He exists, we suffer eternal damnation in hell. On the other hand, if we believe in God and He does not exist, we have lost nothing, whereas if we do not believe in God and He does not exist, we have gained nothing.

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?

Pascal suggests that belief in God is not just a matter of intellectual assent but requires active participation in religious practices, prayer, and a certain degree of commitment to the religious community.

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?

Kierkegaard believed that faith was not a matter of objective truth but a subjective and personal relationship with God. He argued that the question of whether the Bible is true or not is not the

real issue when it comes to faith, because faith is not something that can be proven or disproven by reason or empirical evidence.

2. Explain Kierkegaard's distinction between "objectivity" and "subjectivity" when it comes to living life and searching for truth.

Objectivity, according to Kierkegaard, is concerned with external facts, evidence, and universal principles. It is the approach to understanding the world that relies on reason, empirical observation, and scientific inquiry. Objectivity seeks to understand reality as it is and to find objective truth that can be universally recognized and verified.

Subjectivity, on the other hand, is concerned with the inner experience of the individual, including their feelings, beliefs, and personal values. It is the approach to understanding the world that relies on personal experience, intuition, and faith. Subjectivity seeks to understand reality as it is experienced by the individual and to find truth that is personally relevant and meaningful.

3. Explain some of the problems Kierkegaard looks at when he discusses trying to get to God through approximation and objectivity.

Kierkegaard identifies several problems with the approach of trying to get to God through approximation and objectivity. He argues that this approach can lead individuals to become preoccupied with achieving external standards of righteousness or morality, rather than focusing on their own personal relationship with God. Additionally, this approach can create a sense of distance or alienation from God, as individuals may feel that they are always falling short of the ideal. Finally, Kierkegaard suggests that approximation and objectivity can lead to spiritual complacency or stagnation, as individuals may become satisfied with achieving a certain level of righteousness or knowledge about God, rather than continuing to deepen their relationship with God. Ultimately, Kierkegaard believes that these problems hinder the individual's ability to develop a meaningful and authentic relationship with God.

4. What is Kierkegaard's ultimately definition of truth for an "existing" individual? Why does this definition involve uncertainty, not objective certainty?

Kierkegaard's definition of truth involves a subjective and personal experience that cannot be objectively proven or certain. He emphasizes the importance of uncertainty and subjective experience in the search for truth, particularly in relation to one's relationship with God.