

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

1. Explain Pascal's "Wager" about belief in God. Why should someone believe, according to Pascal?

Blaise Pascal was a 17th-century French philosopher, mathematician, and scientist who proposed an argument for belief in God that has come to be known as Pascal's Wager. The essence of Pascal's Wager is that it's rational to believe in God because it's the best bet, even if the existence of God cannot be proved or disproved through reason. Pascal argued that if we believe in God and God exists, we gain eternal happiness in heaven. If God doesn't exist, we have lost nothing. On the other hand, if we don't believe in God and God exists, we face eternal damnation in hell. If God doesn't exist, we still have gained nothing. In short, Pascal argues that even though we cannot be certain about God's existence, it's better to believe in God just in case. In this way, we have everything to gain and nothing to lose. Wager suggests that belief in God is a rational choice, as it offers the potential for eternal reward and protects us from eternal 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 encounters someone who understands the reasoning behind his Wager but still cannot bring themselves to believe in God. Pascal's advice to this person is to try to cultivate belief through action. Pascal suggests that by participating in religious practices and rituals, such as attending church, praying, and reading religious texts, one can develop a sense of belief in God. He argues that belief is not necessarily a matter of intellectual certainty

but can be a matter of personal experience and feeling. Pascal also emphasizes the importance of humility in approaching questions of faith. He suggests that we should recognize the limits of our own knowledge and understanding and approach religious belief with an open mind and a willingness to learn. Pascal advises the person to take action to cultivate belief, approach religious questions with humility, and remain open to the possibility of God's existence.

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 believes that proving or disproving the Bible is not the real issue when it comes to faith because faith is not a matter of objective proof or evidence. Instead, faith is a subjective and personal commitment that goes beyond what can be proven or disproven through reason or empirical evidence. According to Kierkegaard, faith involves a passionate commitment to a particular religious belief or way of life, which cannot be reduced to a set of objective propositions or arguments. Faith requires a leap of faith, a willingness to take a risk and commit oneself to something that cannot be fully understood or justified by reason alone. Kierkegaard argues that faith involves a paradox, where we must embrace the absurdity of believing in something that cannot be fully grasped by reason. He suggests that the true test of faith is not whether we can prove or disprove the Bible, but whether we are willing to make a personal and subjective commitment to it. Kierkegaard believes that the real issue when it comes to faith is not

about proving or disproving the Bible, but about making a personal and subjective commitment to a particular religious belief or way of life.

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

Kierkegaard distinguishes between objectivity and subjectivity when it comes to living life and searching for truth. Objectivity refers to the use of reason and empirical evidence to understand the world around us. It involves the objective analysis of facts, evidence, and logic to arrive at conclusions about the world. Subjectivity, on the other hand, refers to the personal and subjective experience of living life and searching for truth. It involves a subjective interpretation of the world, where our experiences, emotions, and beliefs shape how we perceive and understand reality. Kierkegaard argues that objectivity alone cannot provide a complete understanding of the world or our place in it. He suggests that subjective experience and interpretation are equally important in understanding the world and us. Kierkegaard believes that subjective experience and interpretation are particularly important in religious belief, where personal commitment and faith are central. Kierkegaard's distinction between objectivity and subjectivity suggests that while reason and empirical evidence are important in understanding the world, subjective experience and interpretation are equally important in our personal search for truth and meaning in life.

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

Kierkegaard argues that trying to approach God through approximation and objectivity presents several problems:

- Firstly, he suggests that objective knowledge of God is impossible to attain because God is beyond the limits of human understanding. Any attempt to objectify God reduces God to a concept or idea, which is insufficient to capture the fullness of God's nature.
- Secondly, Kierkegaard argues that approximating God through reason or empirical evidence is also problematic because it requires reducing God to an object that can be studied and analyzed. This approach limits the scope and depth of our understanding of God and fails to capture the personal and subjective experience of faith.
- Thirdly, Kierkegaard suggests that approximating God through reason and empirical evidence can lead to arrogance and self-righteousness. When we approach God in this way, we may believe that we have a complete and objective understanding of God, which can lead to a sense of superiority and judgment towards others who hold different beliefs.

Kierkegaard suggests that trying to approach God through approximation and objectivity presents several problems, including the impossibility of attaining objective knowledge of God, the reduction of God to an object of study, and the potential for arrogance and self-righteousness.

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

Kierkegaard's ultimate definition of truth for an "existing" individual is that truth is subjective and personal. He argues that truth cannot be understood objectively but only subjectively, through personal experience and interpretation. Kierkegaard suggests that truth involves a subjective inwardness, where individuals must make a personal and subjective commitment to

what they believe to be true. This commitment requires a leap of faith, a willingness to embrace uncertainty and risk, and a recognition that objective certainty is impossible to attain. For Kierkegaard, the ultimate goal of human existence is to become an "existing" individual, which involves embracing subjectivity and living in the tension between faith and uncertainty. He believes that existing individuals are those who are willing to take a subjective leap of faith, to commit themselves to something that cannot be fully understood or justified by reason alone. Kierkegaard's definition of truth involves uncertainty, not objective certainty, because he believes that subjective experience and interpretation are essential to our understanding of truth. He argues that objective certainty is impossible to attain because it requires reducing truth to a set of objective propositions or arguments, which fails to capture the fullness and richness of our subjective experience of truth. Kierkegaard's ultimate definition of truth for an "existing" individual involves a subjective and personal commitment that embraces uncertainty and recognizes the limitations of objective knowledge.