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PHI101

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Reading Questions Lesson 8- Pascal & Kierkegaard
Pascal, "The Wager" (Pensees) – pp. 356-359

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

Pascal puts belief in God into terms of batting heads or tails on a coin flip. Heads God is real and tails He isn't. No matter what you are going to choose, say you chose heads. "If you win, you win everything, and if you lose, you lose nothing." With this Pascal says to bet that he exists because you can bet everything and lose nothing.

2. Later in the reading, Pascal has an imagined conversation with someone who understands the wager but still can't commit to a belief in God. What advice does Pascal give for that person?

Pascal tells him to follow the people that have taken the path and made "The Wager" because they will help him to the faith he is seeking. The man is moved more so by reason than by passion but his passions are running high and blocking his ability to believe. Pascal tells him to reduce his passions.

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?

Even if every word of the Bible was proven true that doesn't bring a non-believer to faith or grow one's faith stronger. Kierkegaard finds that faith lies in passion, not reason.

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

When treated objectively, passion goes out the window and the mind uses reason to deduce everything they find. Objectivity turns into a place where there are no necessary decisions, which creates a falsehood in objectivity. Subjectivity is based on the "passion of a subject, the truth becomes paradox; the fact that the truth becomes a paradox is noted precisely in its having a relationship to an existing subject." Therefore proving existence through passion and truth.

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

The biggest problem was that Christianity is a spirit, and this ultimately becomes subjectivity. Christianity to spirit to inwardness to subjectivity, that is the path.

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

Truth: An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness. This definition does not contain certainty because one's faith lies in their truth and if there was certainty then we would have the ability to grasp God. If we could do so then we would not believe. So we live in uncertainty holding our faith as our truth.