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Philosophy 101

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### **Reading Questions Week 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 suggests that having faith in God without risking anything makes economic sense. According to Pascal, we have two choices and four possible outcomes based on our belief in God. If we believe in God, we can gain unlimited benefits, but if we do not believe, we face limitless losses and hellfire. On the other hand, if there is no God, we only experience a limited life regardless of our beliefs. Pascal considers the risks and rewards of believing in God versus not believing, concluding that it is advantageous to trust in Him regardless of the potential outcome. Therefore, it would be wise to have faith in God, even at the expense of risk or reward.**

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 making a wager on the existence of God despite the uncertainty surrounding it. While reason cannot provide a clear answer, we can weigh the potential outcomes to make a decision. However, Pascal's argument is problematic as he contradicts himself by claiming that losing the bet has no consequence and that losing means losing the truth. He acknowledges that the existence of God is true but cannot use it as evidence in his**

**argument. Furthermore, according to Pascal, choosing between options does not guarantee justification, as reason cannot determine anything in this matter.**

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 says that using logic and facts to figure out the Bible is pointless because it leads to feeling hopeless when more questions arise. It doesn't matter if a historian proves or disproves the truth of religious texts, people will still interpret them in their way. So, everyone has their personal beliefs when it comes to religion. It's not like there's a set of facts that everyone agrees on, it's more about what feels true to you personally. You can't just look at history or something and expect to get the whole picture. It's up to each person to figure out what they believe in for themselves.**

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

**According to Kierkegaard, objective truth is evident and easy to see, whereas subjective reality is more about how you feel on the inside. When it comes to objective stuff, people don't care about a forever happy feeling from the inside. They care about what's real. However, people who are more interested in subjective things care more about how reality affects their emotions.**

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

**Some of the problems Kierkegaard looks at is when taking an objective approach to a topic prevents one from developing an emotional connection, resulting in a lack of sustained interest. Becoming excessively intrigued by something that ultimately proves to**

be just an estimation is contradictory and, therefore, amusing. Passion only arises when it is accompanied by energy. With boundless passionate energy, anything becomes infinitely valuable. The problem lies not with passion but rather with how the subject has been reduced to mere speculation.

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

**Subjective truth is the highest form of truth that a person may now obtain. Kierkegaard's definition is not perfect. For my purposes, subjective truth is a perception that empirical data cannot support. Kierkegaard defined subjective truth as having a passionate internal quality and being vulnerable. He emphasized the importance of faith over reason but did not seek to eliminate objective truth. Instead of emphasizing objectivity, he emphasized the individual truths that have the most impact on us. In his understanding of truth, Kierkegaard recognized the traditional definition of correspondence between thought and reality but stressed the importance of subjectivity. According to him, philosophy must emphasize individuality or passion experienced internally. Although objective and subjective truths should coexist, they cannot coexist simultaneously.**