

Kierkegaard (1813-1855)

Religious Subjectivity

Background

- Born in Copenhagen
- Lutheran pietism
- Much discussion of sin, guilt, suffering, and individual responsibility

Background

- Enormous scope in his writings
 - philosophy, theology, psychology, literary criticism, devotional literature and fiction

Background

- “Father of existentialism”
 - A philosophy that emphasizes individual existence, subjectivity, individual freedom, and choice.

Objectivity vs. Subjectivity

- Søren Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846) explores the subjectivity of truth and the truth of subjectivity.

Objectivity vs. Subjectivity

- Key notions: objectivity, subjectivity; inner and outer truths; three stages of existence

Inner and Outer

Objective truth may be an outer truth and subjective truth may be an inner truth.

- Objective truth includes historical truth and philosophical truth.
- Speculative philosophy as a mode of reasoning which seeks objective truth

Objective Truth

- Speculative thinker attempts to stand apart from his or her own existence, and attempts to view existence objectively.

Subjective Truth

- Subjective truth includes religious truth
- Religious faith as a mode of being which seeks subjective truth

Distinction in interests

Speculative thinking reflects on concrete things abstractly, whereas subjective thinking reflects on abstract things concretely.

Distinction in interests

The objective thinker is interested in what defines existence while the subjective thinker is interested in how existence is defined.

Objective thinkers

- We can reflect on the nature of existence and on “Truth” objectively or subjectively.
- Objective thinkers find truth by approximation
 - Needs to quantify certainty/probability

Subjective thinkers

- Subjective thinkers find truth by appropriation.
- Faith cannot be attained by approximation, or by an effort to quantify deliberation into a higher degree of certainty.

Faith

Faith is a subjective, personal, passionate interestedness in attaining eternal happiness found through appropriation.

Faith

- Faith is a state of *objective uncertainty* in which the individual affirms his or her own subjectivity.

Faith

- Faith can only be attained by an appropriation or acceptance of the condition of uncertainty.

Faith

That's why faith requires a leap
from disbelief to belief.

Faith

- Not a matter of regurgitating church dogma
- Faith involves individual subjective passion
- Others can't do it for you – clergy/church

Faith

- Faith is the most important task to be achieved by a human being, because only on the basis of faith does an individual have a chance to become a true self.

Either-Or

Faith is a category of decision-making in which an individual confronts an “either-or” situation:

Either-Or

EITHER accepting OR rejecting

Either-Or

subjectivity

Either-Or

- The falseness of objectivity may be revealed by a lack of need for personal commitment, and by a lack of need for decision-making.

Either-Or

- The truth of subjectivity may be revealed by a need for personal commitment, and by a need for decision-making.

Which is best?

- Kierkegaard doesn't deny that speculative thinking isn't useful to explain matters about which it is not necessary to have faith.

Which is best?

- But questions about matters of faith (or questions about whether to have faith) must be answered subjectively.

What's so funny?

The Tragic and Comic

On the Objective side

You try to achieve an objective certainty (or the highest possible degree of probability) about an aspect of truth that can only be known by faith.

The Tragic and Comic

On the Subjective side

- Kierkegaard admits that subjectivity becomes comical when it is misplaced; i.e. when subjectivity is misinterpreted as objectivity.
- Tries to achieve an objective certainty by means of faith.

The Tragic and Comic

On the Subjective side

- You fake being infinitely interested in attaining eternal happiness.

Three Stages of Existence

Three Stages of Existence

- Aesthetic
- Ethical
- Religious

Aesthetic

The aesthetic stage is a stage in which the individual is interested in pleasure and enjoyment.

Immersion in sensuous experience, especially as an escape from boredom

Little or no passionate engagement and personal commitment which are characteristic of the higher stages of existence.

Ethical

The ethical stage is a higher stage of personal commitment.

Concern with doing “good” or ethical things in accordance with social norms.

Religious

Religious stage is the highest stage of personal commitment.

Religious stage is the highest stage of subjectivity.

“Inwardness” includes the ethical, ethical-religious, and religious stages of existence.