

Comments and Questions on Kierkegaard's views regarding truth and faith

Almost everything Soren Kierkegaard has written is highly controversial.

Before attempting to argue with his views it is important to first understand them.

The notion of the subjectivity of truth is the reversal of the concept of truth that was current in the philosophy and science of Kierkegaard's time. This older theory of truth is usually called the correspondence theory of truth. The correspondence theory presents truth as a relationship between a statement and some state of affairs to which it refers; if it does not, then the statement is false. (For example, take the statement, "The Statue of Liberty is 100 feet tall." To determine the truth of this statement, we would measure the Statue of Liberty to see whether the statement corresponds with the state of affairs to which it refers.) Truth is objective, according to the correspondence theory, since it depends only on the relation of the statement to the world, and furthermore, the relationship is open to public inspection.

Note that according to the correspondence theory of truth, it would be irrelevant to take into account the individual who makes the statement; the person who makes the statement has nothing to do with the statement's truth or falsity. It is this feature of the correspondence theory of truth to which Kierkegaard objects. According to Kierkegaard, truth *must* involve the individual.

This is Wolfe's statement of Kierkegaard's position on truth: Truth "consists in the proper relationship between the belief and the *subject*, the individual human being who holds that belief. *How* he or she holds it is the criterion of its truth. In order for the belief to be true, it must be held passionately, unconditionally, absolutely without inner reservation or doubt." For example, think of the belief, "God will keep His promise of eternal life to me." For that belief to be true, according to Kierkegaard, you must believe it "passionately, unconditionally, absolutely without inner reservation or doubt."

The other fundamental concept in Kierkegaard's religious philosophy is the leap of faith. Remember that the term "faith" means an unquestioned belief in God's promise of eternal life. The "leap of faith" refers to the fact that there can be no proof or argument to support or justify this belief about God. For Kierkegaard, the leap of faith is non-rational, but it is absolutely necessary.

Kierkegaard is considered the Father of existentialism. Later famous existentialists included Jaspers (protestant), Marcel (Catholic), Heidegger (agnostic), and Sartre (atheist). There are several themes that are typical of the existential movement:

1. Emphasis upon Concrete Individual Existence, or that every man is an individual.
2. The need to make things difficult. "One should face up to the tragic conflicts, paradoxes, and complexities of human existence. Where a rigid scientific rationalism has postulated only one kind of truth - objective scientific truth - and but one kind of good - the value of scientific and technological mastery - someone is needed to stress the truths and values of other modes of experience."
3. The Claim that Truth is Subjectivity. Kierkegaard's view of truth is based upon the distinction between what we believe and how we believe. Objectively the interest is focused upon the object of belief, subjectively upon the attitude of the believer.

Questions:

1. Is Kierkegaard's individualism too extreme?
2. Is his emphasis upon will and feeling, rather than reason or the scientific method, exaggerated?
3. In his preference for passionate participation and commitment, does he undervalue a disinterested analytical attitude?
4. Does he argue inconsistently both that ultimate choice is criterionless and that the choice of a religious way of life is more correct than any other?
5. Is Kierkegaard's definition of faith extreme? Is faith "non-rational"? Did Kierkegaard have faith have no rational base?