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Final Paper: Kierkegaard in Socrates and Myself

PHIL 4312 Kierkegaard

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Outline

I. Introduction

Socrates is for Kierkegaard an idol; he follows in his own philosophy because the Greek philosopher has the status of an idealistic mentor who is an authority figure only second after Jesus Christ for Kierkegaard. Therefore, Kierkegaard’s enthusiasm for Socrates is of genuine nature, even the two individuals follow different religious views that branch out in paganism and Christianity.

II. Primary Claim #1

Kierkegaard idealization of Socrates can be seen through his writings where he presents the ancient philosopher as a mentor and figure that takes profound influence in the way how he thinks and feels himself. Socrates ‘own way of thinking cannot be analyzed in a direct way because he did not write anything down which makes it for Kierkegaard impossible to see the true Socrates. A. Secondary Claim 1.a.

Kierkegaard admits that he is unable to know the truth about Socrates, and he puts his claim on the fact that Socrates must be misunderstood. “Therefore, even though we lack direct evidence about Socrates, even though we lack an altogether reliable view of him, we do have in recompense all the various nuances of misunderstanding, and in my opinion, this is our best asset with a personality such as Socrates” (Kierkegaard 22).

B. Secondary Claim 1.b.

Kierkegaard hopes to seek his own identity, if he follows the Socratic irony which allows him to be free from any restraint of standardized rules and authority. “Irony is a qualification of subjectivity. In irony, the subject is negatively free, since the actuality that is supposed to give the subject content is not there” (Kierkegaard 29). C. Secondary Claim 1.c.

Subjectivity never leaves Kierkegaard’s side when it comes to Socrates, even if he would have to answer and examine the paradox question in the *Euthyphro* which was created by Socrates. “For consider: is the holy loved by the gods because it is holy? Or is it holy because it is loved by the gods?” (Wisdo 221).

III. Primary Claim #2

Kierkegaard is known as a philosopher who emerges his strong Christian faith in his philosophical theories with the main ideas of individualism and subjectivity. The same notions Socrates is following just with the religious belief of paganism which does not influence the Greek philosopher in the same scale as his Christian counterpart.

A. Secondary Claim 2.a.

Socrates sees the individual to itself as the most important part of his philosophy, and he lets this status be over everything else. “In the Socratic view, every human being is himself the midpoint, and the whole world focuses only on him because his self-knowledge is God-knowledge” (Kierkegaard 118).

B. Secondary Claim 2.b.

God is for Kierkegaard everything because he creates and gives humans the understanding to know the truth about themselves and God. “Now, insomuch as the learner exists [er til], he is indeed created, and, accordingly, God must have given him the condition for understanding the truth (for otherwise he previously would have been merely animal, and that teacher who gave him the condition along with the truth would make him a human being for the first time)” (Kierkegaard 121).

C. Secondary Claim 2.c.

Socrates is like any other ancient Greek who believes in multiple deities, it just depends on who is the favorite deity, and for which functions it is needed for. “Socrates remains controversial because he thought that his practice of ethical inquiry was a divinely inspired mission sanctioned by Apollo, the Delphic god” (Sarf 256).

IV. Primary Claim #3

The adversity of Christianity and paganism is a fact which cannot be denied, but this seems to be to no disturbance for Kierkegaard’s admiration of Socrates. Kierkegaard is convinced that their bond can withstand the adversity which is surrounding their two religious faiths and would otherwise be a matter of tension.

A. Secondary Claim 3.a.

Socrates’ influence on Kierkegaard is becoming increasingly obvious because he relies his Christian faith on the notion of Socratic thinking and engulfs himself in the Socratic world. “The only analogy I have before me is Socrates, my task is a Socratic task, to audit the definition of what it is to be a Christian – I do not call myself a Christian (keeping the ideal free), but I can make it manifest that others are that even less” (Kierkegaard 446).

B. Secondary Claim 3.b

Kierkegaard’s problems with the institution of the Church in his Danish home country are at once recognizable by his effort to distance himself and his own faith in God from it. “He finds in this type of religiosity not so much an effort to understand and apply the authentic principles of historic Christianity as the concerted effort of a mass philistinism precisely to protect itself from Christianity by the sophistic use of Christian forms and terminology” (Wild 549).

C. Secondary Claim 3.c.

Kierkegaard’s admiration for Socrates is unbreakable, and his relationship with the ancient philosopher is of the highest noble intention, a man can have for another one that of a learner towards a teacher. “If Christ is a judge and savior who appears from a transcendent realm to make visible normally invisible truths, then Socrates is the eternal archetype to Kierkegaard of the virtuous teacher, for between man and man, the Socratic relationship is the highest and truest” (Sarf 263).

V. Conclusion

Kierkegaard denied his belief in Christianity authorized by a governmental institution which distorts the true meaning of faith and inwardness to God. Instead, he follows a Greek philosopher, even he is a pagan because he admires him for his courage of being true to himself until the end which is higher than any institutional belief.