

Musil, Pascal & Kierkegaard Review

RCHUMS 360 - Existentialism

The Confusions of Young Törless by Robert Musil

1. What do each of the three principal characters—Beineberg, Reiting, and Törless—claim to benefit from the torture of Basini?
2. What is the correlation between mathematics, literature, and the irrational?
3. What is Torless' particular type of sensuality and how does it function in the text?
4. How does the quote from Maeterlinck inform the rest of the book and Musil's dualism?
5. What solution does Torless come to at the end of the novel and how is this shown in both his conversation with his teachers and the final scene with his mother?

Pensées by Blaise Pascal

1. How does Pascal conceive of the dual nature of man?
2. What is man's position in the infinite?
3. What are reasons Pascal gives for man's wretchedness?
4. What is the relationship between faith and reason?
5. How does Pascal use the Wager to inform his hierarchy of sources of knowledge?

Fear and Trembling by Søren Kierkegaard

1. Describe Kierkegaard's three realms of being.
2. What are the necessary steps required for one to have faith?
3. What is the relation between the individual and the universal? How does Abraham paradoxically raise himself higher than the universal?
4. What is the knight of infinite resignation and the knight of faith?
5. How is the story of Abraham and Isaac distinct from the tragic heroes that Johannes de Silentio explores?
6. What is Kierkegaard's attack on Hegelian rationalism and ethics and how does this manifest in the teleological suspension of the ethical?

Themes

Inability of rational methods to capture irrational entities or experiences

The individual's relation to the infinite and/or the divine

The role of sacrifice

Solutions to the existential dilemma