2008-03-10

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by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Humanities, Classics, and Comparative Literature

Brigham Young University

March 2008

ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This thesis studies the relationship of irony, as defined in Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Irony* to the text and subject of *Fear and Trembling*. Irony is interpreted in this thesis as negative space, which both binds and separates and which assumes meaning equal to or greater than the positive space that binds it. This definition applies to Kierkegaard's Socrates who lived ironically in the space between actuality and ideality. This thesis considers how Abraham also lived in ironic space and why ironic space is a prerequisite for faith. Unlike Socrates, Abraham did not stop with irony, but used irony to open ironic space in which a knight of faith can be both separated from and reconciled to his actuality. Because in *Fear and Trembling* the Virgin Mary is compared to Abraham, this thesis examines at length how irony is related to Mary both in terms of her faithfulness and her maternity. Irony can then be seen as a necessary circumstance of maternity. The negative space of the female anatomy becomes ironic because it can take

on more meaning than it can have alone, particularly in its ability to create (an)other person. Faith and maternity share irony as a requirement for their modes of living because both require an ironic separation from the masculine sphere. Applying the relationship of irony to faith and the maternal offers a interpretive possibilities for the knight of faith that otherwise go unnoticed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge all those who have assisted me in so many ways so that this thesis could not only be completed, but also for the whole masters program to be started. First, I would like to thank my thesis committee who so willingly worked with me. I would like to thank Dr. Steven P. Sondrup for introducing me to the world of literary theory and for working with me since then as I have found how much I love exploring the possibilities of that world. For his continual availability and interest in helping me work through difficult theoretical logic, I thank Dr. Nate Kramer. His insights provided vital connections that were needed to make this thesis coherent. I would also like to thank Dr. Roger T. Macfarlane for his willingness to join the committee and provide direction for me to solidify the basis of my philological arguments. Additionally, I thank Jenny Webb for contributing her ears, thoughts, and guest room for the purposes of this thesis.

I would also like to thank my parents, Todd and Debra Parker, for raising me so that I believed in learning and had the opportunities for it. My thanks also go out to them and my husband's parents, Jim and Janet Frederick, for all the time and resources they have invested in my family, particularly to my children's grandmothers who contributed so many babysitting hours. Without them, I never would have been able to leave my children long enough to be able to contemplate and write about motherhood.

My children also deserve my thanks because without them this thesis would be no more than another contribution to the sterilized abstractions of academics that Kierkegaard writes against. Without my academic training I would not have had the vocabulary to articulate anything about the irony of maternity, but without my children, I would never have known that there was something about maternity that needed to be articulated. Because of Miranda and Samuel, at least for me, this thesis means something, is inward. Finally, I want to thank my husband, Nick. Because of him and his perspective, I did not have to fear that marriage and motherhood would preclude any other acomplishments. He continually reminded me that for anything I wanted to do, we could find a way to make it happen.

THE CONCEPTION OF IRONY WITH CONTINUAL REFERENCE TO KIERKEGAARD:
AN EXAMINATION OF IRONIC PLAY IN *FEAR AND TREMBLING*

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Introduction: Irony as a theoretical concept, a rhetorical device, and a mode of living

Trying to define the concept of irony in order to give a literary reading is akin to juggling knives. The reading must maintain a careful balance to avoid injury on irony's dangerous edge. When adding to that reading an element of feminist criticism, the issue can become dicey indeed. Despite the hazards of such an endeavor, the first half of this thesis will attempt first, to analyze the ironic nature of *Fear and Trembling*; second, to examine Abraham as an example of ironic living, and finally to consider the relationship of irony to faith. The second half of this thesis will then study first, how irony relates to the Virgin Mary and her faith, and second, how irony relates to the maternal experience.

Because irony is an elusive device, it is necessary to delineate how this discussion approaches irony as a theoretical concept. The basic qualification for irony as will be discussed in this thesis is negative space that both separates and binds and makes possible for something to be both (its)self and its opposite (or other). Such a broad definition of irony includes both colloquial and academic types of irony, including Kierkegaard's definition of irony as "uendelige absolute Negativitet [infinite, absolute negativity]."[1] Colloquial irony is generally created when two elements are connected through coincidence, but the coincidence seems too poignant to be merely happenstance. Kierkegaard's own name is an example of this type of irony. The name Kierkegaard is

[1]The Danish text quoted in this thesis is from *Kierkegaard: Samlede Værker*, 3rd Edition corrected, as reproduced on *Past Masters* CD Copyright 1990, Alastair McKinnon (original eds A. B. Drachmann, J.L. Heiberg, and H.O. Lange(Copenhagen: Gyldendal) 1962). Hereafter, it will be cited as *KSV*, and will be followed by the paragraph number from which the quote comes. The English translations are by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong published by Princeton University Press, unless otherwise noted. The title *The Concept of Irony* will be abbreviated *CI*, and the title *Fear and Trembling* will be abbreviated *FT*. *KSV*, 339; *CI*, 261.

made up of *kierke*, which means "church" and *gaard*, which means "yard" or "surrounding land." Because in Denmark people were buried on the property of the local church the word "kierkegaard" means both churchyard and graveyard. This coupling of names is somewhat ironic because of the role of death in Kierkegaardian corpus. When this type of relationship arises between two otherwise unrelated elements and creates a proximity between them, irony exists in the negative space in which they are associated.

It is the poignance of the negative space relating the elements, which colloquial irony shares with academic irony. In some cases irony comes from bringing together previously separate or opposite elements. In other cases irony is created by dividing previously joined elements. Whether by relation or separation, both types of irony create a negative space in which interpretation can play. The new relationship created by irony allows for more complex and interpretable intercourse between the elements. When elements become separated, they are still related because the separation cannot exist unless the elements still share some degree of proximity. The elements then become defined by their separation as much as they were previously defined by their union. Because proximity and separation are necessary to create opposites, one cannot be invoked without assuming the other.[2] Whether the emphasis is on the separation or proximity, either one requires the other to complete it. In this way irony becomes a separation that binds as well as a coupling that separates. Irony exists in a contradiction

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[2]Perhaps it would be appropriate to note that although Hegel suggested that nothing can be mentioned without admitting that its opposite exists, I do not think that everything can be categorized in this way. There are numerous ideas that cannot exist without their opposite (hot and cold, separation and proximity), but I am not claiming that every idea has a one and only opposite. Indeed, many ideas are more complex than that. However, I am suggesting that proximity and separation are an opposite pair in which one cannot be expressed without the presence of the other.

or paradox because it is itself and its opposite. If I define irony as separation between elements then it must also be the proximity between them and vice versa. In the same action irony pulls apart and holds together its elements; it creates both distance and proximity.

Kierkegaard references a story about Mohammed's coffin to illustrate the idea of irony. Supposedly the coffin of Mohammed was suspended by two magnets.[3] When positioned with the ends oppositely polarized, the magnets are attracted to each other and try to join together.

By forcing separation between elements that normally would join together, the magnets create a negative space strong enough to hold a coffin. Like the magnets of Mohammed's coffin, irony holds together positive elements by the negative space that separates them. Without the relationship between the positive elements, the negative space would not exist,+ much less have any meaning. However, because of the relationship of the two elements, the negative space that is created between them takes on more meaning than the positive space. When negative space takes on more meaning than the positive space creating it the result is irony. The meaning of the irony "hovers" between the separated elements. In the case of the magnets and the coffin, the coffin

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[3] *KSV*, 251; *CI*, 152. This image is useful because it shows how irony exists by both separating and binding elements. If the magnets are turned one way they attract each other and pull themselves until they are unified. If they are turned the other way they repel each other. In either case the irony exists in the tension between the two magnets. Interestingly enough, Kierkegaard describes the relationship of the magnets as "det Tillokkende og det Frastødende [the one attracting and the other repelling]," (*KSV*, 440; *CI*,48 note*). This depiction is inaccurate because one magnet cannot attract while the other repels. Both magnets must either attract or repel; otherwise there would be no tension between the elements to suspended something in the negative space. It seems a bit ironic that in Kierkegaard's visual example of irony that he mistakenly represents the relationship of the elements.

contains much more meaning than the magnets themselves, but the ironic space would not exist without them.

This definition of irony is significantly removed from the original meaning of the Attic Greek word εἰρωνεία from which English receives the word irony. In a pivotal discussion of irony, Gregory Vlastos points out that the most common meaning of the Greek word, εἰρωνεία, is "deception" or "dissembling."[4] It implies a veiling of information or self in order to deceive someone. The word *eironeia* appears numerous times in attic texts most often meaning "dissembling," though other definitions such as mockery also appear.[5] The connotation of the word is predominantly negative, suggesting that the pretense is used for a less than noble purpose.[6] However, by the time of Cicero the negative connotations almost entirely disappeared, and the Greek *eironeia* has transformed into the Latin *irony*. When defining irony, Quintilian describes it as the figure of speech "contrarium ei quod dicitur intelligendum est (a thing contrary to that which is said must be understood)," a definition that comes into English almost entirely intact and defines the simplest type of irony, irony as a rhetorical device. When

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[4]The word εἰρωνεία comes from the verb εἰρω, meaning to say or speak. An εἰρωνεία is a dissembler because he does not say all that he knows. Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1991), 92-93 discusses irony as a rhetorical term. His two definitions of irony are, "1. Implying a meaning opposite to the literal meaning" and "2. Speaking in derision or mockery." These two definitions support Vlastos argument that the original meaning "dissembling" has become secondary to the meaning "using one part of language to work contrary to another." Lanham further comments that "the more sophisticated the irony, the more is implied, the less stated."

[5]Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 23-25.

[6]Vlastos, 21.

linguistic elements (words, tone, emphasis, context) work against each other to form a meaning opposite of what just the words say, irony is created.

Though much of the Kierkegaardian corpus has been read in terms of irony, few commentators have specifically addressed the irony in *Fear and Trembling*. Perhaps irony does not seem the most appropriate or relevant literary tool for reading a religious and theologically themed text such as *Fear and Trembling*. This seeming inappropriateness may stem from irony so often being employed for humor or sarcasm. In fact, humor is the first use of irony mentioned by Gregory Vlastos, and probably remains the most common use of irony in colloquial speech.[7] When considering how ironically a statement should be understood, a common question could be, "How seriously am I supposed to take this?" This question shows an assumption that something ironic cannot be earnest. Kierkegaard summarizes Hegel's opinion that "for Ironien er det ikke Alvor med Noget [for irony nothing is a matter of earnestness]."[8] This statement itself is ironic because it leaves the reader to interpret its "nothing." This statement could mean that irony can take nothing seriously or that nothingness, i.e. negative space, is precisely what is so serious about irony. Because religion and particularly faith depend on the earnestness of the believer, at first glance, irony may seem out of place.[9] However, a lack of earnestness is not a *sine qua non* for irony.

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[7]Vlastos, 21.

[8]*KSV*, 310, *CI*, 235. Kierkegaard returns to the relationship of irony and earnestness at the conclusion of this section, which is more thoroughly addressed in Appendix A.

[9]For a discussion of this apparent, but not real, incongruity see Gregory L. Reece, *Irony and Religions Belief,* Religion in Philosophy and Theology Today vol 5, ed. Ingolf U. Dalferth (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002). He gives an insightful reading of *The Concept of Irony* and concludes that Kierkegaard's concept of irony at first "made him fear that it would be impossible to hold any religious beliefs," but then Kierkegaard realized that irony "helps him to see what religious belief comes to, helps him to see what

Because as a figure of speech, irony most often means the opposite of what it says, it can not earnestly mean what it does say. This lack of earnestness is common companion to irony only when used in a simple form. In more complex forms irony does not have to detract from the earnestness of a text but can add to it. Irony can supply depth to a text because in more complex forms it allows something to be (it)self and at the same time to be (its) other. The complexity of irony as a theoretical concept includes irony as a rhetorical device and a mode of living. Irony can appropriately be used rhetorically in a text without robbing the text of its earnestness, and irony can become a mode of living without denying life of its earnestness.

Before delving into the more complex forms of irony, the simplest form of irony as a rhetorical device is irony as a figure of speech. An example of this simplest use of irony arises when after dealing with a long and unpleasant tantrum from our daughter my husband looks at me and says, "Well, that was fun." In fact, we both know that the experience was not fun; it was exactly the opposite. The words and context give opposite information. The separation between these elements opens space for interpretation and meaning. Normally, the context and meaning of a statement support each other, but in an ironic statement they oppose each other. The meaning is found in the contradiction. The negative space between the words and context creates a new relationship. Neither element can be understood alone or without the space separating them. For meaning to

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belief in God is like" (Reece, 162). One of irony's more recent writers is Richard Rorty *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1989 who disagrees and concludes that the contingency and irony of language make any solidarity (including belief in God) impossible.

be found the positive space is still required, but the negative space takes on the meaning. This negative space, in the very act of separating typically unified elements, binds them.

One of the more complex forms of rhetorical irony occurs when linguistic elements are separated, but not necessarily opposite. One example of this type of irony occurs when irony is used to create a riddle. Vlastos points out that at the time of his writing this form of irony had not been named. To describe this type of irony for ease in discussing it in this thesis, I will call it "riddling irony" because it intentionally leaves a riddle for the audience to mediate. An example of riddling irony is given by Gregory Vlastos and then more fully elaborated by Alexandar Nehemas in an article responding to Vlastos.[10] Vlastos tells a story of Mae West who declined an invitation from President Gerald Ford to a state dinner at the White House by saying, "It's an awful long way to go for just one meal."[11] Nehemas points out that while her statement is ironic, it does not mean the opposite of what it says. It is true that the distance to travel was considerable, but that was not the reason Mae West declined the invitation. Her statement, while true, was meant to convey something other than what it said. Nehemas explains that this ironic statement does not have an "opposite" meaning. Instead, the statement has an "other" meaning, which creates the riddle. Again, the negative space created by a separation of words and context makes the statement ironic. The words still maintain

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[10]Alexandar Nehamas, *Virtues of Authenticity: Essay on Plato and Socrates*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1998.

[11]Vlastos, 21, defines this example as irony used for mockery and separates from the irony used to create a riddle as in the example of the pupil below, but I have put them together under the term riddling irony because they both leave the audience with a riddle and either could be considered mocking or not.

their meaning, but they also contain other meaning, which the audience is expected to interpret.

Another example Vlastos gives is of a teacher who is frustrated because a student is struggling with understanding the teacher. The teacher remarks to the student, "you are brilliant."[12] There are numerous possibilities of how to understand this statement. The pupil may in fact be brilliant, but today his brilliance is not evident, or the pupil is not usually brilliant but today is much less dense than usual. Riddling irony leaves the audience with a paradox because the statement is both true and untrue at the same time. It is the separation and tension between the truth of the statement and the untruth of the statement that creates the irony. This irony allows language to be (its)self and its other at the same time. Nehemas explains again that the statement does not necessarily mean the "opposite" of what it says, but something "other" than what it says. He further points out that simply because there is other meaning implied in an ironic statement, that implication does not guarantee that the author knows what the other meaning is.

As a rhetorical device, irony can become further complicated when its riddle is threaded throughout a text. Perhaps a good example of this riddling irony can be found in Socrates' rhetoric. Within a Socratic dialogue exist three characters namely, Socrates, the interlocutor, and the reader. Socrates knows something (even if it is only that he knows nothing). The interlocutor knows nothing, but is an instrument for Socrates to engage the subject; the reader is expected to interpret the negative space of the dialogue. The negative space between Socrates, interlocutor, and reader is precisely the irony that allows an appropriate approach to a difficult subject. Though Socrates' ironic method of

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[12]Vlastos, 21-22.

discourse may have been amusing to some, the ironic method did not make the subject matter any less serious. Most of the topics Socrates discusses are serious, and his poking fun at his interlocutor does not make the topics less important. It is Socrates' irony which exposes the difficulties of the concept and challenges his listeners to consider more possibilities.[13] Though Socrates does not offer any answers, he does open ironic space in which his listeners have more possibilities for pondering difficult subjects. Socrates' irony does not detract from the weightiness of the subjects he discusses; rather, it enhances that weightiness by showing that his interlocutor does not appreciate the difficulty of the subject. Vlastos suggests that one reason that so many opinions exist concerning Socrates is because irony leaves much open to interpretation. Nehemas further suggests that although most scholars, including Vlastos, assume that by studying Socrates they can find the truth in understanding Socrates' irony, one cannot be positive that Socrates knew what the other meaning was. Kierkegaard's depiction of Socrates in *The Concept of Irony* agrees with this conclusion.[14]

Similar to the irony in the Socratic dialogues that teases any interlocutor while it opens space for a serious matter, the ironic rhetoric employed in *Fear and Trembling*,

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[13]Since Plato wrote the dialogues of Socrates, it is impossible to know if the ironic way in which they are presented is designed by Plato or a representation of Socrates' method. A problem arises because if Plato constructed the irony of the text then Socrates' irony should be attributed to Plato, but if the irony stems from Socrates, how did Plato preserve it unless Plato fully understood Socrates' irony. Kierkegaard addresses this issue and concludes that the ironic structure of the text of the dialogue originates in Socrates and is more visible in the early dialogues because Plato was attempting to represent only Socrates, but in the later dialogues it is less visible because Plato's own thought begins to take a more dominant role (see *KSV*, 159-237; *CI*, 27-127).

[14]Reece, 11, 36-42 points out that Kierkegaard's concept of Socrates becomes modified in Kierkegaard's later writings, particularly in understanding Socrates' irony from a more religious point of view.

while clever and even amusing, does not negate the seriousness of faith nor of Abraham's situation. Instead the text opens ironic space around the figure of Abraham and the concept of faith by its ironic structure and rhetoric. The structure of *Fear and Trembling* is ironic because there are several beginnings discussing possible Abrahams who are imagined by the ignorant man. The imagined Abrahams are not the same Abraham portrayed in Genesis, and they do not necessarily relate to each other. These sections provide a riddle for a reader who tries to understand "who is Abraham?" The body of the text is devoted to questioning the ethics of Abraham's faith. The text again leaves the reader with a riddle because it offers no definitive answer to its own questions. Because of this riddling irony the reader is caught in the opening of ironic space and can more fully appreciate the importance and significance of Abraham's faith.

In addition to *Fear and Trembling* as an ironic text, the subject, Abraham, exemplifies an ironic mode of living. Abraham is a figure comparable to Socrates, the great ironist. For Socrates, irony is not only a rhetorical device as mentioned above, but a mode of living. The irony omnipresent in Socrates' mode of living provides the source of Socrates' irony in his rhetoric. Greek culture defined its members by their interest and interaction in the *polis*. In such a society there is no room for a person who wants to experience life as an individual rather than as an appendage of society.[15] Socrates "forkastede det Bestaaende, sluttede sig ind i sig selv, begrændsede sig egoistisk i sig selv [rejected the established order, enclosed himself within himself, egotistically

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[15]Hegel's *Geschichte der Philosophie* concludes that all history is moving the world to a teleological goal. This perspective is so central to Hegel's thinking that a chapter is devoted to it in Peter Singer, *Hegel: A Very Short Introduction*, (New York: Oxford University Press) 2001,13-31.

confined himself within himself]" and Socrates' "fuldkomment Isolations-Standpunkt [position as one of complete isolation]." The result of Socrates' irony is that he "her havde unddraget sig Statens Sanction [had placed himself outside the sanction of the state]." Before Socrates, no space existed between self and society, they were one and the same. Kierkegaard sees Socrates as the first person to sufficiently separate himself so that he could live as an individual. He suggests that for Socrates "Ordet 'kjend dig selv' betyder: *adskil* dig selv fra *Andet* [The phrase "know yourself" means: *separate* yourself from the *other*]."[16]

Kierkegaard uses the term *Virkelighed* (actuality) to represent the entire circumstance of a given situation, the culture, the political structure, the religious assumptions, etc.[17] This term is the opposite of *Ideele* (ideality), which represents the abstract ideal sphere.[18] Since in Greek society the entire actuality was the state, Socrates could not access *Ideele* while within the state.[19] Instead of living as one more incarnation of the Geek people, he lived separately from the other(s) in his society. Socrates' ironic living was created by the negative space between himself and all external elements of his

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[16]*KSV*, 266, *CI*, 168-169. *KSV*, 248, *CI*, 146. *KSV*, 539 (footnote 131); *CI*, 185note*. *KSV*, 271; *CI*, 177 (emphasis mine), respectively.
[17]K. Brian Søderquist, "The Religious 'Suspension of the Ethical' and the Ironic 'Suspension of the Ethical': The Problem of Actuality in *Fear and* Trembling," in *Kierkegaard Yearbook 2002* (New York: Walter de Gruyter), 260 points out how this word is used. In addition to *Virkelighed, Realit* appears in *CI* and *FT*. *Virkelighed* is translated "actuality" and *Realit* is translated "reality." Both refer to the circumstance of life within a society, *Realit* is more specific to an individual's circumstance and *Virkelighed* is the more general circumstance of humanity. Both are used as a contrast to *Ideelle* or ideality. See *KSV*, 2034 note 2; *FT*, 41 note* for the relationship between *Virkelighed* and *Realit*.
[18]For different individuals *Ideelle* may represent different things. For Socrates *Ideele* would be the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. For Plato it would be the Realm of Forms. For Abraham *Ideele* would be God.
[19]See *KSV*, 259; *CI*, 160.

society including his students, friends, and cultural expectations. A person is an ironist when he lives in such a way as to surround himself with negative space that frees him from blindly accepting any definition of what it means to be human.[20] According to *The Concept of Irony*, it is the negative space created by an ironic mode of living that makes subjectivity possible because "Men fordi Subjectet seer Virkeligheden ironisk, deraf følger ingenlunde, at han i at gjøre denne sin Opfattelse af Virkeligheden gjeldende forholder sig ironisk. . .men denne Opfattelse har sjeldnere gestaltet sig ironisk [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. . .but his is negatively free and as such is suspended, because there is nothing that holds him]." If a person lives ironically, he is proximate to society but not subject to it.

Whether as a rhetorical device or a mode of living, the theoretical concept of irony concerns separation and proximity of its elements. Because irony exists in negative space, it can never be defined as positive space but only by the positive space that binds it. Kierkegaard uses a picture of Napoleon's grave to visually represent how irony exists in negative space bound by positive space.[21]

> Der existerer et Stykke, som forestiller Napoleons Grav. To store Træer overskygge den. Videre er der ikke at see paa Stykket, og den umiddelbare

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[20]For a discussion of Kierkegaard's concept of the "self" see George Stack, "Kierkegaard: The Self in Truth," in *Kierkegaard and Literature* eds. Ronald Schleifer and Robert Markely (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press) 1984; C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Self* (Waco: Baylor University Press) 2006; and Mark C. Taylor, "Christianity and Selfhood," in *Søren Kierkegaard: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers* Vol. IV, ed. Daniel W. Conway (London: Routledge) 2002, 292-322.

[21]See Figure 1, page 16.

> Iagttager seer ikke Andet. Imellem de to Træer er der et tomt Rum; idet Øiet følger langs med dets Contur-Omrids, fremtræder pludselig af dette Intet Napoleon selv, og nu er det umuligt at lade ham forsvinde igjen. Det Øie, der engang har seet ham, seer ham nu med en næsten ængstende Nødvendighed altid. Saaledes ogsaa med Socrates' Repliker. Man hører hans Taler, ligesom man seer Træerne, hans Ord betyde det, de lyde paa, ligesom Træerne ere Træer, der er ikke en eneste Stavelse, der giver et Vink om en anden Fortolkning, ligesom der ikke er en eneste Streg, der antyder Napoleon, og dog, dette tomme Rum, dette Intet er det, der gjemmer det Vigtigste. (There is a work that represents Napoleon's grave. Two tall trees shade the grave. There is nothing else to see in the work, and the unsophisticated observer sees nothing else. Between the two trees there is an empty space. As the eye follows the outline, suddenly Napoleon himself emerges from this nothing, and now it is impossible to have him disappear again. Once the eye has seen him, it goes on seeing him with an almost alarming necessity. So also with Socrates' rejoinders. One hears his words in the same way one sees the trees; his words mean what they say just as the trees are trees. There is not one single syllable that gives a hint of any other interpretation, just as there is not one single line that suggests Napoleon, and yet this empty space, this nothing, is what hides that which is most important.)[22]

Though the trees themselves exist as positive space, more meaning resides in the negative space between them than either tree has alone. Through the relationship of the trees, irony is created in the negative space between them because the negative space

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[22] *KSV*, 150; *CI*, 19.

presents more meaning than the positive space. Although other parts of the picture employ negative space, i.e. above the trees, around the boat, and between the tree leaves, only the negative space between the tree trunks is ironic. While the negative space elsewhere only gives meaning by emphasizing the positive space, the negative space between the tree trunks becomes ironic because that negative space embodies its own meaning. The meaning in negative space is ironic because is "means" the opposite of what is "says." The positive space of the picture should do the talking, i.e. give meaning to the picture, but instead it is the negative space that gives the picture more meaning.

Since irony can never be fully defined by positive space, language cannot fully express the concept of irony. However, language itself contains the negative space of irony and without negative space language cannot exist.[23] The negative space around and within language is what makes the positive space able to be positive space (e.g. this thesis could not exist without the negative space of the white paper separating the positive space of the letters, words, paragraphs, etc.). The common expression, "read between the lines" assumes that meaning can be found in the negative space created by both the proximity of words to each other and the space that separates them. This expression implies that the negative space found around and between the words contains

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[23]When Sausseure first made the separation between signifier and signified, he revolutionized how language was analysed. In one sense, all language is ironic because of the separation between signifier and signified. The difference between the negative space inherent in all language and ironic space is not a difference of type, but of dimension. The negative space between signifier and signified is one dimensional; a signifier and a signified are joined to form meaning. The negative space that creates irony is multi-dimensional. For simple irony the distance between signifier and signified, which creates the words, remains, but an additional dimension of opposite meaning is established. For more complex irony, the signifier and signified combine to supply the words, and the other meaning(s) create the negative and ironic space.

as much or even more meaning than the words themselves like the negative space between the trees creating the profile of Napoleon contains more meaning then the trees themselves. For this point of view, all literary interpretation attempts to express the irony inherent in literature. The difference between a reading that interprets irony because language consists of irony and an ironic reading lies in the expectation and method of the reader. This thesis is an ironic reading because it assumes intentional irony in the text and endeavors to analyze that irony. It then attempts to find irony that may not be intentional but because its presence offers more possibilities to explore in a reading.

Because *The Concept of Irony* is the beginning of Kierkegaard's literary corpus, scholars have wrestled with understanding how much the later texts in the Kierkegaardian corpus should be taken ironically and how to interpret the irony. As readers, we necessarily try to balance the elements of the text to appropriately understand the space they create. This reading of *Fear and Trembling* is such an attempt to see what profile emerges when one focuses on the space between the trees. The first half of this thesis will attempt to offer a reading of *Fear and Trembling*, which focuses on the significance of irony as a rhetorical device and a mode of living for the text of *Fear and Trembling*. Following that reading of *Fear and Trembling*, I will attempt to extrapolate another image from the ironic elements. The second half will explore some possibilities based on passages in *Fear and Trembling* of relating irony to the feminine as well as relating irony to the maternal experience.

Figure 1[24]

[24]Picture of Napoleon's grave referenced by Kierkegaard in *The Concept of Irony. Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter K1 Kommentarer til af en endnu Levendes Papier Om Begrebet Ironi* (København: Gads Forlag), 1997, 169.

Part I. Irony at Play in *Fear and Trembling*

Kierkegaard is famous for using indirect communication believing that it was the only way to commune on certain topics. Indirect communication is not the same as irony, although it is closely related because both employ negative space.[25] Instead of lecturing on a concept by systematically building an argument, Kierkegaard approaches a topic indirectly. Like Socrates for whom "irony is an indispensable part of his indirect communication,"[26] Kierkegaard uses indirect communication to open ironic space. As in all of his pseudonymous works, this strategy is the case in *Fear and Trembling*. Kierkegaard's indirect communication in *Fear and Trembling* is replete with irony. In the text irony is used several different ways, in the structure of sections, in the relationship between the sections, and in various statements within the section. Irony presents itself in so many varieties that each irony adds to a layering and multiplicity of irony. This section is concerned with pointing out the irony in the structure of *Fear and Trembling*, in the relationships between sections, and in the content of the text.

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[25]Roger Poole, *The Indirect Communication* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia) 1993 and Sylvia Walsh, *Living Poetically: Kierkegaard's Existential Aesthetics* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press) 1994 both include discussion of irony in terms of communications. Interestingly, Sylvia Walsh does not include a discussion of irony in her *Living Christianly*.

[26]John Lippitt, *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought* (New York: St. Martin's Pres, LLC) 2000, 135.

Chapter 1

A View Made Necessary: Irony in Structure and Text

As a rhetorical device irony often presents the reader with a riddle. Such a riddle seems to be present when Johannes de Silentio makes a claim in one part of the text, and then in another part of text implicitly contradicts his own claim. For example, Johannes emphasizes on several occasions that "Nærværende Forfatter er ingenlunde Philosoph, han har ikke forstaaet Systemet [the present author is by no means a scholar. He has not understood the system]."[27] Despite this claim, Johannes quotes Greek, Latin, Hebrew, French, and German. Not only does he show a reading knowledge of these languages, but he also demonstrates familiarity with the important persons, concepts, and systems in the literature of these languages. Since Johannes himself admits that education is found in the classical texts and philosophy, and shows understanding of those texts and philosophy, he seems to fit the criteria of a scholar.[28] This presents the reader with a riddle. How can Johannes not be a scholar even though he has the knowledge to be considered one? One way to answer this question is by taking the statements as riddling irony, i.e. that statements are deliberately ironic in order to entice a reader to puzzle the meaning of the riddle. Johannes deliberately denies being a scholar and at the same time shows that he has the qualifications of a scholar so that his reader will wonder how that

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[27] *KSV*, 1842; *FT*, 7.

[28] See *KSV*, 1918; *FT*, 55. "Endnu enhver grundigere Tænker, enhver alvorligere Kunstner forynger sig ved det græske Folks evige Ungdom [every more thorough thinker, every more earnest artist still regenerates himself in the eternal youth of the Greeks]" and *KSV* 1888; *FT*, 33. "Jeg for mit Vedkommende har anvendt adskillig Tid paa at forstaae den hegelske Philosophi, troer ogsaa nogenlunde at have forstaaet den [I for my part have applied considerable time to understanding Hegelian philosophy and believe that I have understood it fairly well]."

can be possible. Johannes draws the readers' ttention to the problem of academic pursuits by creating this riddling irony. Johannes is not a scholar even though he is a scholar. He has the training and knowledge of a scholar, and he knows their systems, but he does not accept that the system employed by scholars is able to access the type of understanding that Johannes is seeking. The irony at play here forces the reader to evaluate why the question of faith is not an academic pursuit and why an academic pursuit has limitations when applied to concepts such as faith.

On a larger scale, Johannes uses irony in the structure of *Fear and Trembling* in order to create more riddling. *Fear and Trembling* is divided into two sections, the first an aggregate of three introductory sections and the second another introduction and the "Problemata." The whole first section contains nothing more than several introductions, and the second section contains its own introduction. The presence of so many introductions immediately causes the reader to pause and wonder why such a structure is used and question whether there is something ironic in the several sections. A discussion of three questions forms the body of the text. Because by definition a question opens negative space, by using questions to title the three *problemata*, Johannes deliberately invokes negative space.

In the first part of the work considerable ironic space within and between introductory sections exists. The first element of negative space a reader encounters when approaching *Fear and Trembling* appears on the title page. The work is written by one Johannes de Silentio.[29] *De* is a Latin preposition meaning "from," which was often

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[29]A earlier draft of the title page included the comment under the author's name "a poetic person who exists only among poets." In *KSV*, 400; *CI*, 324 Kierkegaard claims that the poet must be related to his work ironically. For a further discussion of the meaning of

used to identify a given person by the person's geographic origin, i.e. Leonardo Da Vinci distinguishes this Leonardo who was born in Vinci from other Leonardos. This original geographic designation later was used for a surname. What does it mean that Johannes is "de Silentio"? Is Johannes a person who was born in "Silence" or is his position one of silence? For "Silence" to be either the origin or the name of an author presents a riddle because the ideas of silence and authorship generally oppose each other. One implies communication and the other its lack.[30] Silence is linked to irony because silence is the opposite of speaking. A rock cannot speak, therefore it is silent, but this silence is not the opposite of speaking. A rock's silence is only the inability to speak. As the opposite of speech, silence implies more than a lack of sound because it assumes a capability of sound. Silence from a lack of speech instead of an inability to speak is the negative space of speech. In other words, silence is the nothing present when speech is absent. (The subject of silence will reappear in "*Problema* III.") If the negative space created by silence acquires more meaning than the positive space (in this case the text), then the negative space of the silence is ironic. For this particular text an author who is *de Silentio* may be ironically appropriate if by writing the author intends to create silence, i.e. negative space, rather than to fill silence.

Another indication that intentional negative space exists in the text can be found on the page between the title page and the preface. On this page lies a quote by Hamann referring to a story from Livy. "Was Tarquinius Superbus in seinem Garten mit den

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Johannes de Silentio see Roy Martinez, *Kierkegaard and the Art of Irony* (Amherst: Humanity Books), 2001.

[30]J. H. Gill Faith Not Without Reason: Kant, Kierkegaard and Religious Belief," in *Kant and Kierkegaard on Religion*, eds D.Z. Philips and T. Tessin (London: Macmillan) 2000, 64.

Mohnköpfen sprach, verstand der Sohn, aber nicht der Bote. [What Tarquinius Superbus said in the garden by means of the poppies, the son understood but the messenger did not]."[31] This quote is laden with negative space because it literally relays a silent message. The story referenced tells of a son who sends a messenger to his father for advice about running the kingdom. Because the father does not trust the messenger, he answers indirectly by walking into his garden and cutting off the tops of any poppy that stands above the average height. The messenger explains what the father did, and the son interprets the message to mean that he should kill any person who stood too tall and was therefore a threat. He followed the advice and successfully maintained his position.[32] In the story negative space clearly exists between the message from the father and the interpretation by the son. However, this space was occupied by an ignorant man who nevertheless successfully carried the message. This quote effectively throws the gauntlet to the readers challenging us to interact correctly with the negative (ironic) space created and to see if we can understand a message fathered in silence (through Kierkegaard) through an ignorant messenger (Johannes) relaying a message (the text) to a son (reader).

A preface by Johannes de Silentio follows this quote. In the preface, Johannes claims that "Nærværende Forfatter er ingenlunde Philosoph, han er, poetice et eleganter, en Extra-Skriver, [The present author is by no means a philosopher. He is *poetice et eleganter* (in a poetic and refined way) a supplementary clerk]."[33] With such a statement Johannes compares himself to the messenger who is an intermediary. Fittingly, this places Kierkegaard in the role of the father because, despite the common knowledge that

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[31]*KSV*, 1838. This quote is given in German because it is taken from Hamann.
[32]Livy 1.59.
[33]*KSV*, 1842; *FT*, 7.

Kierkegaard wrote the text, he used a self-proclaimed ignorant pseudonym to carry the message. The reader is then placed as the son interpreting the message. The text of *Fear and Trembling* then becomes the "silent" message.

In addition to challenging the reader, the reference introduces the subject of a parent-child relationship. The relationship of parent and child is a central one for *Fear and Trembling* and this story raises questions which have relevance for Abraham. Three elements from the story coincide with Abraham's story. The story from Livy concerns a parent-child relationship, silence on the part of the parent, and murder. In Livy's story the son is seeking sustenance from his relationship with his father, and he receives the message through silence. The message from the father is to murder the best members of society. The story of Abraham also has these elements of the parent-child relationship. Isaac seeks information from his father, his father stands silent, and the message involves the question of murder. A similar relationship between parent and child is that of Abraham and God. God, as Abraham's father, gives a message that the son (Abraham) cannot understand and that involves murdering someone in his society. Perhaps by invoking a story about an ironic relationship between parent and child, Johannes is trying to prepare the setting (in other words open negative space) in which to situate Abraham's story.

Following the preface is a section titled "Stemning." This section is another type of introduction, and it presents more ironic space beginning with its title. The Danish word *stemning* is variously translated as "exordium," "attunement," or "prelude."[34] Its

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[34]The reason some translators prefer "prelude" or "attunement" is because the subtitle to *Fear and Trembling* is *A Dialectical Lyric*. Prelude or attunement both continue the musical metaphor. Attunement, however, more aptly describes the content because

basic meanings are "atmosphere" and "tuning." The title "Stemning"suggests that this section prepares an atmosphere with a certain mood or characteristics. It also sets the tone or the tuning since the word *stemning* can also mean the tuning of a musical instrument, an appropriate interpretation for a work subtitled "A Dialectical Lyric." This section is not the actual music, but represents a preliminary arrangement of sound or space for the actual music. It is worth noting that both tuning or atmosphere are concerned with sound. Sound exists in non-tangible, non-physical (i.e. negative) space. Sound has to travel through the distance or separation between the instrument and the audience.[35] We could extend this idea to compare to the father, message, son story from Livy. Because an instrument lies in silence without a musician to play it, the musician could be the father, the instrument the messenger, and the audience the son.

More ironic space seems to reside in the text of the "Stemning" than the relationship of the title to the preceding quote. This section offers four scenarios of what Abraham and Isaac could have experienced. Within this section, there are two elements I would like to discuss here and a third in a later chapter. The first element is the ignorant man who is pondering Abraham's story. The second element is the four depictions of

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prelude suggests music that is harmonious with the main body of music while attunement suggests a preliminary attempt to reconcile the different instruments. All the stories are attempts or tunings, which all stress one note (i.e. the emotion of Abraham's ordeal). A fuller discussion of this can be found in Edward F Mooney, "Ordeals of Silence" in *Søren Kierkegaard: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers* Vol. III, ed. Daniel W. Conway (London: Routledge) 2000, 25-26.

[35]Of course sound cannot travel in true negative space. There must be some medium to carry it, but it does still travel through distance from its source to something that can interpret it. The medium can transfer the waves, but cannot "hear" them. It is not until the sound waves reach an ear (of a son) that they can be heard.

Abraham this character considers. The third element is the paragraph on a mother weaning her child, which follows each depiction of Abraham.

The *"*Stemning*"* begins with Johannes describing an ignorant man who ponders the message of Abraham but who does not understand it. Like the father who relays a message to his son through his silence and by an ignorant messenger, Johannes de Silentio utilizes the ignorance of another man. Both the title, which connotes a type of space, and the content of the section (that all of the accounts are negative and that the man after considering the account is still left with negativity) suggest that the section itself is designed to create an ironic negative space. The man presented in the Exordium "var ikke Tænker [was not a thinker]" nor "lærd Exegetan [an exegetical scholar]," and it is because of his lack of an academic background that "han følte ingen Trang til at komme ud over Troen [he did not feel any need to go beyond faith]."[36] These statements sound very much like the claims from Johannes in the preface. However, unlike

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[36]*KSV*, 1845-1846; FT, 9. This man is an example of what Johannes mentions in the preface. "I vor Tid bliver Enhver ikke staaende ved Troen, men gaaer videre. . .I hine gamle Dage var det anderledes, da var Troen en Opgave for hele Livet, fordi man antog, at den troende Færdighed ikke erhverves hverken i Dage eller Uger. Naar da den prøvede Olding nærmede sig sit Endeligt, havde stridt den gode Strid og bevaret Troen, da var hans Hjerte ungt nok til ikke at have glemt hiin Angst og Bævelse, der tugtede Ynglingen, som Manden vel beherskede, men som intet Menneske ganske voxer fra - uden forsaavidt det skulde lykkes ved saa tidlig som mulig at gaae videre. Hvor da hine ærværdige Skikkelser naaede hen, der begynder i vor Tid Enhver for at gaae videre. [In our age, everyone is unwilling to stop with faith but goes further. . .It was different in those ancient days. Faith was then a task for a whole lifetime, because it was assumed that proficiency in believing is not acquired in days or weeks. When the tried and tested oldster approached his end, had fought the good fight and help the faith, his heart was still young enough not to have forgotten the anxiety and trembling that disciplined the youth, that the adult learned to control, but that no man outgrows–except to the extent the he succeeds in going further as early as possible. The point attained by those venerable personages is in our age the point where everyone begins in order to go further" (*KSV*, 1841; *FT*, 7).

Johannes who claims ignorance of the system, this man actually is academically ignorant. The use of an ignorant man possibly exemplifies Kierkegaard's statement in *The Concept of Irony* that an author can use the "eenfoldigste og meest indskrænkede Mennesker, ikke for at spotte dem, men for at spotte Viismændene [simplest and dullest of persons, not in order to mock them but in order to mock the wise]."[37] In introducing this ignorant man Johannes uses the words "Der var engang en Mand."[38] This phrase has an echo of a fairy-tale. To catch the sense of this in English some translators have used, "There once was a man." Another possible translation might be "Once upon a time there was a man." This beginning to the "Exordium" emphasizes that this man is admittedly fictitious as are his variations on the story of Abraham.

Johannes uses this ignorant man to posit four versions of the story of Abraham. The passages emphasize the possible range of emotions that any person in a position similar to Abraham's might experience, but none of the passages represent the actual, biblical account. Each of the four describes a very different possibility, but they all share a similar structure. All four passages begin with a reference to Sarah, discuss the road to Mount Moriah, detail something that happens on the mount, and end with a few sentences about a mother weaning her child. The layout of these elements suggests negative space. Each passage begins its own page headed by a roman numeral. In the space beneath the roman numeral lie the scenarios of the imagined Abrahams. Following the account there is an empty line between the story and the weaning passage. The seemingly deliberate use of an unusual amount of negative space in the typography of the

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[37] *KSV,* 325; *CI*, 251.
[38] *KSV*, 1844; *FT*, 9.

text reinforces the possibility that these passages are intended to create negative space in which the reader must find meaning.

None of the four stories tells the actual story of Abraham and all of them imply consequences that are not part of the biblical story. Instead, each passage explores a possible experience that Abraham could have had and describes emotions that someone in Abraham's position might have experienced. The first account has Genesis 22:1-2, the commandment from God that Abraham take Isaac and offer him as a burnt offering, as a header.[39] In this rendition, Abraham, after taking leave of Sarah, walks in silence during the three-day journey. On the fourth day as he and Isaac approach Mt. Moriah, Abraham whose "Aasyn var Faderlighed [face epitomized fatherliness]" tells Isaac what is in store for him.[40] Isaac is horrified by his father's intentions and begs for his life.[41] Then Abraham carries Isaac and tries to console him. When Isaac is not consoled, Abraham changes tactics. He pretends to be a monster so that Isaac will blame Abraham and not God because "det er dog bedre at han troer, jeg er et Umenneske, end at han skulde tabe Troen paa Dig [it is better that he believes me a monster than that he should loose faith in you]."[42]

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[39]*KSV*, 1848. "Og Gud fristede Abraham og sagde til ham, tag Isaak, Din eneste Søn, som du elsker, og gaae hen i det Land Morija og offer ham der til et Brændoffer paa et Bjerg, som jeg vil vise dig." For a discussion of how scripture is used in the Kierkegaardian corpus see J. J. Pedersen, "Kierkegaard's View of Scripture" in *The Sources and Depths of Faith in Kierkegaard*. Bibliotheca Kierkegaardina 2, eds. Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulova Thulstrup (Copenhagen: Reitzels, 1978), 27-57.
[40]*KSV*, 1849; *FT*, 10.
[41]Unlike the story taken from Livy, in this story the son does not understand the actions of the father and begs him not to go through with his plan.
[42]*KSV*, 1849; *FT*, 11.

In the second account Abraham does not try to explain to Isaac, but remains silent throughout the journeying, the binding, the drawing of the knife, and the sacrificing of the ram. The difference in this account is that "Fra den Dag af blev Abraham gammel [from that day henceforth, Abraham was old]" and Abraham's "Øie var fordunklet, han saae ikke Glæden mere [eyes were darkened, and he saw joy no more]" because he "kunde ikke glemme, at Gud havde fordret det af ham [could not forget that God had ordered him to do this]."[43] Abraham never recovers from the emotional trauma that the experience caused. Instead of the journey becoming the defining moment of Abraham's faith, it is the destruction of his faith.

Of the four accounts the third account is the most different from the Biblical story of Abraham. In this story after drawing the knife, Abraham decides not to sacrifice Isaac, but instead "han bad Gud at tilgive ham hans Synd, at han havde villet offre Isaak [he prayed God to forgive him his sin, that he had been willing to sacrifice Isaac]."[44] As in the first passage, this version leaves the story incomplete. It ends with Abraham who "kunde ikke begribe, at det var en Synd, at han havde villet offre Gud det Bedste, han eiede, det, hvorfor han gjerne selv havde ladet sit Liv mange Gange; og hvis det var en Synd, hvis han ikke havde elsket Isaak saaledes, da kunde han ikke forstaae, at den kunde tilgives; thi hvilken Synd var forfærdeligere? [could not comprehend that it was a sin that he had been willing to sacrifice to God that best that he had, the possession for which he himself would have gladly died many times; and if it was a sin, if he had not loved Isaac in this manner, he could not understand that it could be forgiven, for what more terrible

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[43]*KSV*, 1852; *FT*,12.
[44]*KSV*, 1856; *FT*, 13.

sin was there?]"[45] The man cannot understand how it could not be a sin to be willing to kill your own son, but he also cannot understand how withholding anything from God (even your own son) could not be a sin as well. Abraham's deliberations show how his situation is one of irony because Abraham is caught in a riddling paradox. If he truly loves God then he cannot deny God anything, especially what is most precious to him. If he truly loves his son then Abraham cannot make a sacrifice of him. Abraham's love creates an irony because he cannot love both God and Isaac without being both willing and unwilling to sacrifice Isaac to God.

The final passage focuses not on Abraham's emotions, but on Isaac's. When Abraham drew the knife "da saae Isaak, at Abrahams Venstre knyttede sig i Fortvivlelse, at der gik en Skjælven igjennem hans Legeme - men Abraham drog Kniven [Isaac saw that Abraham's left hand was clenched in despair, that a shudder went through his whole body–but Abraham drew the knife]."[46] Because he has seen his father's hand "knyttede sig i Fortvivlelse [clenched in despair]" Isaac "havde tabt Troen [had lost the faith]."[47] After they return home to Sarah, Isaac never tells about what he saw, and Abraham never knows that Isaac saw his father's despair. There is no explanation of why Isaac lost his faith from this sight, but one possibility lies in the word "despair."[48] The Danish word

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[45]*KSV*, 1856; *FT*, 13.
[46]*KSV*, 1859; *FT*, 14. When I first read this passage I misunderstood it because I assumed a meaning prematurely. I thought that when "Abraham drew the knife" it was a manifestation of faith rather than a loss of it. I was not aware of the irony being presented and assumed this scenario because it presented the Abraham I expected to read about. I find it ironic that I misunderstood the irony because I anticipated understanding the text.
[47]*KSV*, 1860; *FT*, 14.
[48]See Linda Williams, "Kierkegaard's Weanings" *Philosophy Today* 42:3 (1998), 316, for a discussion of what faith Isaac lost.

translated as despair is *fortvivlelse*, which does connote an intense emotion but also has a more technical meaning. *Fortvivlelse* means a loss of hope or faith and would be considered not just as a description of emotion but as a sin. In *The Sickness Unto Death* the word *fortvivlelse* is the despair that is the sickness unto death. It would seem appropriate to apply that same definition here because, which despair that Abraham feels effectively kills his faith and Isaac's. It is noteworthy that this Abraham is not acting with "fear and trembling;" he is acting "in despair." If Abraham had been fearing and trembling, his actions could have still been faithful, but if he is despairing, his actions become sinful. This simple addition of Abraham's emotion turns his action from faith to murder. The passage, however, omits a discussion of Abraham's situation, and tells the reader that this despair causes Isaac to lose faith. In this rendition rather than finding faith both father and son are bereft of faith as a result of the experience.

If the passages did not conclude with a comparison of a mother weaning her child, perhaps they could just be explained as an attempt to help the reader internalize the emotional possibilities, which would accompany such an ordeal, but the weaning passages are so strikingly different than the rest of the section that they beg for a consideration of more possibilities. One purpose for including the weaning passages within the accounts of Abraham may be to draw the reader's attention to the irony in the text. The abrupt switch from the story of Abraham to a statement such as "Naar Barnet skal vænnes fra, da er ei heller Moderen uden Sorg, at hun og Barnet mere og mere skilles ad; at Barnet, der først laae under hendes Hjerte, senere dog hvilede ved hendes Bryst, ikke skal være saa nær mere. Saa sørge de sammen den korte Sorg. Held den, der beholdt Barnet saa nær, og ikke behøvede at sørge mere! [When the child is to be

weaned, the mother, too, is not without sorrow, because she and the child are more and more to be separated, because the child who first lay under her heart and later rested upon her breast will never again be so close. So they grieve together the brief sorrow. How fortunate the one who kept the child so close and did not need to grieve any more!]"[49] This paragraph does not have any immediate application to the subject at hand. The meaning cannot be found within the words alone. As they stand the passages do not readily lend themselves to interpretation. Thus interpretation only seems possible when understood as an ironic relationship (i.e. the negative space) between the words, their structure, and the possible meaning.[50] Each of the preceding elements we have discussed (the author's name, the initial quote, the fairy-tale quality, and the emotional but not real accounts of Abraham) suggests that an ironic reading is necessary for a full understanding of *Fear and Trembling*. Additionally, the ironic space of the passages that emphasize the maternal further open interesting interpretive possibilities (a subject that will be taken up again later).

Each of the four scenarios reveals very intense emotions that could have been experienced, but none of them describes the faithful Abraham who is the subject of the remainder of the book. In all four passages, Abraham is willing to be obedient, but his obedience does not constitute faith. In fact, in each of the passages the result of the experience is not faith, but actually a lack of faith. These passages rarely receive much

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[49]*KSV*,1857; *FT*, 13.

[50]This is directly related to the idea of indirect communication. When there is ironic space separating words and meaning, it becomes the reader's job to juggle the relationship between them. The more ironic space Kierkegaard can place between himself and his reader through pseudonyms, structures, characters, negative possibilities, seemingly disjointed passages, etc. the more the reader is left alone with the text and becomes responsible for their interaction with it.

commentary because they are one introduction among several, short, and rather strange.[51] Often they are skipped so that more attention can be devoted to the "*Problemata*" where "the real meat" is supposedly found, but John Lippitt suggests that we "overlook (them) at our peril."[52] Instead of directly addressing the subject of faith, these passages show negative possibilities or open negative space around the concept of faith.

In the final paragraph of the "Exordium," Johannes returns to this man who has attempted to understand Abraham by imagining the four accounts. Johannes concludes "Saaledes og paa mange lignende Maader tænkte hiin Mand, om hvilken vi tale, over denne Begivenhed. Hver Gang han da efter en Vandring til Morija-Bjerget vendte hjem, da sank han sammen af Træthed, han foldede sine Hænder og sagde: 'Ingen var dog stor som Abraham, hvo er istand til at forstaae ham?' [Thus and in many similar ways did the man of whom we speak ponder this event. Every time he returned from a pilgrimage to Mount Moriah, he sank down wearily, folded his hands, and said, 'No one was as great as Abraham. Who is able to understand him?']"[53] This statement clarifies that the passages do not represent Abraham. Instead they represent his imaginings of what he might have felt if he had been tested as Abraham. Presumably the accounts are imaginations of a man without Abraham's faith trying to make the same trip that Abraham made in faith. Through the ignorant man's meditations, Johannes indirectly suggests what faith is not.[54]

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[51]The three authors who do devote attention to this section are Lippitt (*Kierkegaard)*, Mooney (*Knights of Faith*), and Williams. Each has insightful comments, but none discusses the passages in terms of their possible ironic content.
[52]John Lippitt, *Kierkegaard and* Fear and Trembling (London: Routledge) 2003, 15.
[53]*KSV*, 1862; *FT*, 14.
[54]Mooney *Knights of Faith*, 28 points out that in addition to the text of the Exordium, Kierkegaard considered several more options for Abraham. "Abraham merely *resigns* Isaac, 'dull with grief;' he thrusts the knife into his *own* breast; he seeks to hide, to avoid the task, or doubts, hesitates. He lacks courage: 'If God wants Isaac, let *Him* take him!'

It is not simple, blind obedience; it is not something that destroys another's faith; it is not something that deprives someone of joy (which are the results of the various scenarios). In this manner Johannes uses a *via negativa* to open space void of misconceptions about faith.

The "Exordium" started with a man who knew nothing, it describes what faith is not, and then concludes with the same man still knowing nothing. Without coming to any positive conclusions about faith, this section leaves the reader only with negative space. It would be hard for such a structure not to remind a reader of Socrates who expresses his ignorance, considers a number of possibilities, and leaves having come to no conclusions. If the negative space created by these elements can assume more meaning than the elements themselves, the negative space creates irony. The Socratic engagement with an idea suggests to a reader that there might be something ironic dwelling in the negative space of this section.

All of the elements discussed contribute to the negative space found in the beginnings of *Fear and Trembling*. The weaning passages create ironic space between mother and child. The four stories of Abraham create negative space concerning faith. The ignorant character who concludes with no understanding creates negative space for Johannes' question of faith. The quote by Hamman creates negative space between the father, the messenger, and the son. The pseudonym creates negative space between the author, the text and the reader. The remaining text contains two more introductions and

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He loses joy, is merely resigned. Abraham forgets the *journey*, either by sacrificing Isaac *immediately* or by taking a 'winged horse' to Moriah. He wants to set an illustrious example for all fathers; he speaks, and speaks the wrong words at the wrong time; he lies to Isaac. God kills Isaac, relieving Abraham of the task. Abraham wavers, cannot make up his mind."

then the three *problemata*. Although these remaining sections also open ironic space, instead of examining them closely for ironic structure and rhetoric, I will point out a few such elements and then turn attention to the irony in the subject of these sections, i.e. Abraham and his faith.

The "Eulogy on Abraham" concludes the beginnings of *Fear and Trembling*, and the "Preliminary Expectoration" introduces the body of *Fear and Trembling*, the "*Problemata*." These two sections contrast starkly with the preceding sections. In the "Eulogy," Johannes' purpose is not to reconstruct Abraham's ordeal (as in the Exordium), but to praise Abraham's faith. The "Euology" opens with a discussion of the need for both heroes (to do wonderful things) and poets (to describe and preserve those things). By discussing heroes and their poets as an introduction to Johannes' praise of Abraham, Johannes tacitly places himself in the role of the poet and Abraham in the role of the hero.[55] While admitting that a poet (which Johannes claims he is not although he is attempting what he describes the role of a poet)[56] can never be the hero, Johannes still points out the value and need for every hero to have a poet. This beginning validates Johannes assuming the role of poet to Abraham's role of hero.

This section recounts in much more detail the experience of Abraham, albeit not to focus on the emotion or difficulty of Abraham's faith, but to savor how Abraham's faith made something terrible into something wonderful. Without ever explaining what Abraham's faith consisted of, this section continually lauds the results of faith and the

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[55] Implying that Abraham is a hero is something of a problem since much of the "Problemata" is dedicated to showing how Abraham is not a tragic hero and that faith cannot be mediated by the tragic hero's suspension of the ethical for a higher ethical.
[56] *KSV*, 1864; *FT*, 15-16. This seems to be another ironic claim similar to Johannes' claim that he is not a scholar.

paradox of faith. In a style that could be found in a sermon Johannes claims that "Abraham var større end Alle, stor ved den Kraft, hvis Styrke er Afmagt, stor ved den Viisdom, hvis Hemmelighed er Daarskab, stor ved det Haab, hvis Form er Vanvid, stor ved den Kjærlighed, der er Had til sig selv [Abraham was the greatest of all, great by that power whose strength is powerlessness, great by that wisdom whose secret is foolishness, great by that hope whose form is madness, great by the love that is hatred to oneself]."[57] The picture of Abraham given here is beautiful, perhaps exquisite, and even uplifting because of the overflowing optimism about Abraham's faith. While artistic, this portrayal of Abraham acknowledges the problem of the paradox in its praise, but does not try to understand it. With no transition from the "Exordium," which concludes with a lament of inability to understand Abraham, this section assumes either that it understands Abraham and does not need to explain him or that understanding Abraham is not necessary to appreciate him. The proximity of the sections to each other emphasizes the negative space between them and creates an ironic coupling.

The body of the text follows, which has another introduction of its own titled "Preliminary Expectoration," the "Eulogy on Abraham" suggesting that the discussion contains some emotional content (from the heart) rather than intellectual content (from the head). In this section the knights are introduced and distinguished from each other. Although they are two types of one category, the knight of resignation is an approachable and understandable figure, and the knight of faith is an unrecognizable and not understandable figure. Here again is a contrast to draw out negative space around faith.

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[57]*KSV*, 1865; *FT*, 16-17.

The "Problemata" reads much more as constructed arguments than any of the preceding sections. Each problem centers around an ethical question. A question, by its very nature binds negative space. The positive elements of the question and the answer are bound by the silence following when a question is asked, but before the answer has been given. The simple fact that questions introduce these sections attests that there is negative space being invoked. There is relatively little discussion of Abraham or his faith. Instead, there are many comparisons of figures who might be used to explain Abraham, but Johannes shows how other characters are only tragic heroes and as such not comparable to Abraham.[58] These figures are foils for Abraham and create a negative space in which Abraham exists. Abraham is not a tragic hero, he does not fit into ethical categories, his faith cannot be mediated.

Finally, there is an "Epilogue." This section brackets the preface by returning to the idea of commerce and bargain pricing.[59] In the preface Johannes comments on how value is assigned to produce and how everything can be bought at a bargain. He suggests that the value system of material goods cannot be applied to the value of spiritual experience. The "Epilogue" reiterates the separation or negative space, which exists between the material and spiritual world. Because humanity lives in a material world, too often the assumptions of that world become assumptions for any existence. But faith, while only available to humans in a material world, cannot be mediated by that world, but must maintain a certain separation from it.[60]

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[58]The arguments Kierkegaard uses to differentiate Abraham from tragic heroes will be addressed more fully in the discussion of Abraham below.
[59]Mooney *Knights of Faith*, 20.
[60]For Plato the separation of the material was necessary in order to access the ideal. In Plato's Realm of Forms the realm is defined by the fact that the ideal forms are not

These elements discussed above examined the negative space that Johannes creates around the figure of Abraham. Although those elements could possibly be explained by other rhetorical devices such as indirect communication or *inconcinitas*, it seems appropriate to acknowledge that such devices are intentionally ironic. Due to the numerous elements that suggest irony, including style (indirect communication) and structure (multiple contradictory beginnings, divisions of sections, and questions without answers), it seems not only possible but necessary to read *Fear and Trembling* with constant awareness of the irony at play. This irony becomes even more poignant as the ironic structure of *Fear and Trembling* becomes a framework of negative space within which the figure of Abraham exists.

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necessarily material. This separation of material from ideal in Christianity became the idea the separation of the physical from the spiritual.

Chapter 2

A View Made Actual: Abraham and Irony

Abraham has been knighted the "father of faith" and consequently most discussions of his life are viewed in relation to his faith. Defining Abraham within a context of irony may seem as strange as claiming a religious test to be ironic. However, the relationship of *The Concept of Irony* to the entirety of the Kierkegaardian corpus has recently been explored a great deal, and several commentators have noted that *The Concept of Irony* is much more closely related to the rest of the corpus than was previously thought. Søderquist posits that "I do not think it is an exaggeration to assert that his formal authorship takes up at the very point *The Concept of Irony* leaves off."[61] If Abraham can appropriately be read as living ironically, then *Fear and Trembling* is a continuation of Kierkegaard's discussion of irony, its problems, paradoxes, and value. In *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard claims that irony is necessary for any "ægte humant Liv [genuinely human life],"[62] and presumably, Abraham can appropriately be considered as living genuinely.

The roots of irony as a mode of living can be found in the same place, or more precisely, in the same person as all other forms of irony, in Socrates. In order to ascertain whether Abraham qualifies as living ironically, comparing Abraham to Socrates

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[61]K. Brian Søderquist, "Kierkegaard's Nihilistic Socrates in *The Concept of Irony*." *Tänkarens Mångfald: på Søren Kierkegaard.* Eds. Lone Koldtoft, Jon Stewart, Jan Holmgaard (Göteborg: Makadam Förlag) 2005, 243. He further suggests that *CI* was not Kierkegaard's final say on the concept of irony. He believes that several of the issues presented in *CI* were opened but not resolved in that text, and they continue to be influential in the later writings. One such issue is the correct use of irony as a mode of living. By reading *FT* as an ironic text and Abraham employing an ironic mode of living, this thesis is an application Søderquist's thesis to a specific text.

[62]*KSV*, 390; *CI*, 326.

seems appropriate. To consider further whether Kierkegaard's definition of irony allows for Abraham to have lived ironically, we need to compare Abraham to a concept of irony historically and theoretically appropriate to Kierkegaard. Conveniently, Kierkegaard himself has provided several hundred pages of discussion on irony and particularly Socrates' irony.[63] Against Kierkegaard's detailed analysis of Socrates' irony, the further analysis of romantic irony, and the brief mention of controlled irony found in *The Concept of Irony*, we can compare Abraham to determine whether ironic elements can be found in him. In this comparison, I am not suggesting that Abraham is an ironist to the same degree as Socrates. Rather I am proposing that Abraham's faith requires the space provided by an ironic mode of living before faith could have sufficient space within Abraham. Although Abraham does not fit the description of "uendelige absolute Negativitet [infinite, absolute negativity],"[64] he does share characteristics of irony that Kierkegaard emphasizes are central to Socrates' ironic mode of living.

Upon beginning his dissertation Kierkegaard notes, "At nu Traditionen til Socrates' Existents har knyttet Ordet Ironi, det veed Enhver, men deraf følger ingenlunde, at Enhver veed, hvad Ironi er [It is common knowledge, of course, that tradition has linked the word 'irony' to the existence of Socrates, but it by no means follows that everyone knows what irony is]."[65] Since the entire dissertation is devoted to articulating

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[63]Among those who have offered readings interpreting irony in *CI* are Andrew Cross, ""Neither Either Nor Or: The Perils of Reflexive Irony," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1997, 125-153 and Tony Aagaard Olsen, "Kierkegard's Socratic Hermeneutic in *The Concept of Irony*," in The Concept of Irony *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, Vol 2. (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press) 2001, 101-122.
[64]*KSV*, 339; *CI*, 261.
[65] *KSV*, 142; *CI*, 11.

the concept of irony, it would be presumptuous to assume that such a concept could be accurately distilled into one sentence. However, for the sake of manageability, I have interpreted irony as the negative space that both binds and separates something and its other. When applied to a mode of living I have inferred from *Concept of Irony* that an ironist is often defined by his separation of himself from his *Virkelighed* or actuality (i.e. society, culture, and expectations), ultimately a separation of self and other. This separation from his sphere of actuality allows the ironist a proximity to the sphere of ideality. Abraham's devotion to God requires such a separation of self from other. This separation positions Abraham in negative space, creating distance between himself and his society, friends, and family, i.e. his actuality. It also creates a proximity to God in the sphere of ideality.

Kierkegaard, like Hegel and other commentators, presents Socrates as the original ironist. Unlike others, Kierkegaard presents Socratic irony as not just a linguistic tool, but as a *Standpunkt*, a position or viewpoint. For Kierkegaard, Socrates' irony "er ikke det Redskab han brugte i Ideens Tjeneste, Ironien er hans Standpunkt, mere havde han ikke [was not the instrument he used in the service of the idea; irony was his position–more he did not have]."[66] The Danish word *Standpunkt* is composed of two words *stand* and *punkt*. The word *stand* refers to a condition or circumstance, and the word *punkt* denotes a position or location. Because what is visible to a person is determined by its location and circumstance, a *standpunkt* can be a point of view or opinion. As a viewpoint or position, irony was more than Socrates' rhetoric, but was the reason for his mode of living. A *standpunkt* of irony dictates not only how a person

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[66]*KSV*, 295; *CI*, 214.

speaks, but also how a person lives because it is the position taken toward the world, i.e. his actuality. For irony to be a *Standpunkt* it must dictate the whole perception a person has of himself and the world. In this way irony as a *Standpunkt* effectively becomes an ironic mode of living.[67] This reading interprets Socrates' rhetoric as a reflection of his mode of living, rather than simply a didactic tool. For Kierkegaard Socrates was a complete ironist, he did not just use irony, he was ironic.

One reason that Socrates is believed to be the original ironist stems from how the word εἰρωνεία changed after it was ascribed to Socrates. In a remarkable etymological analysis, Gregory Vlastos locates the transformation of the Greek word εἰρωνεία from a figure of speech and rhetorical device into a mode of living in the person of Socrates himself. He suggests that Socrates' influence following his death was so pervasive that the more common meaning of εἰρωνεία "to dissemble," fell almost entirely out of use in favor of the previously rare use of εἰρωνεία to mean "something other than what is said" (or in this case perhaps, what is seen). He arrives at this conclusion because Socrates is described as spending his entire life εἰρωνομένος.[68] He determines that Socrates did not just use irony in his speech, but he lived ironically. Though Kierkegaard significantly

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[67]Søderquist, "Nihilistic Socrates," 235. As Søderquist points out this interpretation "that Socrates' *position* or existential consciousness is irony cannot be separated from his claim that Socrates introduced the ironic consciousness to human history. For as Kierkegaard makes clear, he can only assert that irony entered history with Socrates if indeed the Socratic position was pure irony." See also Anthony Rudd, "Kierkegaard's Critique of Pure Irony," in *Kierkegaard: The Self in Society* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 82-96.

[68]*Sym*. 216E4 discussed by Vlastos, 33.

predates Vlastos, Kierkegaard's reading of Socrates anticipates the linguistic connection found by Vlastos by seeing Socrates' irony as a *standpunkt*.[69]

Because Kierkegaard represents Socratic irony as an ironic mode of living, we are able to discuss what constitutes ironic living. One of Kierkegaard's critiques of Hegel is that Hegel defined the individual entirely by the individual's position in world-history. For Hegel and the dominant cultural view of his time, an individual was intrinsically joined to the world-spirit. Though Hegel's thought and Greek thought are from different cultures and centuries, they share this idea among their many differences, an idea which offended Kierkegaard. When viewing humanity as one entity joined by a universal spirit progressing toward a teleological goal, there is no space for an individual. Many cultures, including the Greek culture, saw the society as one entity. Against this view, Socrates created his separation of self and other. Socrates related "han igjen maatte forholde sig negativt til Virkeligheden eller i græsk Forstand til Staten [negatively to actuality or, in the Greek sense, to the state]."[70] Without separating himself from actuality, which was the state, Socrates could not be an individual or experience subjectivity. The assumption that every person is part of one human experience denies the individual a subjective life because the individual only exists as defined by a greater whole.

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[69]Nehemas believes that Vlastos, although rarely directly addressing Kierkegaard's work is nonetheless disputing Kierkegaard's Socrates. Nehemas reads Kierkegaard's Socrates to be defined by Socrates' silence and pondering. He reads Vlastos to define Socrates' irony by his riddling speech. I see this difference as one of emphasis rather than as mutually exclusive. Vlastos' definition in irony as a mode of living as complimentary, rather than competing with, Kierkegaard's description of irony as a *standpunkt*, if Socrates' contemplative silence and his riddling speech are both manifestations of his ironic mode of living.

[70]*KSV*, 259; *CI*, 160

What is the worth of a human being if he or she is the same as any other human being and whose life is not an individual experience distinct from all other? For Kierkegaard such a life without subjectivity but dictated and dominated by expectations of culture and society is worthless.[71] For Kierkegaard the worth of a human life is not in its part in moving forward a "world-spirit" as it is for Hegel. Rather it is the possibility of individuality, of being a self who is an other to every other because the possibility of subjectivity defines humanity.[72] In both Greek culture and Hegelian thought all persons were only to be defined through their conformity and participation in their society. The self and society were so thoroughly joined that the self was non-existent, and "Netop fordi før Socrates dette Selv ikke var [this self did not exist prior to Socrates]."[73] According to Kierkegaard it is Socrates' irony, which allows him to create a self separated from his actuality to become an individual.[74]

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[71]Kierkegaard sees Xenophon's portrayal of Socrates' as depriving Socrates of the very irony, which made Socrates distinct. Although Kierkegaard does not believe that Xenophon understood Socrates he comments that "Xenophon har virkelig, ved at bortskjære alt det Farlige fra Socrates, tilsidst reduceret ham aldeles in absurdum, formodentlig til Vederlag for, at Socrates saa tidt gjorde det ved Andre [Xenophon actually reduced him totally *in absurdum*, in recompense, probably, for Socrates' having done this so often to others]" (*KSV*, 148;*CI*, 16). The statement itself is ironic because Kierkegaard cannot believe that Xenophon does this knowingly. Also this statement shows that Socrates without irony is reduced *in absurdum* and loses his meaning.

[72]Kierkegaard never explicitly makes this claim, but he does make statements, which assume that subjectivity is the distinguishing property of humanity such as "intet ægte humant Liv er muligt uden Ironi [no genuinely human life is possible without irony]" (*KSV*, 403; *CI*, 326).

[73]*KSV*, 271; *CI*, 177.

[74]In English there exists a verbal expression of this idea because the words "persons" and "people" are not interchangeable. While the word "people" denotes one group of united human beings, the word "persons" refers to a plural number of individual beings. Within Greek society there was no concept of persons, only the concept of a person who was one constituent of a people. This cultural assumption, which the Greeks held and Hegel restated seems to have offended Kierkegaard so intensely that much of his work challenges it in one way or another. Kierkegaard's initial effort to combat this view can

Throughout the thesis, Kierkegaard emphasizes that Socrates' irony was "uendelige absolute Negativitet [infinite, absolute negativity]."[75] Because this negativity was Socrates' *Standpunkt*, his irony manifested itself in Socrates' life. One manifestation of Socrates' negativity, which accomplished his ironic separation of self and other was silence. Nehemas examines Socrates' silence in three ways.[76] The first silence exists because Socrates himself does not write, the second silence comes when Socrates' does not respond to another person, and the third silence arises when Socrates responds without giving answers. About the first type of silence, little can be said that has not already been said many times. Since we have no evidence of Socrates writing his own thoughts, a certain distance can never be overcome.[77]

The other two types of silence require more attention. Socrates was well known for his silence both by his declining to speak and what he left unsaid when he did speak. Socrates' silence is discussed several places in *The Concept of Irony*. Kierkegaard claims that "hvad Socrates nemlig selv satte saa megen Priis paa, at staae stille og besinde sig]: Taushed, dette er hele hans Liv i Forhold til Verdenshistorien [what

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be found in Kierkegaard's analysis of irony and his reading of Socrates as an ironist.

[75]*KSV*, 339; *CI*, 261.

[76]Nehemas, 83-85.

[77]The problem of separating Socrates from Plato has been discussed and debated at great length. Kierkegaard spends a great deal of time dealing with this problem and analyzing the three sources for Socrates in order to put forth what he thinks the correct picture of Socrates should be. Since Kierkegaard himself deals with this issue extensively (*KSV*, 230-237; *CI*, 119-126), it will not be discussed here, but assumed that Kierkegaard's separation is the one referenced. Kierkegaard admits that "saa seer man let, hvor vanskeligt det bliver at fastholde Billedet af ham, ja at det synes umuligt eller idetmindste ligesaa besværligt, som at afbilde en Nisse med den Hat, der gjør ham usynlig [It is easy to see how difficult it becomes to fix a picture of him–indeed, it seems impossible or at least as difficult as to picture a nisse with the cap that makes him invisible]" because "Han har Intet efterladt, hvorefter en senere Tid kan bedømme ham [he has left nothing by which a later age can judge him]" (*KSV*, 143; *CI*, 12).

Socrates himself prized so highly, namely, standing still and contemplating–in other words, silence–this is his whole life in terms of world history]."[78] For Kierkegaard "the same path to the knowledge of truth that Socrates himself has followed" is the irony that made Socrates "uden at agte paa Omgivelsen at fordybe sig i sig selv [heedless of the surroundings to become immersed in himself]."[79] Kierkegaard suggests that Socrates' silence was negativity designed to separate himself from his society in order to more fully turn his view inward. A more often examined use of Socrates' negativity surfaces in the way Socrates talked with those around him. Socrates feigned ignorance (negative knowledge) and then proceeded to ask questions (creating negative space) until his interlocutor's assumptions and arguments had crumbled (leaving negativity). Socrates' ironic living not only filled himself with negative space, but drained anything he contacted until it was also negative space.

Kierkegaard describes Socrates' separation of self from other as a hovering above all relationships, both to every other he encountered and also to the aggregate other of society (i.e. actuality). Kierkegaard insists that Socrates' irony was so complete that he could not posit anything; everything truly Socratic produced only negativity. Perhaps most telling is that Kierkegaard does not see Socrates positing anything even when referring to the self. Kierkegaard argues that although "pleier ellers ogsaa for at betegne Socrates' Standpunkt at erindre om de bekjendte Ord: gnothi sauton,[it is customary to characterize Socrates' position with the well known phrase γνῶθι σαυτόν]," for Socrates

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[78]*KSV*, 143; *CI*, 11. This statement is one reason that Nehemas sees the contemplative silence as defining Kierkegaard's Socrates. While Kierkegaard does see this as more persuasive evidence of Socrates' irony, Kierkegaard also admits that Socrates' rhetoric is also a part of that irony (see below).
[79]*KSV*, 246; *CI*, 141.

knowing himself meant "adskil dig selv fra Andet [*separate yourself from the other*]."[80] Using the imagery from Aristophanes, Kierkegaard comments on Socrates' separations from other (both individual others and the aggregate other of a society), "Hvad enten han nemlig hænger i en Kurv under Loftet, eller han omphalopsychitisk stirrer ind i sig selv og derved til en vis Grad frigjør sig fra den jordiske Tyngde, saa svæver han i begge Tilfælde. Men netop denne Svæven er yderst betegnende [Whether he is in a basket suspended from the ceiling or staring omphalopsychically into himself and thereby in a way freeing himself from earthly gravity, in both cases he is hovering. But it is precisely this hovering that is so very significant]."[81]

Socrates lived between two spheres because he broke down the old establishment and relationships of his society, and he initiated the space necessary for another society and new relationships to emerge. Socrates' "hele Standpunkt afrunder sig derfor i den uendelige Negativitet, der i Forhold til en foregaaende Udvikling viser sig negativ og i Forhold til en efterfølgende ogsaa negativ. . . Imod det Bestaaende, det substantielle Liv i Staten, var hele hans Liv en Protest [whole position, therefore, rounds itself off in the infinite negativity that turns out to be negative in relation to both a previous and a subsequent development . . . against the established order of things, the substantial life of the state, his whole life was a protest]."[82] Socrates' irony suspended him between two ages. He destroyed the old age to which he belonged but could not enter the new age, which he ushered in.[83] Kierkegaard compares Socrates to John the Baptist because like

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[80]*KSV*, 271; *CI*, 177.
[81] *KSV*, 271; *CI*, 177 emphasis mine. *KSV*, 251; *CI*, 152.
[82]*KSV*, 297; *CI*, 218.
[83]*KSV*, 296; *CI*, 217.

John the Baptist, Socrates destroyed his own age by being a part of it, but did not establish the new age.[84] Socrates was not able to live in either actuality. This suspension between two actualities is the negative space created by Socrates' irony.

This separation and suspension seem to be the crucial element of ironic living for Kierkegaard. According to Kierkegaard, Socrates' irony seems to be characterized by the negative space that separates self from all other, either one specific other or the other of actuality. In order to accomplish this separation Kierkegaard demonstrates how irony's silence does not show externally what exists internally. Irony "fastholder den atter her Modsætningen mellem Væsen og Phænomen, mellem det Indvortes og det Udvortes [maintains the contradiction between essence and phenomenon, between the internal and the external]."[85] Kierkegaard uses the Danish word *Indesluttethed* to describe how Socrates kept his internal and external self separate. It can mean "reserved" or "withdrawnness," but it also conveys a sense of a barrier or wall.[86] In order to effectively separate himself from the other, Socrates had to create space between (him)self and other(s). This space becomes ironic space because rather than resolving the difference between internal and external, it maintains the contradiction between them.

This negative space that surrounds Socrates is his ironic mode of living. By veiling his internal self with an affected external facade, Socrates separates (him)self from other(s). What Socrates did externally did not necessarily have a correlation to who Socrates was internally. The basis for Socratic irony as a mode of living is that the internal is kept separate from others. What an ironist presents externally for others to see

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[84] *KSV*, 340; *CI*, 263.
[85] *KSV*, 333; *CI*, 257.
[86] Søderquist, "Actuality," 238-239 n.66.

and interact with, is not what exists internally. Kierkegaard discusses this as a separation of internal and external explaining that "det er Ironien væsentligt at have et Udvortes, der er det Indvortes modsat [it is essential for irony to have an external side that is opposite to the internal]."[87] The ability of an ironist to define himself independently from his actuality allows a subjectivity that precipitated an individual personality. Kierkegaard describes this personality as a "*status absolutus*" as opposed to the "*status constructus*."[88] A personality of absolute status, than a status constructed by *Virkelighed* (i.e. actuality), requires subjectivity, which in turn requires irony.

Because the external and internal are not identical, the ironist may seem to be a schizophrenic.[89] The difference between an ironist and a schizophrenic is that the ironist controls the relationship of the external for the purpose of subjectivity. The relationship of external to internal is not one of competition for control. His external appearance is not a form of self-deception, but an act of protection through separation. In order to preserve the self as a subjective individual, a person must create space for itself to exist. The self cannot be defined by the other without becoming subject to the other. The

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[87]*KSV*, 262; *CI*, 256.
[88]*KSV*, 162; *CI,* 28.
[89]The ironist might also seem to be a hypocrite and Kierkegaard addresses the difference between an ironist and a hypocrite. He points out that irony lies in "et metaphysisk Gebet [the metaphysical sphere]" while hypocrisy in "det moralske Gebet [the sphere of morality]" since "de moralske Bestemmelser egentlig ere for concrete for Ironien [moral categories are too concrete for irony]" (*KSV*, 331; *CI*, 256). The ironist should not be judged for his irony in the same way a hypocrite should be condemned for his hypocrisy. Ironically, the hypocrite and ironist do perform the same act, separating the external from internal, but are actually opposites because one does it to accomplish subjectivity, the other to accomplish conformity. In other words, an ironist separates himself from the other so that he can exist as a subjective individual despite what his society demands that he be. Conversely, most often the hypocrite does not want to be a subjective individual and denies his individuality by pretending to conform to society's norms.

external self is a veil to cover and protect the internal self from becoming defined and subjected to something external to its self. Because it is the external that is available to interact with the other, separating the external from the internal frees the internal from the influence of the other. The position of irony requires the ironist to separate (him)self from the other(s) to avoid being subject to the other. This preserves the ironist's subjectivity and freedom.

Although the self cannot be a self unless it is separated from the other, neither can it be a self without the other. Even for an ironist the other is necessary for the self to define its self. Without the other there would be nothing to separate the self from. Negative space can only exist when there is proximity between elements. The result of the negative space created by irony is that instead of being defined by or incorporated in the other, the self is defined by its separation from (and remaining proximity to) the other. This distinction becomes important because an ironist's external appearance is not a result of a fractured person, but a protected subjectivity. The external face of an ironist is necessary to separate the ironist from the other, not to separate the ironist from himself making the self a personification of irony.[90] Socrates created this separation by both the silence of not responding and the silence of riddling speech.

Socrates' irony created negative space so that "Socrates' Standpunkt er da Subjectivitetens, Inderlighedens, der reflecterer i sig selv [Socrates' position, then, is that of subjectivity, of inwardness, which reflects upon itself]."[91] The silence Socrates used to

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[90]Søderquist points to Arne Gron and Pia Soltoft who have reviewed the "implicit role of 'the other' in Kierkegaard's anthropology. They conclude that essential elements of the 'self' lie in one's relationships with the other" (Søderquist, "Actuality," 240 n.69).
[91]*KSV*, 260; *CI,* 163.

veil his internal self becomes a "Vei til Sandhedens Erkjendelse. . .uden at agte paa Omgivelsen at fordybe sig i sig selv [path to the knowledge of truth. . .heedless of the surroundings to become immersed in himself]."[92] Because Socrates' position was subjectivity, he was able to access the path leading to truth. The result of Socrates' ironic separation from actuality is a closer proximity to ideality. Socrates' irony allowed him to be a subjective individual, and subjectivity "giver det abstracte Ideelles hele Verden [yields the whole world of abstract ideality]."[93] For Kierkegaard, Aristophanes portrays Socrates' separation from actuality by Socrates' floating into the clouds because the separation from the earth shows both Socrates' separation from actuality and his proximity to ideality. Socrates "der svævende over Jorden i en Kurv, bestræber sig for at hæve sig op i disse Regioner, idet han frygter for, at Jordens Kraft skal suge Tankerne fra

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[92]*KSV*, 246; *CI*, 141. In this passage Kierkegaard is summarizing Aristophanes' play and Kierkegaard further comments in his footnote that "Her har vi den aristophaniske Opfattelse af den bekjendte socratiske Staaenstille og Stirren.[here we have the Aristophanic view of the well-known Socrates' standing still and staring]" (*KSV*, 493 ;*CI*, 141).

[93]*KSV*, 247; *CI*, 145. This quote may seem used out of context when one first reads it in its entirety. It comes when Kierkegaard is describing Aristophanes' depiction of Socrates and the whole quote is as follows, "Men see vi nu efter, hvilket Standpunkt det er, der skinner gjennem denne Parodi, saa kan man dog ikke sige, at det er Subjectivitetens, thi dette giver dog altid Noget, det giver det abstracte Ideelles hele Verden, men det, der betegnes, er et reent negativt Standpunkt, der slet Intet giver [if we try to find what the point of view is that shines through in this parody, we cannot say that it is the position of subjectivity, because this always yields something, yields the whole world of abstract ideality, but what is described here is a purely negative position]." Here Kierkegaard says that Aristophanes' view of Socrates is not a position of subjectivity, but he does not say that Socrates' actual position is not one of subjectivity. In fact, in a later statement Kierkegaard points to Socrates irony as exactly a position of subjectivity while still remaining infinitely negative saying, "hans Standpunkt været den uendelige Negativitet. . .thi dette indeholder Muligheden i sig til Alt, Muligheden til hele Subjectivitetens Uendelighed [his position was infinite negativity. . .since this contains within itself the possibility of everything, the possibility of the whole infinity of subjectivity]" (*KSV*, 296 *CI*, 215).

ham eller, naar vi tage Billedet bort, at Virkeligheden skal absorbere, skal knuse den spinkle Subjectivitet [floats above the earth in a basket and struggles to rise into these regions, because he fears that the force of gravity will pull down his thoughts or, to drop the metaphor, that actuality will absorb, will crush, the delicate subjectivity]."[94]

The separation from actuality (or metaphorically from earth's gravity) protects the ironist's subjectivity and allows his absolute personality to be less relative to the sphere of ideality. The movement away from actuality is also a movement toward ideality because the reason for opening ironic space was to create a circumstance for subjectivity where subjectivity can engage ideality.[95] In this movement Socrates became suspended in the space between ideality and actuality. Socrates "viser sig atter her som den, der staaer paa Springet til Noget, men dog i ethvert Øieblik ikke springer ind i dette Andet, springer til Siden og tilbage i sig selv [proves to be one who is ready to leap into something but never in the relevant moment does leap into this next thing but leaps aside and back into himself]." He could not fully access ideality nor fully extract himself from actuality. Socrates could only relate negatively to ideality because "Det til Grund for Alt Liggende, det Evige, det Guddommelige var han uvidende om, det vil sige, han vidste, at det var, men han vidste ikke hvad det var [He was ignorant of the ground of all being, the eternal, the divine–that is, he knew that it was, but he did not know what it was]." He remained suspended between the two spheres like Mohammed's coffin between the two magnets. Although Socrates' irony seems designed to open access to ideality, Socrates

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[94]*KSV*, 244; *CI,* 138.
[95]cf. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* which contains the statement "subjectivity is truth" (189). If absolute Truth can be accessed, then subjectivity, as truth for an individual, would be the only possible means to access it.

himself never entered the sphere of ideality. He related negatively to both actuality and ideality suspended between the two spheres, not belonging to either.[96]

The ironic position of Socrates hovering above all relationships and between actuality and ideality keeps all possibilities open. Socrates' irony was a position of "hans Standpunkt været den uendelige Negativitet. . .thi dette indeholder Muligheden i sig til Alt, Muligheden til hele Subjectivitetens Uendelighed [infinite negativity. . .since this contains within itself the possibility of everything, the possibility of the whole infinity of subjectivity]."[97] By surrounding himself with negativity, Socrates created the space that allowed for his subjectivity. Socrates' silence provides his "infinite negativity" as well as allowing him to avoid committing to any possibility. Socrates veiled himself in silence, which separated his internal self from what was externally available to the other (either a specific other or a the more general other of actuality) and became suspended between actuality and ideality. Even concerning a sphere of ideality, or being, or the eternal or the divine, Socrates remained negatively related to it to the point that Kierkegaard could not assign just one name to it. The negative relationship between actuality and ideality meant that Socrates could never realize the possibilities of either.

For Kierkegaard Socrates never found anything to fill the space he opened. Socrates only created the negative space of irony, in the forms of silence, a separation from other and actuality, and a suspension between actuality and ideality. Although it did not cause anything positive, Kierkegaard sees Socrates as performing the first step necessary to find truth. "Sandheden fordrer Taushed, før den vil oplade sin Røst, og

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[96]*KSV*, 261; *CI*, 166. *KSV*, 266, *CI*, 169.
[97]*KSV*, 296; *CI*, 215.

denne Taushed skulde Socrates tilveiebringe. Derfor var han blot negativ [Truth demands silence before it will raise its voice, and Socrates was to bring about this silence. For this reason, he was purely negative]."[98] Kierkegaard credits Socrates with creating the silence through irony but not with finding truth's voice. Irony was the end of Socrates.

Kierkegaard admires Socrates as the figure to introduce ironic living and in so doing introduce subjective living, but he finds the natural conclusion of what Socrates began dangerous because "da viser Ironien sig i en betænkeligere Skikkelse [irony manifests itself in a more alarming form]."[99] The natural result of an ironic separation of the self and other is that the self is no longer regulated by society. The ironist's position "er da Subjectivitetens, Inderlighedens [is that of subjectivity, of inwardness]."[100] Socrates' irony created a position of complete isolation in order to secure his subjectivity. That isolation also meant that Socrates, "snarere derved, at han forkastede det Bestaaende [rejected the established order]."[101] The ironic *Standpunkt* of Socrates was a threat to the Athenian actuality "da han ved at stille sig ganske isoleret, atter her havde unddraget sig Statens Sanction [since by completely isolating himself he had placed himself outside the sanction of the state]."[102] Without sanction over its own citizens, a state would not be able to function, and

> "hans Attentat maatte fra Statens Standpunkt betragtes som et af de allerfarligste, som et Forsøg paa at udsuge Blodet af den og forvandle den til en Skygge. Det er dernæst ogsaa klart, at han maatte tildrage sig den offentlige Opmærksomhed; thi

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[98]*KSV*, 293; *CI*, 210.
[99]*KSV*, 286; *CI,* 197.
[100]*KSV*, 260, *CI*, 163.
[101]*KSV*, 266, *CI*, 168.
[102]*KSV*, 539 (footnote 131); *CI*, 185note*.

> det var ikke et videnskabeligt Stillleben, han hengav sig til, tvertimod, det var med et verdenshistorisk Standpunkts uhyre Elasticitet, at han vippede den Ene efter den Anden ud af Statens substantielle Virkelighed. [from the viewpoint of the state his offensive had to be considered most dangerous, as an attempt to suck its blood and reduce it to shadow. Moreover, it is also clear that he would unavoidably draw official attention to himself because it was not a scholarly still life to which he was devoting himself. On the contrary, with the enormous elasticity of a world-historical viewpoint, he tipped one individual after the other out of the substantial actuality of the state]."[103]

Socrates not only removed himself from the actuality of the state, but he continually moved others in the same direction. Because of this Kierkegaard claims that "Men med Alt det var han ingen god Statsborger og gjorde visselig heller ikke Andre dertil [in all this he was not a good citizen and certainly did not make others so]."[104]

Due to the dangerous possibilities of irony to actuality, Kierkegaard is not one of Socrates' mourners. As much as Kierkegaard believes Socrates had the right to live ironically, he also believes that the state had a right to respond against Socrates because such instability within an single person was threatening to the state. Most scholars are sympathetic to Socrates because they appreciate Socrates' contribution to humanity. They mourn because "en saadan bra Mand, saadan et retskaffent Menneske, Dydsmønster og Kosmopolit i een Person blev et Offer for den lumpneste Misundelse [such a good man, such an honest human being, paragon, and cosmopolitan all rolled into

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[103]*KSV*, 272, *CI*, 178.
[104]*KSV*, 274, *CI*, 181.

one, became a victim of the meanest envy]."[105] Against this traditional understanding, Kierkegaard recognizes Socrates' threat to Greek society by Socrates placing himself outside the limits of the jurisdiction of his actuality. Because of the threat irony poses to actuality, Kierkegaard agrees that "Socrates velfortjent blev dømt fra Livet, at hans Forbrydelse var, ikke at ville anerkjende Folkets Souverænitet, men at gjøre sin subjective Overbeviisning gjeldende ligeoverfor Statens objective Dom. . .Staten ligesaa berettiget til at fordømme ham, som Socrates til at emancipere sig [Socrates was deservedly condemned to death, that his crime was refusing to recognize the sovereignty of the nation and asserting instead his subjective conviction over against the objective judgement of the state. . .the state was just as justified in condemning Socrates as he was in emancipating himself]."[106]

Despite the conclusion that Socrates' irony was dangerous, Kierkegaard's reading of Socrates is ultimately positive. Kierkegaard seems to admire Socrates' ability to free himself from the social and political constraints of his culture in order to create a proximity to another sphere, that of ideality. The separation Kierkegaard sees in Socrates is the ability for an individual to understand and define himself independent of other paradigms. By separating himself from the defining elements of his culture, Socrates was able to live subjectively and become less related to actuality, which made him able to become less relative to ideality. This separation of self from other is absolutely necessary for an individual to experience his own individuality and to live subjectively.

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[105]*KSV*, 263, *CI*, 167-168.
[106]*KSV*, 285; *CI*, 193. It is important to note that Kierkegaard does not say that Socrates did not have a right to live ironically or that Socrates should not have chosen to live so. He believes that Socrates' irony was world-historically valid. However, he believes that the state also had a right to punish Socrates because he was a threat to the state.

For Kierkegaard, "Det er Subjectivitetens uendelige overgivne Frihed, vi see i Socrates, men dette er netop Ironien. [It is the infinite, nonchalant freedom of subjectivity that we see in Socrates, but this is precisely the irony]."[107] Because Socrates lived ironically, he was able to separate himself from the other. The negative space created by his ironic living allowed Socrates to experience subjectivity because he was suspended between ideality and actuality instead of being bound to one of them.[108]

To this picture of Socrates we compare Abraham. Unfortunately, neither as many sources nor as lengthy sources exist for Abraham as exist for Socrates, nor does *Fear and Trembling* provide a structured analysis of Abraham in the same way that *Concept of Irony* does of Socrates. However, the defining characteristic of Socratic irony as presented by Kierkegaard does appear in the discussion of Abraham, namely the negative space that creates a separation of self and other and suspends the self between the two spheres of ideality and actuality. It is this element of irony for which we will examine *Fear and Trembling*'s discussion of Abraham.

Before beginning our comparison a problem of time ought to be considered. Scholars, including Kierkegaard, universally recognize irony's entrance onto the world-historical stage in the figure of Socrates. Since Abraham lived centuries before Socrates the designation of Abraham as an ironic figure would seem irreconcilably anachronistic. However, assigning Socrates as the entry point of irony into "Verdenshistorien [human

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[107]*KSV*, 293; *CI*, 211.
[108]For a few further points about Kierkegaard's understanding of Socrates' irony, see Appendix A.

history]"[109] exposes an assumption of academia. The intellectual roots of Western philosophy begin with Greek civilization. Socrates is credited with being the first ironist because he is the first ironist in *Greek culture*. Because we receive the word and concept of irony from the Greeks does not mean that it could not have existed or that it can not appropriately be applied to someone separated from Greek civilization by both time and space.[110] Simply because the word irony did not yet exist in the Greek language does not mean that Abraham's situation is not ironic. In fact it is a poignant example of Johannes' claim that the knight of faith is impossible to distinguish from the murderer. Although Abraham lived long before Socrates or before the transformation of the Greek word irony to include a mode of living, Abraham could still have lived ironically if he exercised the same separation of self and other that Socrates did.

Like Socrates' silence, Abraham's silence separated him from his actuality in order to create a closer proximity to ideality. Because Abraham left the land where he was born, he had already separated himself from his original actuality. For Johannes "Ved Troen vandrede Abraham ud fra Fædrenes Land. . .han lod sin jordiske Forstand tilbage, og tog Troen med sig [By faith Abraham emigrated from the land of his fathers. . .he left behind his worldly understanding, and he took along his faith]."[111] In this statement, Johannes suggests that Abraham separated himself from his actuality or worldly understanding in order to literally find space in which his faith could survive.

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[109]*KSV*, 294; *CI*, 211.
[110]Conceivably, there are figures in any culture previous to or separated from the western intellectual tradition might appropriately be considered ironists.
[111]*KSV*, 1866; *FT*, 17.

Abraham created for himself a new actuality for his faith based on his familial relationships. While Socrates' actuality consisted of his students, associates, and the *polis* in general, Abraham's new actuality centered around his family. This actuality for Abraham was a step toward ideality because as the patriarch Abraham chose what beliefs existed in his new actuality. Since Abraham was devoted to his god, this new actuality allowed Abraham a space in which he could live more closely to his ideality, i.e. his God.[112]

Despite the purpose of the new actuality to move Abraham closer to God, it is Abraham's new actuality from which he must further separate himself in order to obey the command to sacrifice Isaac and continue to move toward God or ideality. The method Abraham uses to create the separation is the same method used by Socrates, silence. One of the central issues for Johannes de Silentio is Abraham's silence, and the problem of silence pervades the entirety of *Fear and Trembling*. For Socrates, silence was a means for a self to create the negative space necessary for separation of self and other. *Fear and Trembling*'s concern with silence begins before any mention of Abraham is made. It was noted above that Kierkegaard's choice of pseudonym, Johannes de Silentio, immediately alerts the reader that irony may be at play. Since Socrates' silence is such a fundamental part of his irony and Abraham's silence is a significant subject of *Fear and Trembling*, a reader might understandably wonder if the

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[112]In one tradition Abraham was forced to leave his homeland because of the religious practices there. According to one account (Abraham 1:10-12) Abraham's father attempted to sacrifice Abraham to a false god. Abraham had to leave his home in order to escape a wicked father. Then Abraham's true God requires of Abraham to do in faith the same action that his own father had done in wickedness. The irony of this situation lies in the proximity of the actions (sacrificing a son) and the separation of the motivations (following a true versus false god).

pseudonym "de Silentio" is intended to suggest a silent relationship between the silent characters of Socrates and Abraham. If indeed the Kierkegaardian corpus "takes up at the very point *The Concept of Irony* leaves off,"[113] it is not a large step to associate the ironic silence of Socrates with the silence of de Silentio's text and wonder what meaning can be found in the negative space between the texts, negative space connected by silence.

Abraham's story corresponds to each of the three types of silence Nehemas attributes to Socrates. The first type of silence is the silence of a first-person record. The record of Abraham comes from Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament and one of the five books of Moses. The first five books of Moses are so named because they are supposed to be the books Moses wrote. Most scholars do not believe that Moses himself wrote the five books of Moses, but even if he did, Moses is the earliest surviving writer of Abraham's story, more than four hundred years after Abraham's lifetime. Like Socrates, Abraham is silent because "Han har Intet efterladt, hvorefter en senere Tid kan bedømme ham [he left nothing by which a later age could judge him]."[114]

Abraham also uses silence to create negative space between (him)self and other(s) both by a lack of words and by an ambiguity of them. The first of these two types of silence we will consider is the silence by not speaking. Johannes mentions several times that Abraham did not speak to Sarah, Eleazar, or Isaac. For Johannes to conclude his work with the third question of the "*Problemata*," "Var det ethisk forsvarligt af Abraham, at han fortiede sit Forehavende for Sara, for Elieser, for Isaak? [Was

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[113]Søderquist, Socrates, 243.
[114]*KSV*, 143; *CI*, 12.

Abraham's silence to Sarah, Eleazar, and Isaac ethically justifiable?]"[115] hints that the question of silence by not speaking is a pivotal issue.

In the "Exordium" part of the differences between the imagined Abrahams and the actual Abraham is how they deal with silence. The first imagined Abraham walks in silence for three days, but then breaks his silence. He tries to explain the situation to Isaac. Isaac does not understand, and Abraham resorts to deceiving Isaac. The second imagined Abraham goes along the road "de tause [in silence]," and "Taus lagde han Brændet til Orden, bandt Isaak, taus drog han Kniven [silently he arranged the firewood and bound Isaac; silently he drew the knife]." The silence of this Abraham preserves Isaac who "trivedes [flourished]," but it destroys Abraham whose "Øie var fordunklet, han saae ikke Glæden mere [eyes were darkened and he saw joy no more]."[116] The third imagined scenario does not use the word silence, but the second paragraph is written as Abraham is journeying to Mount Moriah alone on a later occasion and is reviewing his previous journey in his mind. In his solitude Abraham maintains his external silence and internally wrestles with the situation. Abraham cannot mediate the situation; he cannot understand how his willingness to sacrifice Isaac could be a sin, nor can he understand how it could not be a sin. Abraham's external silence hides an internal trauma that Abraham cannot reconcile with his faith. In the fourth imagined scenario, it is Isaac who is silent. After seeing his father lose faith, Isaac loses his. Even though "Der er i Verden aldrig sagt et Ord derom, og Isaak talte aldrig til noget Menneske, om hvad han havde seet [not a word is ever said of this in the world, and Isaac never talked to anyone about

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[115] *KSV* 1967; *FT*, 82.
[116] *KSV*, 1852; *FT*, 12.

what he had seen]," Isaac is damaged from the experience. In each case the silence creates a separation of an external self and an internal self.

Like Socrates' silence, the silences in the "Exordium" produce only negativity. For Kierkegaard's Socrates the negativity created by his ironic silence was beneficial to Socrates because Socrates could keep all possibilities open. For the imagined Abrahams, the negativity produced by silence is very harmful. Instead of providing freedom, this silence produces destruction. While Socrates' silence veiled and protected his internal self, the silences in the scenarios veiled the internal not to protect itself, but to hide its hypocrisy. In the first three scenarios, Abraham loses faith, and although he continues his life as if he is fine, his internal self has been destroyed. In the final scenario, Isaac keeps his silence, but he loses his faith. For both the imagined Abrahams and Isaacs, their silence produces a facade (i.e. negativity) that appears to be healthy and conceals their internal self, which has been destroyed.

Following the imagined scenarios, the "Eulogy on Abraham" also mentions Abraham's silence. When describing the journey it says, "Han talte Intet til Sara, Intet til Elieser, hvo kunde ogsaa forstaae ham, havde Fristelsen ikke ved sit Væsen taget Tausheds Løfte af ham? [He said nothing to Sarah, nothing to Eliezar–who, after all could understand, for did not the nature of the temptation extract from him the pledge of silence?]"[117] How interesting that the comment about silence (negative space) is presented as a question (negative space). In this section the silence is assumed to be necessary to the trial. Considering that the imagined Abraham's effort at speaking was not a manifestation of faith nor was any type of silence in the scenarios, here that silence

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[117]*KSV*, 1874; *FT*, 21.

is required for Abraham to have faith. The silences of the imagined Abrahams were attempts for Abraham to remain in the ethical sphere. Each attempt to speak or keep silent was for the purpose of adhering to the demands of ethics rather than separate himself from them. The reason these scenarios produce negativity is because Abraham's situation cannot be mediated in the ethical sphere of Abraham's actuality. Instead the silence of the actual Abraham created negative space between himself and the ethical. Abraham's silence to Sarah and Eliazar separates him from them without trying to answer the demands of the ethical. This silence moved Abraham further from his actuality, but closer to his ideality, God.

In the "Preliminary Expectoration" the most interesting reference to silence is implicit and given in reference to the knight of faith. While the knight of infinite resignation "kjender man let [is easily recognizable],"[118] the knight of faith cannot be recognized. Upon finding him one might "Spring tilbage, slaaer Hænderne sammen og siger halv høit: 'Herre Gud! er det Mennesket, er det virkeligt ham, han seer jo ud som en Rodemester' [jump back, clap my hands, and say half aloud, 'Good Lord, is this the man, is this really the one–he looks just like a tax collector'].[119] The knight of faith is silent about his faith; it is not visible to any other even though it defines the self. In addition the knight is fully reconciled with the world and his own actuality so unlike the knight of infinite resignation, the knight of faith does not seem removed from the world.[120]

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[118]*KSV*, 1894; *FT*, 38.
[119]*KSV*, 1895; *FT*, 39.
[120]The comparison of the knight of infinite resignation and the knight of faith will become more central shortly in the discussion of faith.

"*Problema* II" is the section that not implicitly, but explicitly deals with Abraham's silence. In this section, Johannes uses Abraham's silence to demonstrate how Abraham was outside of both the aesthetic and ethical sphere. While the aesthetic hero can be silent, his silence serves to save another. Abraham's silence does not fit the aesthetic category, but neither does it fit the ethical category. Ethics cannot forgive Abraham for remaining silent because ethics demands disclosure, which is found in the tragic hero.[121] Since Abraham's silence is produced by neither the aesthetic nor ethical sphere, its origins must be located elsewhere.

"*Problema* III" deals with both types of Abraham's silence, his silence by not speaking and his silence by speaking but not communicating. Johannes notes that Abraham not only chooses to be silent but that "han kan ikke tale [he *cannot* speak]."[122] Abraham is bound to silence because his experience is not explainable in any understandable means, not through the universal, not through the ethical, not through the aesthetic. Abraham must separate (him)self from other(s) so like Socrates, he can be separated from his actuality. Johannes explains "deri ligger Nøden og Angsten. Naar jeg nemlig, idet jeg taler, ikke kan gjøre mig forstaaelig, saa taler jeg ikke, om jeg end talte uafbrudt Nat og Dag. Dette er Abrahams Tilfælde [therein lies the distress and anxiety. Even though I go on talking night and day without interruption, if I cannot make myself

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[121]*KSV*, 206-212; *FT*, 112-113. Abraham cannot speak as opposed to Socrates who had to make a concluding statement before he died because Socrates remained in the ethical sphere. If he had not spoken then a poet could have spoken for him because a tragic hero is accessible to a poet. Abraham, however, is not accessible to a poet because he was not in the ethical sphere and so could not have any final words. (See *KSV*, 2020, 2047; *FT* 117, 117note* for a discussion of Socrates' final words.)
[122]*KSV*, 2012; *FT*, 113 (italics in Hong translation).

understood when I speak, then I am not speaking. This is the case with Abraham]."[123] Whether Abraham speaks or not, he has to maintain silence because there is no rational justification for his actions. The only way for him to follow through with his trial is to create negative space around himself separating himself from all others.[124] Abraham "kan sige Alt; men Eet kan han ikke sige, og dog naar han ikke kan sige det]: sige det saaledes, at en Anden forstaaer det, saa taler han ikke[can say everything, but one thing he cannot say, and if he cannot say that–that is, say it in such a way that the other understands it–then he is not speaking]."[125] In his silence, Abraham moves away from actuality, towards ideality and becomes suspended between them.

Abraham does not speak to Sarah or Eliezar, nor does he begin a conversation with Isaac.[126] However, on the journey to Mount Moriah, Isaac asks his father a question. This question initiates the second type of silence. This silence is the riddling silence of speech because one gives an answer, but an answer that only creates negative space. Johannes even points out this irony saying that Abraham's response has "Ironiens Form, thi det er altid Ironi, naar jeg siger Noget, og dog ikke siger Noget [the form of irony, for it is always irony when I say something and still do not say anything]."[127] Johannes relates the event of Isaac's question as follows, "Isaak gjør Abraham det Spørgsmaal,

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[123]*KSV*, 2012; *FT*, 113.
[124]Because Abraham cannot speak, he himself does not create the silence, but the requirements of his faith do. See Robert L. Perkins, "Abraham's Silence Aesthically Considered" in Fear and Trembling *and* Repitition *International Kierkegaard Commentary* Vol. 2 (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press) 1993, 155-176.
[125]*KSV*, 2012; *FT*, 113.
[126]Johannes uses Isaac's question to show that Abraham must not have talked to Isaac. He considers Isaac's question " hvilken da ogsaa tilstrækkelig beviser, at han ikke havde talet iforveien [ample evidence that he had not said anything before]" (*KSV*, 2016; *FT*, 115).
[127]*KSV*, 2023; *FT*, 118.

hvor Lammet er til Brændoffer. 'Og Abraham sagde: Gud skal see sig om Lammet til Brændofferet min Søn!' [Isaac asks Abraham where the lamb is for the burnt offering. 'And Abraham said: God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son']."[128] Interestingly enough, Abraham's statement is completely true in more than one way. God did, in fact, provide the sacrifice in the form of a ram in a thicket. But in an even more poignant sense, God provided the sacrifice not because he provided an animal, but because he provided himself, the lamb of God, to be sacrificed. However, neither of these interpretations, which make Abraham's statement factual, were available to Abraham. He did not know of a future sacrifice, and even if he did, Isaac was asking about the current sacrifice.[129] Abraham did not know that there would be a ram in the thicket; if he had known there would not have been trial. Abraham uses irony to veil the answer from his son. Just as Socrates used one type of silence (riddling speech) to remove himself from his actuality, and another type of silence (staring silently into himself) to bring himself into closer proximity to ideality, Abraham used his silence to separate himself from his actuality (his family) and bring himself into closer proximity to his ideality (the absolute).

Socrates' negative relationships make him comparable to the knight of infinite resignation. The knight of infinite resignation is so named because he has relinquished

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[128]*KSV*, 2016; *FT*, 115-116. Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death,* trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 1995, 59 also points out how Abraham's statement is accurate in a way that Abraham could not have anticipated.

[129]It is impossible to say with surety whether Abraham could have known that God himself would become a sacrifice because the Bible is silent on that subject. It is generally assumed that since there is no explicit discussion of it that Abraham could not have anticipated it. However, whether he knew concerning the sacrifice of Jesus Christ or not, in the context of his statement Isaac would not have understood that the answer did not refer to his question.

all expectations. He is infinitely resigned to what life may or may not hold. In other words the knight of infinite resignation is resigned by ideality to his actuality.[130] While the knights of infinite resignation are infinitely resigned to their actuality by accepting (i.e. resigning control or expectations of) ideality, Socrates is also resigned to his actuality and ideality through his irony. When describing the knight of infinite resignation, Johannes explains that resignation is the last step before faith. It is a separation of self and other through resigning the self to the unknown of the absolute. It is not surprising that the knight of infinite resignation has so much in common with Socrates since both have a negative relationship with ideality. Both know that the absolute exists but both have resigned themselves that knowledge and their own inability to go further. Like Socrates, the knight of infinite resignation remains infinitely suspended between ideality and actuality.

In *Fear and Trembling* Johannes references Socrates as a tragic hero and discusses three other tragic heroes.[131] The other three tragic heroes, Johannes describes, analyzes, and returns to several times, all of whom share the sacrificing of their child. Johannes tells the story of Agamemnon who was required to sacrifice Iphigenia in order to have sufficient winds to sail for Troy. He also tells of Jephthah who in the jubilation of a victorious battle promises to sacrifice the first thing to come from his house. That first thing was his daughter running to congratulate him. Finally he tells of Brutus, who kills his sons to avoid their treacherous plotting of restoring Brutus' enemy to Brutus' throne.[132] Each of these sacrifices was a prerequisite for saving the society.

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[130]*KSV*, 1903; *FT*, 48-49.
[131]See *KSV*, 2020; *FT*, 117 for a discussion of Socrates as a tragic hero.
[132]*KSV*, 1923-1928; *FT*, 57-59.

Agammenon's sacrifice of Iphigenia allowed the ships to sail for Troy. Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter allowed her father to keep his vow to God. Brutus' sacrifice of his son allowed Rome's freedom from tyranny. Kierkegaard classifies these figures as tragic heroes. The stories are tragic because each gave up his ethical duty to protect their child. The father's are heroes because the sacrifice, although it produced personal loss, also protected the rest of society.

Each of these fathers is in an ironic position because the ethical sphere has become separated from itself, one part containing the ethical mandate to care for and preserve your children, the other containing the mandate to make any sacrifice necessary for the good of your society. The father is suspended between these two spheres separated out of the ethical. In each case the father breaches the ethical sphere containing his duty to his child in favor of the higher ethical sphere containing the greater good of his people. The heroes in these stories are the fathers who choose a higher ethical mandate. The tragedy in these stories is the wasted lives of the children sacrificed. The fathers are tragic figures because of the difficulty of their decisions, but the tragedy of the story lies in the need to take a life and break an ethical mandate in order to save a society. The fathers faced an ironic situation because in order to preserve one standard of the ethical sphere, they had to break another. The ethical sphere that was broken was both itself and other. It was at once part of the ethical sphere, but also outside that sphere. One difference between the irony of these tragic heroes and Socrates is that the fathers faced an ironic situation, but Socrates lived an ironic life.

If Socrates can remain an ironist and also be a knight of infinite resignation and a tragic hero and tragic heroes can face ironic situations, then an ironist can still fit other

categories of living in addition to (or because of) his irony. Socrates can be understood as a tragic hero or knight of infinite resignation without depriving him of his irony; rather, it is because of his irony that Socrates can fit these other categories. Additionally, these other categories seem to assume a certain amount of negative space or irony. For the knight of infinite resignation there is the negative space in which he resigns himself to the influence of ideality onto his actuality. For the tragic hero there is negative space binding the hero in a separation of the ethical into two spheres. Socrates' irony provided the negative relationships necessary to be a knight of infinite resignation, or in the way it heroically opened the path to ideality, but tragically could never follow the path.

According to Kierkegaard Socrates had very little at stake in his death, and even had Socrates not preferred to die, Socrates was sacrificing his life for the right to live ironically.[133] His sacrifice was to give up an the ethical right of life for a higher ethical right of freedom.[134] Likewise, Agamemnon, Jephthah, and Brutus all made a sacrifice that moved them beyond the ethical sphere into a higher ethical sphere. Though they all made difficult choices, they all remained within the ethical sphere and understandable to those who knew of them. The irony of the tragic hero is that the ethical sphere becomes separated into two and the hero becomes suspended between them. The hero can only

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[133]*KSV*, 337-339; *CI*, 260-261.

[134]Socrates' position may not seem to be within the ethical sphere if Kierkegaard's reading that Socrates' was dangerous to his society is correct. However, the ethical discussed in *FT* is a more general ethical than the ethical of one given society. It is "the universal, and as the universal it applies to everyone, which from another angle means that it applies at all times" (*FT*, 54). Socrates could place himself outside of the jurisdiction of his actuality without placing himself outside of the universal, ethical sphere of humanity.

access one of the two ethical spheres, and when he does he must transgress the other sphere.

Because the ethical can become fractured and even the most sacrosanct ethical mandates can be justifiably broken, irony's result can be that "jetzt werden alle Dinge, alles Bestehen, alles für fest Gehaltene flüssig. Dies Feste - sei es nun eine Festigkeit des Seins, oder Festigkeit von bestimmten Begriffen, Grundsätzen, Sitten, Gesetzen - geräth in Schwanken und verliert seinen Halt [all things, all existence, everything held to be secure is now made fleeting. This firm ground–whether it be a security of natural Being or the security of definite conceptions, principles, customs, and laws–becomes vacillation and loses its stability]."[135] Why Kierkegaard opposed the relativity of these ironists seems to be related to the possible dangers to not only for the ironist but also to the actuality to which he belongs.

Against this result, Kierkegaard concludes his thesis with the brief mention of an alternative type of irony, *behersket* irony. As a verb *behersket* means to control or master. It carries the idea of containing or regulating something. As an adjective it means "controlled." As its name suggests, controlled irony seems to be negativity not completely infinite or absolute. Kierkegaard's discussion of controlled irony is very brief and difficult to unpack; however, it suggests that Kierkegaard sees a *sub specie* of irony that is not as negative or destructive as the irony that Kierkegaard previously criticized.[136] I would like to suggest that Abraham is ironic mode of living fits the category of

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[135]*KSV*, 292; *CI*, 206. Here Kierkegaard is quoting Hegel's *Geschichte der Philosophie*. Although Hegel is describing the Notion, which controlled the sophists in this passage, his statement also describes the irony of which Kierkegaard accuses his contemporaries.
[136]See Reece, 23-27 where he discusses the *sub specie* of irony.

controlled irony. Abraham's relationship with his God was both the reason for his irony and the control on it.

Chapter 3

A View Made Possible: Irony and Faith

Socrates is not the only example of irony Kierkegaard examines in *The Concept of Irony* nor the only one whom Kierkegaard saw as ethically problematic. Following his lengthy analysis of Socrates, Kierkegaard embarks on a critique of more contemporary ironists generally referred to as romantic ironists. A thorough analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis, but a few comments about Kierkegaard's critiques may help expand the concept of irony to better understand Kierkegaard's concluding thoughts on "controlled" irony. Kierkegaard esteems those who espouse romantic irony significantly less than Socrates because their subjectivity devolved into infinite relativity. For Kierkegaard, "derfor er Socrates' Ironi verdenshistorisk bemyndiget, og har ikke det Sygelige og det Egoistiske, som den i en langt senere Tid har [Socrates' irony is world-historically authorized and does not have the sickliness and egotism it has in a much later period,]" and in this later period "viser Ironien sig i en betænkeligere Skikkelse [irony manifests itself in a more alarming form]."[137] The much later period he is mentioning is apparently that of romantic irony. Although Socrates' irony is subject to this criticism, since his separation made Socrates "a law unto himself" and created his existence absolute from anything other, Kierkegaard more definitely raises it against romantic irony.[138]

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[137]*KSV*, 555 (footnote 157); *CI*, 213note*. *KSV*, 286; *CI*, 197.
[138]See Romans 2:14 for "a law unto himself." Reece, 21-23 gives a fuller discussion of Kierkegaard's aversion to the romantic ironists and concludes that Kierkegaard accepts Socrates' irony because it was validated by world-history, but Kierkegaard does not see that same validation in the romantic ironists (convenient for Kierkegaard since when he was writing little world history had passed for the romantic ironists).

Instead of irony creating freedom for subjectivity, Kierkegaard sees romantic irony as constraining the ironist in an inability to access any particular possibility. If all possibility is open that means that no possibility is experienced.[139] Instead of being infinite negativity this irony becomes infinite relativity. No judgments can be made, no ethical standard can be upheld, no progress can be made. The irony that Kiekegaard admired in Socrates' was irony that separated a person from actuality in order to find closer proximity to the absolute. Instead the irony of the Romantic ironists seems to find the opposite, that there is no ideality, no ethical, no absolute only relativity. The danger that Kierkegaard saw in Socrates, which Kierkegaard considered sufficiently threatening to agree that the state had a right to execute Socrates, was the replacement of ideality with relativity, which Kierkegaard sees in much larger proportions in the romantic ironists.

The result of this uncontrolled, infinite, relative irony is instability. When an ironic lifestyle is approved by a society, the society could lose all control over its members because anything could be justified by an ironist. If any position is as valid as any other, then the ironist "can make no commitments, hold no loyalties. As a result, the irony that appears to offer complete freedom, instead offers slavery."[140] The society becomes void of the very commitments and loyalties which regulate and control the society. If everything is relative then very little can be controlled. If multiple persons choose to remain in their society without being bound by it or if the society accepts irony

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[139]Cf. *Either/Or* 417, where Judge William points out to the aesthete that by not committing to any one path of life, he only has one same experience over and over again.
[140]Reece, 22.

as a *licet*-mode of living then the society would be subject to such relativism that it could not help but deteriorate.

The difference in Socrates' ironic mode of living and Abraham's can be seen in their differing relationships with deity. An ironic mode of living may seem to prevent a relationship to divinity because such a relationship would constrain the ironist, but paradoxically (could we say ironically), it does not. Even for Socrates, whom Kierkegaard must present as the example of "pure irony,"[141] the negative space in which he lives does allow for another influence. If Socrates living in "uendelige absolute Negativitet [infinite, absolute negativity]."[142] was still able to have a relationship with a *daimon*, Abraham should also be allowed a relationship with deity while still living ironically.

Both Plato and Xenophon record that Socrates had a *daimon* guiding him.[143] Xenophon describes the *daimon* as both warning and instructing Socrates, but Plato credits the *daimon* with only warning Socrates.[144] Kierkegaard posits that Plato's reading is more accurate and maintains that "dette Dæmoniske fremstilles blot som advarende, ikke som befalende, det er, som negativt, ikke som positivt [this *daimon*ian is represented only as warning, not as commanding–that is as negative and not as positive."

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[141]See Søderquist, "Nihilistic Socrates," 213-243 for a discussion of Kierkegaard's interpretation of Socrates' *daimon*.
[142]*KSV*, 339; *CI*, 261.
[143]Kierkegaard describes the difficulty of understanding Socrates' relationship to the *daimon* as a "*crux philogorum*" (*KSV*, 258; *CI*, 157) presumably because it is both the source of difficulty and the reason for Socrates' mode of living.
[144]Kierkegaard cites Ast who sides with Xenophon and claims that the *daimon* must have "die ihn nicht bloss zum Handeln antrieb, sondern auch mit begeisterter Hoffnung erfüllte [not only incited him to action but also filled him with enthusiastic hope]" (*KSV*, 259; *CI*, 159).

For Kierkegaard understanding Socrates' *daimon* as only negative "er det for den hele Opfattelse af Socrates saa Betydningsfulde [is significant for the whole conception of Socrates.]"[145] This reading of the *daimon* preserves Kierkegaard's thesis that Socrates' irony was "uendelige absolute Negativitet [infinite, absolute negativity]"[146] because even Socrates' *daimon* produced only negativity. A further example of Socrates' (and his *daimon's*) negativity is that Socrates acted on the silence of his *daimon*. During his apology, Socrates said that the *daimon* was not warning him to avoid the death penalty and so Socrates assumed that he was supposed to accept it.[147]

> Kierkegaard points out that the word *daimon* is,
>
> "hverken reent adjectivisk, saaledes at man maatte fuldstændiggjøre det ved at underforstaae ergon, semeion eller noget Lignende; ikke heller i den Forstand substantivisk, at det betegner et særegent eller eiendommeligt Væsen. . .der ved dette Ord betegnes noget Abstract, noget Guddommeligt, der dog netop i sin Abstraction er hævet over enhver Bestemmelse, er uudsigeligt og prædicatløst, da det ingen Vocalisation tillader [is neither simply adjectival in such a way that one must complete it by understanding ergon, semeion or something similar; nor is it substantive in the sense that it designates a special or unique being. . .this word denotes something abstract, something divine, something that precisely in its abstraction is above definition. . .since it allows no vocalization]."[148]

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[145]*KSV*, 259, *CI*, 159.
[146]*KSV*, 339; *CI*, 261.
[147]*Apology*, 31c-32a.
[148]*KSV*, 259; *CI*, 158.

Since the word *daimon* is not a substantive, it does not refer to one specific being, but an abstract category of possible beings.

For example one use of the word daimon is with the word τι, which is the neuter form of τις.[149] Interestingly enough, the word τις, τι can be either an indefinite adjective or an indefinite pronoun depending on whether it has an antecedent or is accompanied by a noun. When τις, τι is paired with *daimon* it is impossible to tell which word is the noun and which word is the adjective because both are adjectives that can be used substantively. The phrase τι δαιμον can be justifiable translated as "a certain divinity" or "a divine something." *Daimon* is also not masculine or feminine, but neuter. In a culture where all of the gods were anthropomorphic, the neuter gender and not-quite-a-noun usage are evidence that a *daimon* was not considered in the same category as divine beings such as gods, but was instead a less powerful and, more importantly, a less universal entity. The indefinite nature of the word as well as its usage when referring specifically to Socrates' *daimon* show that while Socrates did claim a divine influence, that influence was not a specific god nor an omnipresent representation of the universal (or ethical). The significance of the indefiniteness of Socrates' *daimon* is that the influence it had on Socrates did not represent the universal, ethical, or absolute. Because Socrates followed the warnings of his *daimon* it seems clear that he trusted his *daimon*, but his trust only mattered for each individual warning. Socrates' *daimon* did not provide him with anything more than directions about a given circumstance of actuality. Socrates' *daimon* did not offer Socrates any knowledge or understanding of the world. It

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[149] For a discussion of the grammatical uses of τις see Herbert Wier Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press) 1920, 1262-1270.

did not offer hope or promises of anything in mortality or after. According to Kierkegaard Socrates' *daimon* was a divine entity that could provide guidance and help, but it was not the controlling element of the universe; it was not absolute.

Unlike Socrates who remained infinitely negative, Abraham's irony was a search for ideality that was positive because for him ideality would be the absolute. Abraham believed he had found truth because his God was absolute. For Johannes, the terms god and absolute seem to be interchangeable.[150] Johannes concludes that "den Enkelte som den Enkelte staaer i et absolut Forhold til det Absolute, eller Abraham er tabt [the single individual as the single individual stands in an absolute relation to the absolute, or Abraham is lost]."[151] Since it is Abraham's relationship with god that is under specific scrutiny, then Abraham is the single individual and God the Absolute.[152] If Abraham's god is the absolute then for Abraham to have an absolute relationship with him, Abraham himself must live in an absolute space, a negative space separating himself from all other. Johannes suggests that this negative space between self and other is irony and that "Der forekommer endog Steder i det nye Testamente, som anprise Ironi, kun at den bruges til at skjule det Bedre [There are places in the New Testament that praise irony, provided that it is used to conceal the better part]."[153] He then quotes Matthew 5:16, where Jesus instructs his disciples to look like they are not fasting when they are so that no one will

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[150]Derrida, 67 interprets the "absolute other" as God.
[151]*KSV*, 2026; *FT*, 120.
[152]It is worth noting that Johannes does not preach that Abraham's god is the Absolute, only True God. He assumes the truth of the biblical account, which claims Abraham's god as the only one true God, and with that assumption Abraham must stand in an absolute relation to the absolute or he is a murderer. If the god of the Bible is not the one, true God then the whole discussion is obsolete, and Abraham is a murderer.
[153]*KSV*, 2005; *FT*, 111. Cf. Luke 10:42

know. Johannes asserts that a religiously motivated movement can be "just as much one of irony as is everything else that is based on the premise that subjectivity is higher than actuality."[154]

Since subjectivity cannot exist within actuality, a person must open ironic space otherwise actuality "skal absorbere, skal knuse den spinkle Subjectivite [will absorb, will crush, the delicate subjectivity]."[155] In order for a relationship with the absolute to exist, a person must be separated from actuality. The ironic space separating a person from actuality allows that person to be sufficiently independent to access something outside of actuality. The distance mandated by faith is expressed in the seemingly harsh statement from Luke 14:26 which reads "Εἴ τις ἔρχεται πρός με καὶ οὐ μισεῖ τὸν πατέρα ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τὴν μητέρα καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα καὶ τὰ τέκνα καὶ τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ τὰς ἀδελφὰς ἔτι τε καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἑαυτοῦ, οὐ δύναται εἶναί μου μαθητής. [If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.]" When Johannes discusses this scripture, he comments that because it is harsh, we do not hear it quoted often. He continues to say that theology students learn to soften the word "hate" and interpret it gently. Johannes claims that the scripture can not be mitigated and that "Ordene skulle tages saa forfærdelige som muligt [the words are to be taken in their full terror]."[156]

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[154]*KSV*, 2006; *FT*, 111. This section is quite amusing because there is additional irony at play in it. Johannes says, "Dette vil man i vor Tid ikke vide Noget af, man vil overhovedet ikke vide mere om Ironi end hvad Hegel har sagt, der besynderlig nok ikke forstod sig stort paa den, og bar et Nag til den, hvilket vor Tid har gode Grunde til ikke at opgive [our age does not want to know anything about this; on the whole it does not want to know more about irony than was said by Hegel, who, curiously enough, did not understand much about it and bore a grudge against it]."
[155]*KSV*, 244; *CI,* 138.
[156]*KSV* 1952; *FT*, 72.

For Abraham to have faith he had to separate himself from Sarah, Eleazar, and Isaac. Without that separation or that ironic mode of living he could not maintain a relationship with God. An ironic mode of living creates sufficient space for a person to be absolute and then to enter into a relationship with the absolute. For Socrates his irony allowed him to be suspended between two spheres; similarly for Abraham, his distance from actuality allows a proximity to ideality, or more precisely his distance from the ethical allowed his access to the absolute. Irony creates the necessary separation, which allows subjectivity, which allows an individual to escape some of the relativity of his culture in order to enter in a relationship with the absolute.[157]

For Abraham an ironic mode of living was not the final movement as it was for Socrates or the knight of infinite resignation. Abraham went one step further, or perhaps more accurately, one leap further. Instead of remaining suspended between actuality and ideality, he made a movement of faith and entered ideality. Johannes explains that Abraham could not speak when he had made this movement of faith. For Abraham language becomes impossible because language only exists in the negative space between elements. If Abraham entered ideality, that is if he accessed the Absolute, no

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[157]One problem of faith is the requirement that an individual trust his own subjectivity (*KSV*, 1933-1935; *FT*, 60-62) and his relationship to deity. One reason for the title *Fear and Trembling* (from Philippians 2:12) may be because ironic living leaves no other relationship against which a person can check himself. (For a discussion of the meaning of the title, *Fear and Trembling* see Gene Fendt, "Whose Fear and Trembling?" in Fear and Trembling and Repitition *International Kierkegaard Commentary* Vol. 2 (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press) 1993, 177-191 and Ronald Green "Developing 'Fear and Trembling'" in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1997, 257-281.) Abraham had only his own belief that he correctly understood God's will. That alone had to provide sufficient strength to act. He took an extraordinary risk by believing in his own discernment that it was God who commanded him. If it had not been God who commanded Abraham, would Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac been faith or murder?

space would exist between Abraham and the Absolute. Since both are absolute, the relationship between them is absolute, and there is no space between them in which language can exist. When God spoke to Abraham and required the sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham had to chose between the ethical and the absolute. If he chose the absolute, no further language would be possible. If he chose the ethical, he would never be faithful. As a prerequisite of faith irony requires the separation of a self from every other. Such separation causes the loneliness Johannes describes as characteristic of the knight of faith. Faith binds the knight to the absolute so that no language is needed, but separates him from other(s) because no language is adequate. In this way, the silence of Abraham becomes a reflection of how his irony was necessary for his faith.[158]

Because Abraham chose to make the movement of faith, there could be no explanation within actuality of his absolute relationship with the absolute. On the other hand, Abraham's faith mandated a return to actuality. Abraham could not be faithful without engaging his actuality and sacrificing Isaac, and so for Abraham to maintain his relationship with ideality he had to return to his actuality, but still remain separate from it. I suggest that what makes the reconciliation with actuality possible is the irony used for the initial separation. Because of the negative space separating Abraham from

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[158]Derrida, 107-109 discusses Abraham's silence in terms of a secret. Abraham's silence with his actuality is because Abraham is keeping a secret from Sarah, Isaac, and Eleazar. This secret remains unspoken not only because Abraham does not reveal it to those around him, but because Abraham himself does not know what the secret is. Although Abraham's secret is entirely his own and one of the few things (like death), which are entirely individual, it is a secret that Abraham keeps because even he himself does not know what it is. Tamsin Lorraine discusses Derriada's reading of Kierkegaard in "Amatory Cures for Material Dis-ease: A Kristevian Reading of *The Sickness unto Death*," in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity* eds Martin J. Matustik and Merold Westphal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press) 1995, 76-97.

other(s) in order to leave actuality, when he returned after accessing ideality, there was sufficient space for ideality to remain with Abraham within his actuality. When the trial was over and Abraham had successfully made the separation from actuality, he was able to return to it having acquired ideality within his self. In this way, Abraham remained suspended between ideality and actuality, but not in the same way that Socrates was suspended. Socrates was suspended between the two spheres so that he could access neither, Abraham was suspended between them while he was within them, which gave him access to both and also made him a boundary between both.[159]

Perhaps the irony of faith can exist in a paradox because it contains both negativity and positivity. Irony produces the negativity necessary to veil the self's faith from any other. Faith produces positivity because it expects victory.[160] According to Kierkegaard the expectancy of faith is victory. The expectancy of victory produces hope that all negativity will be overcome.[161] Abraham is different from the tragic heroes or Socrates because his irony did not end with irony because Abraham's choice did not remain in the ethical. He was choosing between the ethical and the absolute. Risking one's own life is considered ethically justifiable, and even in the cases of the fathers taking the life of a child can be ethically justified, but taking the life of an other to whom

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[159]Socrates, on the other hand, was a boundary between two actualities, but did not have access to either.

[160]I personally find it amazingly ironic (and I cannot imagine that the irony was anything but intentional) that one of Kierkegaard's first Upbuilding Discourses was "The Expectancy of Faith" and it was published concurrently with *Fear and Trembling*.

[161] Derrida's relationship to irony is the subject of Merold Westphal's "Kierkegaard, Socratic Irony, and Deconstruction" in The Concept of Irony *International Kierkegaard Commentary* Vol 2 (Georgia: Mercer University Press) 2001, 365-390. Westphal convincingly argues that Derrida and deconstruction should be located in the same type of ironic space that Kierkegard opens up for Socrates and which I suggest is where Abraham must reside.

you are ethically bound with no ethical reason to do so is an act in another sphere entirely.

As a mode of living irony opens space around an individual and allows the individual to be a self that is not regulated by or defined by his actuality. For Kierkegaard's Socrates ironic space that Socrates opened remained empty and Socrates remained silent. Kierkegaard admits that even though Socrates had no positivity, irony can make positivity possible because "Sandheden fordrer Taushed, før den vil oplade sin Røst, og denne Taushed skulde Socrates tilveiebringe [Truth demands silence before it will raise its voice, and Socrates was to bring about this silence]."[162] Kierkegaard here alludes that irony, through its silence, is a prerequisite to truth. Abraham was ironic without being empty because his faith filled his ironic space with hope. Abraham's faith allowed him to resign Isaac and without losing hope of getting him back. The irony of faith is not that the impossible and possible are joined, but that they remain separate and unreconcilable without being mutually exclusive. Abraham was "større end Alle, stor ved den Kraft, hvis Styrke er Afmagt, stor ved den Viisdom, hvis Hemmelighed er Daarskab, stor ved det Haab, hvis Form er Vanvid, stor ved den Kjærlighed, der er Had til sig selv [Abraham was the greatest of all, great by that power whose strength is powerlessness, great by that wisdom whose secret is foolishness, great by that hope whose form is madness, great by the love that is hatred to oneself]."[163]

With ideality (and faith) within the negative space around Abraham who reenters actuality, Abraham's irony produces positivity instead of negativity. Instead of irony

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[162]*KSV*, 293; *CI*, 210.
[163]*KSV*, 1865; *FT*, 16-17.

resigning all actuality and ideality, it reconciles them so that Abraham can paradoxically live within both. According to Johannes the knight of infinite resignation is easily recognizable because of his separation from actuality, but the knight of faith is unrecognizable because he is entirely reconciled with his actuality and "tilhører ganske Verden [belongs entirely to the world]."[164] Herein lies an irony beyond even Socrates' irony. Abraham's irony separated (him)self from other(s) removing him from actuality and allowing the movement of faith. His faith collapsed the space between the self and the absolute. Controlled by faith the same irony that separated Abraham from actuality returned him to actuality where he could simultaneously live in both ideality and actuality. Instead of becoming an island between ideality and actuality as Socrates did, Abraham becomes a bridge between ideality and actuality.

We earlier noted that irony controls the ironist because it holds him in negativity. We also noted that this suspension was dangerous to actuality because the ironist becomes infinitely relative to his actuality meaning that the ironist "can make no commitments, hold no loyalties."[165] Unlike Socrates' irony and the romantic ironists, Abraham's irony was controlled by his faith. Irony created the space necessary for faith and then faith controlled the space created by irony. This relationship is one possible reason that Kierkegaard said, "Maa man derfor end advare mod Ironien som mod en Forfører, saa maa man ogsaa anprise den som en Veileder [Even though one must warn against irony as a seducer, so must one commend it as a guide]." When uncontrolled,

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[164]*KSV*, 1895; *FT*, 39.
[165]Reece, 22.

irony becomes an infinite relativity that binds the ironist. When irony is controlled by faith it can be "Seier over Verden [victory over the world]."[166]

Unfortunately, irony controlled by faith is as unstable as irony when it is "uendelige absolute Negativitet [infinite, absolute negativity]."[167] Jacques Derrida claims that Abraham's position exists in its own contradiction (i.e. irony when defined as the relationship between self and other) because "Abraham is faithful to God only in his absolute treachery."[168] The potential for treachery against all other, even one's own son, makes irony controlled by faith a threat to society. As Johannes points out, there is no way to distinguish a murderer from a knight of faith. The unstable nature of a knight of faith results not because the absolute is not fully absolute, but because all human experience is relative to human perception. In *Fear and Trembling* Johannes de Silentio discusses how Abraham's silence is problematic because it creates a separation of self and other. The problem of irony for Abraham was that the others from whom he separated himself were those to whom he had an ethical duty. Socrates' silence is less problematic because he could maintain ironic silence without breaching ethical boundaries. Socrates could separate himself from his actuality and move toward ideality without crossing the boundaries of ethics because Socrates' ideality was within the ethical sphere. Unlike Socrates, whose irony and silence were inconvenient and frustrating to those around him, Abraham's silence was a matter of life and death. Since Kierkegaard believed that Socrates was accountable to his actuality for the danger he presented to it, how much more accountable should Abraham be to his actuality for the

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[166]*KSV*, 404; *CI*, 327. *KSV* 394; *CI*, 319.
[167]*KSV*, 339; *CI*, 261.
[168]Derrida, 68.

threat of murder he presented to it? "Kan Troen ikke gjøre det til en hellig Handling at ville myrde sin Søn, saa lad den samme Dom gaae over Abraham som over enhver Anden. [If faith cannot make it a holy act to be willing to murder his son, then let the same judgment be passed on Abraham as on everyone else]."[169] Since faith is impossible to prove, for Kierkegaard Abraham should be as accountable to his actuality as Socrates was to his. The ironic paradox in which faith exists lies in how irony frees the ironist so that faith is possible, but then that faith controls the ironist. The ironist is both free from actuality, controlled by faith, and accountable to actuality.[170] When irony controls an ironist, the ironist is uncontrollably negative. When faith controls irony, the irony makes faith uncontrollable. Faith's irony is infinitely resigned and infinitely hopeful. It is the struggle, the tension, the paradox of irony that makes a murder into a holy act.

At the end of this discussion a reader might notice that we have spent more time discussing irony than faith. Perhaps this is appropriate because faith exists in an ironic space separated from any actuality, and it is accessible to a self who is a knight of faith and not by any other. Therefore the relationship with faith remains ironic because we know that it is (or that is must be or Abraham is lost), but not what it is. Interestingly

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[169]*KSV* 1883; *FT*, 30.

[170]Troen er netop dette Paradox, at den Enkelte som den Enkelte er høiere end det Almene, er berettiget ligeoverfor dette, ikke subordineret, men overordnet, dog vel at mærke saaledes, at det er den Enkelte, der efter at have været som den Enkelte det Almene underordnet, nu gjennem det Almene bliver den Enkelte, der som den Enkelte staaer i et absolut Forhold til det Absolute. Dette Standpunkt lader sig ikke mediere; thi al Mediation skeer netop i Kraft af det Almene; det er og bliver i al Evighed et Paradox, utilgængeligt for Tænkningen. Og dog er Troen dette Paradox eller ogsaa (dette er de Conseqventser, som jeg vil bede Læseren have in mente paa ethvert Punkt, om det end vilde blive mig for vidtløftigt overalt at nedskrive dem) eller ogsaa har der aldrig været Tro til, netop fordi den altid har været, eller ogsaa er Abraham tabt (*KSV* 1919, *FT*, 55-56).

enough, by using an ironic text (*Fear and Trembling*) to discuss an ironic person (Abraham) and an ironic subject (faith), Kierkegaard presents irony (faith) within irony (existing in Abraham) within irony (literally in the pages of *Fear and Trembling*). How ironic.

Part II. Playing with Irony: (An)Other View Made Possible

In the first half of this thesis I discussed how irony exists in the negative space between elements. Irony as a rhetorical device can be found in the negative space between text and meaning. As a theoretical concept irony enables the relationships between different ideas and separate spheres. As a mode of living irony can be found in the separation and proximity of self and other as well as between actuality and ideality. The negative space opens a necessary circumstance to make faith possible in a relationship between the self and the absolute. The second half of this thesis focuses more particularly on the relationship between the self and the absolute as well as the relationship of self and other.

Irony concerns both separation and proximity because it either separates elements that are usually unified or it binds elements that are usually separate. While no type of irony can exist without both separation and proximity because it is precisely the negative space between the elements that creates the ironic relationship, irony is also defined by whether it is primarily binding or separating the elements. To return to one of Kierkegaard's images, irony exists in the relationship between two magnets. If both magnets are turned one way, they repulse each other and the negative space binding them is actually a force repelling them. If the magnets are turned the opposite way, the negative space between the magnets that separates them is actually a force binding them. In both instances the relationship between elements creates irony because the negative space can perform one action and its opposite at the same time, it both binds and separates. Whether the force behind the ironic relationship is repelling or attracting depends on the nature of the elements. The irony lies in the relationship, either, that even

though the magnets try to repel they are defined in their attraction, or, as much as they try to be joined they will always be separate from the other.

Chapter 4

The Virgin Mary, Irony, and Faith

In my reading of *Fear and Trembling*, Abraham becomes a prime example of faithful ironic living. His faith requires an ironic separation from his wife, his son, and the rest of his actuality. About Abraham Johannes says, "Tvivler jeg meget paa, at man i den ganske Verden skal finde en eneste Analogi, undtagen en senere [I doubt very much that anyone in the whole wide world will find one single analogy, except for a later one]."[171] Only a few pages later Johannes makes a comparison the Virgin Mary to Abraham, presumably making Mary the "latter one" Johannes was referencing. Johannes compares Mary, the Mother of God or the Virgin Mary, to Abraham because Mary is misunderstood in the same manner that Abraham is misunderstood. The discussion about her is one of the few examples in *Fear and Trembling* where a woman is the focus of the story. Johannes describes her as follows:

> "Hvo var stor i Verden som hiin benaadede Qvinde, Guds Moder, Jomfru Maria? Og dog hvorledes taler man derom? At hun var den Benaadede bland Qvinder gjør hende ikke stor, og dersom det ikke traf sig saa besynderligt, at de, der høre, kunne tænke ligesaa umenneskeligt som de, der tale, saa maatte vel enhver ung Pige spørge, hvorfor blev ikke ogsaa jeg den Benaadede? og hvis jeg ikke havde Andet at sige, da skulde jeg slet ikke afvise et saadant Spørgsmaal som dumt; thi ligeoverfor en Begunstigelse, abstract seet, er ethvert Menneske lige berettiget. Man udelader Nøden, Angsten, Paradoxet. . .Vel fødte Maria Barnet vidunderligt, men det gik hende dog paa Qvinders Viis, og denne Tid den er Angstens, Nødens

[171] *KSV*, 1918; *FT*, 55.

og Paradoxets. Engelen var vel en tjenende Aand, men han var ikke en tjenstvillig Aand, der gik til de andre unge Piger i Israel og sagde: foragter ikke Maria, hendes hændes det Overordentlige. Men Engelen kom kun til Maria, og Ingen kunde forstaae hende. Hvilken Qvinde blev dog krænket som Maria, og er det ikke ogsaa her sandt, at den, hvem Gud velsigner, forbander han i samme Andedrag? Dette er Aandens Opfattelse af Maria, og hun er ingenlunde, hvad der oprører mig at sige, men endnu mere, at man tankeløst og leflende har opfattet hende saaledes, hun er ingenlunde en Dame, der sidder paa Stads og leger med et Gudebarn. Naar hun da desuagtet sagde: see jeg er Herrens Tjenerinde, saa er hun stor, og jeg tænker, det skal ikke falde vanskeligt at forklare, hvorfor hun blev Guds Moder. Hun behøver ingen verdslig Beundring, ligesaa lidet som Abraham behøver Taarer, thi hun var ikke Heltinde, og han ikke Helt, men begge bleve de ingenlunde større end disse, ved at være fritagne for Nøden og Qvalen og Paradoxet, men bleve det ved disse. [Who was as great in the world as that favored woman, the mother of God, the Virgin Mary? And yet how do we speak of her? That she was the favored one among woman does not make her great, and if it would not be so very odd for those who listen to be able to think just as inhumanly as those who speak, then every young girl might ask: why am I not so favored? And if I had nothing else to say, I certainly would not dismiss such a question as stupid, because, viewed abstractly, vis-à-vis a favor, every person is just as entitled to it as the other. We leave out the distress, the anxiety, the paradox. . .To be sure, Mary bore the child wondrously, but she nevertheless did it "after the manner of women" and such a time is one of anxiety, distress, and

> paradox. The angel was indeed a ministering spirit, but he was not a meddlesome spirit who went to the other young maidens in Israel and said: Do not scorn Mary, the extraordinary is happening to her. The angel went only to Mary, and no one could understand her. Has any woman been as infringed upon as was Mary, and is it not true here also that the one whom God blesses he curses in the same breath. This is the spirit's view of Mary, and she is by no means–it is revolting to me to say it but even more so that people have inanely and unctuously made her out to be thus–she is by no means a lady idling in her finery and playing with a divine child. When despite this, she said: Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord–then she is great, and I believe that it would not be difficult to explain why she is the mother of God. She needs worldly admiration as little as Abraham needs tears]."[172]

Historically Mary has been greatly admired for her role as the Mother of God, and Abraham has been sympathized with because his role as the Father of Faith. Throughout *Fear and Trembling* Johannes reminds his readers that Abraham does not need any tears from others who cannot understand him. Johannes even suggest that a knight of faith would chide someone who weeps for him saying, "græd ikke over mig, men græd over Dig selv. [Do not weep for me, but weep for yourself]."[173] The entirety of *Fear and Trembling* demonstrates the uselessness of tears, which are regularly the reaction to Abraham's story. Johannes attempts to shatter the illusion that Abraham can be understood with the result that instead of weeping for Abraham the reader appreciates

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[172]*KSV*, 1939; *FT*, 64-65.
[173]*KSV*, 1940; *FT*, 66.

Abraham's incomprehensibility. In a similar manner, Mary receives at least as much worldly admiration as Abraham receives tears. In Copenhagen itself, the main cathedral is "The Church of Our Lady." Like many other cities, Copenhagen dedicated its church to the Virgin Mary because of her prestige as the mother of God.[174] Within these cathedrals and in many other churches are numerous paintings depicting Mary sitting in beautiful robes, playing with her divine child. For Johannes, this is offensive. Johannes seems to believe that Mary does not need the numerous effigies depicting her, or cults of courtly love centered on her, or even her elevation to sainthood. Though she has been lauded throughout the centuries and achieved nearly god-like status,[175] Johannes argues that no one bothers to understand her and her paradoxical position. Since Johannes only draws the comparison without giving a detailed analysis, I would like to infer in more detail some of the comparisons and differences between Abraham and Mary that this passage implies

From Johannes' perspective the stories of Mary and Abraham share three defining elements: 1) the reception of their stories 2) the need to breach the ethical, and 3) the ironic position of faith.[176] The first element is the one specifically addressed by Johannes

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[174]See Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard and the Church in Denmark*. Bibliotheca Kierkegaariana 13, eds Niels Thulstrup and Marie Milkulová Thulstrup (Copenhagen: Reitzels) 1984 for a discussion of Kierkegaard's relationship to the organized religion of his time.

[175]Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image* (Arkana: Penguin Books), 1993, 547-608 gives an account of how the Virgin Mary assumes the position of the Roman Goddesses in Christendom. Included in the chapter are several images of Mary that could accurately be said to depict her as idling in finery and playing with a divine child.

[176] The parallels are possibly the result of one story foreshadowing the other. From the Christian point of view, Isaac is a type of Christ and the *akedah* mirrors the crucifixion. Since the children of Mary and Abraham are literary parallels, the parents of those children will also share parallels. F.F.Bruce, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand

and was discussed above, that both Abraham and Mary are received and lauded while the importance of their stories is ignored. In order to analyze the other two comparisons, first we will consider how other elements of the two stories coincide. To compare the stories more easily they are presented below–Mary's story as told in Luke, and Abraham's as told in Genesis.[177]

Luke 1:26-38, 2:4-8, 2:16-19

> (1:26-38) And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, though that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And behold, thy

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Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 312 n.151 comments that the story of Isaac "prefigured the resurrection of Christ."

[177]See Appendix B for the text in the original languages.

cousin Elisabeth, she hath conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her. . .(2:4-8) And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David. . .to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds. . .(2:16-19) and they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. . .But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.

Genesis 15:1-6, 17:19, 21:1-2, 22:1-13

(15:1-6) After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am they shield and thy exceeding great reward. . .And Abram said, Behold to me thou hast given no seed; and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. . And he believed the Lord; and he counted it unto him for righteousness. . .(17:19) And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son

indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac; and I with establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him. . .(21:1-2)And the Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. . .(22:1-13) And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold here I am. And he said, take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go wonder and worship, and come again to you. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together. And Isaac spake unto Abraham, his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together. And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and tool

> the knife to slay his son. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.

By presenting the two stories next to each other several points of comparison become visible. Both Mary and Abraham received a child through a miraculous conception. For Abraham the conception was miraculous because his wife was not only barren but since "it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women" (Gen. 18:11), she was also past menopause. For Mary the conception was miraculous because not only was she was not yet married, but she was also a virgin since she states "I know not a man." In both cases, the physical impossibilities were overcome to create a promised child. To Abraham God promised that the child would be the recipient of his covenant and would give Abraham numberless posterity who would "possess the gate of his enemies" (Gen. 22:17). To Mary God promised that her child would be given "the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:33). Both promises include political domination within a kingdom.

For both Mary and Abraham there was a time when the heavenly messenger called them by name and to whom they responded with a submissive phrase. On more than one occasion when the Lord calls Abraham by name, Abraham responds with the Hebrew phrase הִנֵּנִי. This phrase is a combination of a particle denoting presence and the first person pronomial suffix. Literally it means "here I" and is variously translated as "Behold, here I am" (Gen. 22:1) or "Here am I" (Samuel 3: 4). This particular phrase is not a simple statement of presence but a submissive response to a recognized superior.[178] When the Lord calls Abraham to tell him to sacrifice his son Isaac, Abraham responds with הִנֵּנִי. On the top of the mount as Abraham lifts the knife over Isaac, Abraham hears the voice of the Lord and again responds הִנֵּנִי. The use of this expression by Abraham both when he receives the command to sacrifice Isaac and when he is committed to carrying out that command shows a complete submission to the absolute. For Abraham it is not that he was commanded to kill his son that made him great, but his willingness to submit to that command without losing his faith that makes him great.

Mary similarly offers complete submission to the will of God. Kierkegaard points out that what makes Mary great was not that she was favored. The definition of favor assumes that the receiver does not deserve the favor nor is the receiver entitled to it. Since no one can claim entitlement of a favor, everyone has just as much claim as the next person causing Johannes to conclude that any maiden could have been favored. Being favored of the Lord was not what made Mary great, but rather it was her response

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[178]It is the same phrase used by Samuel to answer when he believes that Eli is calling for him. See Samuel 3:4,6,8.

to being favored that made her great. After Mary had discussed with the angel what being "favored" entailed, Mary chose to submit and said εἶπεν δὲ Μαριάμ· ἰδοὺ ἡ δούλη κυρίου· γένοιτό μοι κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου. [Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it unto me according to thy word]." The word Mary uses to describe her relationship to God is δούλη, generally translated as either "servant" or "slave." It has both meanings because whether the person was owned or free, the person was not only in the service but under the control of another.[179] Mary's response echoes Abraham's because like Abraham her statement includes the idea of presence before the messenger, but more importantly it includes a unconditional submission to the message. Like Abraham, it was Mary's submission to the absolute without losing faith in the absolute that made her great.

For both Mary and Abraham the message about a child and the completion of the command required a journey to a symbolic place. The time between the commandment to sacrifice Isaac and when Abraham lifted the knife was a three-day journey to Mount Moriah. The three days are a temporal negative space in which Abraham could consider the irony of his position. Johannes emphasizes how at any moment along the journey Abraham could have turned back. For Abraham abandoning his decision would have been as simple as turning around and heading home. It was not only Abraham's decision to be obedient, but how Abraham proceeded that Johannes admires. Abraham did not hurry nor did he linger. He was steadfast in his resolve. He did not waver, try to get it over with, or try to delay it.

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[179] It is the same phrase used by Paul when he declares Παῦλος δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησου in Romans 1:1.

For Mary the length of time between her commitment and the birth was nine months, and right before delivery she journeyed from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Although it would have been harder for Mary to forsake her choice to carry the child, she probably could have. In the ancient world abortion was not legal or socially acceptable, but it was still practiced, especially when a woman was not married.[180] Mary probably could have terminated her pregnancy secretly, but Mary did not. Unlike Abraham, Mary's choice put her at the mercy of her society. No one knew what Abraham intended to do when he reached Mt. Moriah. His obedience would not have been compromised before he could fulfill the commandment. Perhaps he would have faced consequences after the fact, but as the patriarch of the society that is doubtful. Mary on the other hand faced the possibility of serious consequences before she could complete her commandment to "bring forth a son." At the very least, Joseph would know that the child was not his. According to the record in Matthew, Joseph did find out that his betrothed was pregnant and had decided to fulfill his ethical obligation. Although he did not want to make and example of her, he was prepared to "put her away privily."[181] Only an angelic visit stayed his hand, something that Mary probably could not have known would happen when she made the commitment. Mary may have had weeks even months to consider her situation before Joseph or anyone else knew or accepted her choice.

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[180]A requirement of the Hippocratic Oath is to not ever help a woman perform an abortion. The need to have medical students swear not to perform abortions assumes that abortions were preformed in the ancient world.

[181]The two options for Joseph would be either to have Mary publically stoned and make an example out of her or to put her away privately, which means she admits that she is defiled and can go her own way. See Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel Of Matthew* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press), 1991, 34-35. Unfortunately if a woman admits her defilement, this precludes her from any source of support, which would leave few options other than prostitution or starvation.

Another shared element is that both Mary and Abraham had to make a journey to a symbolic place. Abraham's journey led to a mountain top. Mountain tops are considered a symbol of the primordial mound which emerged during creation and represents a proximity to God. In a topographical metaphor Abraham had to separate himself from actuality by leaving the servants behind, he had to ascend in elevation by climbing a mountain to be closer to ideality. Mary had to leave Nazareth and travel to Bethlehem. The name "Bethlehem" means "house of bread." Mary delivered the "bread of life" in the "house of bread." However, when Mary arrived at Bethlehem, there was no room for her. Instead of giving birth in the midst of actuality, Mary was separated from her actuality. Her separation from actuality is appropriate because she would be giving birth to ideality. The geographic separation typifies Mary and Abraham's ironic separation from actuality and allowed them to receive a closer proximity to ideality.

Another significant part of Abraham's faith that Johannes indentifies is that Abraham believed that the impossible and possible could exist together. As a knight of faith, Abraham did not resign Isaac neither did he expect anything less than killing Isaac. The miracle of Abraham's faith was that he could give up and get back. This is an ironic position because the two opposites, possibility and impossibility, are brought into proximity so that both are actual while remaining separate. In a similar way, Mary knew that accepting the commandment to be pregnant threatened both her and her child. By accepting the pregnancy, she was also accepting the possibility of its termination. She had to believe that her choice of creation would not become a choice of destruction. She also had to believe in a proximity of the possible and impossible that was not rationally viable.

Both Mary and Abraham share an element of silence in their experience. Abraham's silence to Sarah, Eleazar, and Isaac was part of his ironic separation from actuality that his faith seemed to require.[182] There is no record of whether Mary spoke to her family members, but Mary's silence can be divided into three categories similar to Abraham's.[183] Mary's first silence was to Joseph. Joseph knew at some point that she was pregnant, but since he planned to follow the expectations his time, either Mary had not explained the situation to him, or he did not believe her explanation without the visitation of the angel. In either case, Mary was silent to Joseph either by not speaking or by not being understood when she did speak. Johannes points out Mary's second silence. Mary remained in silence because the angel came to her alone. The angel "var ikke en tjenstvillig Aand, der gik til de andre unge Piger i Israel og sagde: foragter ikke Maria, hendes hændes det Overordentlige. Men Engelen kom kun til Maria, og Ingen kunde forstaae hende. [was not a meddlesome spirit who went to the other young maidens in Israel and said: Do no scorn Mary, the extraordinary is happening to her. The angel went only to Mary, and no one could understand her]."[184] In addition to the silence to family members and to those in her society, Mary was silent in a third way. When her child was born and the shepherds were announcing "abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child," Mary did not speak about it but "kept all these things and

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[182]Like Abraham the first silence that can be attributed to Mary can be the silence of a first-hand account. Although the account does have Mary speak in the first person, the sources for the account are unknown.

[183]Mary did speak to Elizabeth, but it is not clear how much Elizabeth knew about the pregnancy or if Elizabeth assumed the child was Joseph's. It is possible that in order to avoid suspicion Mary and Joseph were married shortly after Joseph accepted Mary's pregnancy, but it is impossible to know.

[184]*KSV*, 1939; *FT*, 65.

pondered them in her heart." Mary's ponderings after the birth of her child represent her continual interest in her ironic relationship and the silence it produced.

The experiences of both Mary and Abraham required physical actions, for Mary regarding life and for Abraham regarding death. Life and death are the two opposites in the category of existence and as such they share some elements. For Mary to bear a child her flesh had to be pierced. For Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (or the ram as if it were Isaac), Abraham's knife had to pierce its flesh. In both the birth and the death the separation of flesh precipitates the flow of blood. In the sacrifice, the flowing blood would carry Isaac through the veil of death. In the birth, the flowing blood would carry Jesus through a veil into life. In both cases it is the act of the parent that causes the transition in the child and fulfills the commandment given by God.

Both the situations of Abraham and Mary deal with the need to preserve posterity. The ethical demands that a woman provide the posterity (with the correct father) and that a man protect and provide for that posterity. Johannes argues that "mod Sønnen har Faderen den høieste og helligste. . .ethisk Forpligtelse [to the son the father has the highest and holiest. . .ethical obligation]."[185] A father is supposed to love his son more than himself so that the father's seed can be perpetuated. From the perspective of the ethical, the most important duty for both a man and woman is concerning their posterity. Without a woman's chastity, a legitimate lineage could not be produced; without a man's protection, that lineage could not be preserved.

Johannes describes Abraham's plight when God tells Abraham to sacrifice his child of promise saying, "Saa var da Alt forspildt, forfærdeligere end om det aldrig var

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[185]*KSV*, 1881; *FT*, 28.

skeet! Saa drev Herren da kun sin Spot med Abraham! Vidunderligt gjorde han det Urimelige virkeligt, nu vilde han atter see det tilintetgjort. [So everything was lost, even more appallingly than if it had never happened. So the Lord was only mocking Abraham! He wonderously made the preposterous come true; now he wanted to see it annihilated]." When describing Mary's situation Johannes asks "Hvilken Qvinde blev dog krænket som Maria, og er det ikke ogsaa her sandt, at den, hvem Gud velsigner, forbander han i samme Andedrag? [Has any woman been as infringed upon as was Mary, and is it not true here also that the one whom God blesses he curses in the same breath?]" To be blessed and cursed by the same breath is an ironic position because the position is itself (a blessing) and its opposite (a curse). Abraham, like Mary, was cursed and blessed by the child God promised. Abraham was able to have a son, but then that son was required of him. Mary's son was also required of her both in the manner of His birth and in the manner of His death. From Johannes' viewpoint, to be chosen by God is a blessing because of the relationship with God, and it is a curse because it demands a separation from actuality, and in both Mary and Abraham's cases it demands a separation from the ethical.[186]

To illuminate how much Abraham diverges from his ethical duty, Kierkegaard takes great pains to show that there are occasions in which this ethical mandate can be superceded. An ethical mandate can be transgressed when the transgression is necessary to complete a higher expression of the ethical. Kierkegaard demonstrates three such occasions by using the stories of Agammenon and Iphigenia, Jephthah, and his daughter, and Brutus and his son. Because Agamemnon, Jephthah, and Brutus were each the

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[186]*KSV*, 1870; *FT*, 19. *KSV*, 1939; *FT*, 65.

patriarch of his society, the ethical duty as a father to protect his child could not supercede his ethical duty as a patriarch to protect his society. The father's ethical duty concerning an individual was sacrificed to a higher ethical duty to the universal. Kierkegaard contrasts these three stories with Abraham to show how Abraham does not fit the same category, despite the parallel that each father was compelled to sacrifice his own child. What differentiates Abraham from the other fathers is that the sacrifice of Isaac was not in order to preserve Abraham's society. If Abraham was compelled to sacrifice Isaac as a penance, then Abraham's sacrifice could be justified by a higher expression of the ethical like the other three fathers. However, Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac held no such promise of a greater good. Isaac's death was meaningless within the ethical, which is why Abraham had to breach the ethical to be willing to do it.

While for a man it is the preservation of his family that is his ethical duty, for a woman it is the production of her family. Because pregnancy outside of wedlock threatens the legitimacy of family, for most cultures it represents the most serious breach of the ethical possible for a woman. Despite this ethical mandate, there are occasions when a woman can bear an illegitimate child for the "greater good" as Lot's daughters, Tamar, and Rhea Silvia each did. Like Agamemnon, Jephthah, and Brutus, each of these women broke the ethical mandate of chastity, but the result in each case was a higher fulfillment of the ethical. Lot's daughters (Gen. 12, 14, 19) intentionally manipulated their father into drunkenness so that they could be impregnated by him without his knowing what he was doing.[187] Without their chosen breach of the mandate of chastity, Lot's seed could not have survived. Without posterity the daughters would have no

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[187]Genesis 19:31-38.

means for support when their father became incapacitated. Tamar (Gen. 38:6) pretended to be a harlot in order to seduce her father-in-law and manipulate from him his ring and staff. With the symbols of his patriarchy, she could prove the legitimacy of her child despite the ethical breach of the conception.[188] Because Rhea Silvia could bear the legitimate heirs, she was sequestered as a Vestal Virgin in order to prevent the true line from being perpetuated. Her forcible impregnation by Mars was the only way to produce legitimate heirs who would become the founders of the Rome.[189]

Mary can be contrasted with these women who bore children outside of wedlock in the same way that Kierkegaard contrasts the three fathers to Abraham. In each of these cases the result of the women's actions was the same as Mary's. All became pregnant outside of wedlock. These women are also comparable to the Agamemnon, Jephthah, and Brutus because their actions are generally excused because of the result, which are considered remaining within a larger sphere of the ethical than the boundary they crossed. Tamar's father-in-law admits that Tamar had a right to his family's seed. Since he did not provide it, she was justified in securing it through other means. When Lot recovers from his drunkenness, he recognizes that the only way to keep his family line alive is through the means his daughters provided. Because Rhea Silvia was made a Vestal Virgin to deny her father any posterity, her pregnancy returned the rightful line to power and produced the founder of Rome. Like Agamemnon, Jephthah, and Brutus the actions of these three women remain in the ethical sphere. Mary's story is much more

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[188]Genesis 38:6.

[189]Livy 1.4.1. Sed debebatur, ut opinor, fatis tantae origo urbis maximique secundum deorum opes imperii principium. Vi compressa Vestalis cum geminum partum edidisset, seu ita rata seu quia deus auctor culpae honestior erat, Martem incertae stirpis patrem nuncupat.

comparable to Abraham's because her actions cannot be explained within the ethical. Mary was not endeavoring to secure a bloodline in danger of becoming extinct. Neither was she asserting her right to a child of her husband's family. Instead she was betraying the trust of her betrothed by conceiving a child that was not his.[190]

The parallels between the stories of Mary and Abraham suggest that not only did they both have faith, but their faith required an ironic mode of living. Both required a faithful act that defied the ethical. One of the most sacred obligations of the ethical is to protect family. For a father one of the most serious breaches of the ethical is to kill your child. For a woman one of the most serious breaches of the ethical is to become pregnant before marriage especially with a child not belonging to your intended. Both decisions required serious consequences for the family members. For Abraham loss of his posterity. For Mary the loss of her child (perhaps herself). They both separated themselves from the other(s) by silence. Abraham kept silent about his intentions. Mary "kept these things and pondered them in her heart." They both chose to separate themselves from their actuality in order to create a proximity to the absolute. They both had to believe in an irrational proximity of the possible and impossible. They were both blessed and cursed in the same breath. The negative space, which normally exists between a curse and a blessing that separates them into opposites becomes collapsed when both happen at the same time and because of the same action (i.e. in the same

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[190]Cf. *Either/Or*, 417 where Judge William is explaining the ethical reasons for marriage. He assumes that Mary and Joseph were married shortly after Joseph became aware of Mary's pregnancy. He claims that even to bring a Savior into the world is not an ethically justified reason for marriage.

breath). The irony is formed by the proximity that makes one breath be both (its)self (a blessing) and (its) other (a curse) at the same time.

It could be argued that the type of irony faced by Mary and Abraham is not the same irony that Kierkegaard defines as Socrates' "infinite absolute negativity." For Kierkegaard Socrates is an ironist because his separation from actuality was continual throughout his life, not confined to one event. Because the stories of Mary and Abraham center on one event, it could be argued that both Mary and Abraham faced an ironic situation without participating in an ironic mode of living. Socrates' irony is "uendelige absolute Negativitet [infinite, absolute negativity]"[191] because it creates negative space between self and actuality. Socrates creates negativity because he is both himself (internally) and something other (externally), making him both something (himself) and its other (his other) at the same time. Similarly, Mary and Abraham are both something (blessed) and its other (cursed) at the same time. Although this discussion has focused on only one event, this event can be seen as microcosm of the individual's entire life.[192] For both Mary and Abraham, their relationship to the life of their child is the defining event of their lives. They both take their titles from these events. Mary becomes the Mother of God, and Abraham becomes the Father of faith. In both cases the one event situates Mary and Abraham in an ironic paradox of faith, which in order to mediate and maintain each has to employ an ironic mode of living. Irony becomes a prerequisite to

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[191]*KSV*, 339; *CI*, 261.

[192]Of course, for Mary the only record of her life is written in *The Gospel of Luke* so it could be argued either way. On the one hand, the analysis of this thesis takes into account all the material about Mary's life. On the other hand, this analysis can only take into account one event of Mary's life.

faith because for Mary and Abraham faith required an ironic separation from actuality in order to breach the ethical.

Chapter 5

Kierkegaard and the *Foeminini Generis*

Up to this point the irony discussed was concerned first with separation and only secondly with the resulting proximity. Now the ironic elements will be concerned first with union and secondly with separation. In the latter case, the irony exists because by joining the separate elements, their separateness is emphasized. To return to Kierkegaard's image of the magnets, the distinction between the two magnets is never as overcome nor as pronounced as when the two are joined. Although the two magnets are as physically close as possible and joined by a magnetic force, the boundary of each magnet remains and the line of union is also the line of separation. In a similar way, a scar is both the sign of healing and the sign of the wound. A seam on clothing is both the sign of union and separation. For these types of irony, the negative space comes from the opposites sharing the same proximity. When irony separates elements, the elements can never be fully independent of their opposite. When irony joins elements, the elements can never be fully unified because they are opposites. Either relationship must remain ironic because both are one thing and their opposite at the same time. Since Abraham is a masculine and paternal example of an ironic mode of living and Mary is a feminine and maternal example, their comparison provides an opportunity to examine how irony relates to the opposite relationship of masculine and feminine.

In the first paragraph of *The Concept of Irony* Kierkegaard does not begin his discussion of irony itself. That discussion begins in the second paragraph where Kierkegaard describes how he will approach irony through the figure of Socrates. In the first paragraph Kierkegaard opens his dissertation by the philosophical discussion. In

this abstract introduction Kierkegaard describes the philosophical discussion as a relationship between masculine and feminine elements. Kierkegaard genders the "phenomenon" as feminine and the "genius" as masculine. A close reading of this paragraph will provide the theoretical foundation from which we can formulate a concept of feminine and masculine that should be appropriate to apply to other members of the Kierkegaardian corpus. Kierkegaard's introductory paragraph reads:

> "Er der Noget, hvorfor man maa rose den nyere philosophiske Stræben i dens storartede Fremtræden, saa er det visselig for den geniale Magt, hvormed den griber og fastholder Phænomenet. Sømmer det sig nu for dette, der som saadant altid er foeminini generis, paa Grund af sin qvindelige Natur at hengive sig til den Stærkere, saa kan man dog ogsaa med Billighed af den philosophiske Ridder fordre den ærbødige Anstand, det dybe Sværmeri, istedetfor hvilket man stundom formeget hører Sporernes Klirren og Herskerens Stemme. Betragteren bør være Erotiker, intet Træk, intet Moment maa være ham ligegyldigt; men paa den anden Side bør han dog ogsaa føle sin Overvægt, men kun bruge den til at forhjælpe Phænomenet til dets fuldkomne Aabenbarelse. Om derfor end Betragteren fører Begrebet med sig, gjælder det dog om, at Phænomenet bliver ukrænket, og at Begrebet sees tilblivende ved Phænomenet. [If there is anything that must be praised in modern philosophical endeavor in its magnificent manifestation, it certainly is the power of the genius with which it seizes and holds on to the phenomenon. Now if it is fitting for the phenomenon, which as such is always *foeminini generis*, to surrender to the stronger on account of its feminine nature, then in all fairness one can also demand of the philosophical knight a deferential

> propriety and a profound enthusiasm, in place of which one sometimes hears too much the jingling of spurs and the voice of the master. The observer ought to be an amorist; he must not be indifferent to any feature, any factor. But on the other hand he ought to have a sense of his own predominance–but should use it only to help the phenomenon obtain its full disclosure. Therefore, even if the observer does bring the concept along with him, it is still of great importance that the phenomenon remain inviolate and that the concept be seen as coming into existence through the phenomenon]."[193]

Contained in this rather dense and abstract paragraph Kierkegaard compares the relationship between philosophical elements to a sexual relationship between a male and female. For Kierkegaard it is the ability of the masculine "genius" to obtain this relationship that "must be praised" in a discussion of the "philosophical endeavor." Since the relationship between masculine and feminine is the "magnificent manifestation," Kierkegaard both assumes a separation between the masculine and feminine as well as a benefit to creating a union between them. Kierkegaard states that the phenomenon is *foeminini generis*, or of a feminine gender, and as such "it is fitting for the phenomenon. . .to surrender to the stronger on account of its feminine nature." This statement defines the masculine and feminine as two separate *genera*, and also gives an example of what the basic difference between the categories is. According to this statement the masculine *genus* is the stronger, and the feminine *genus* is the weaker that submits to the stronger. Such a perception of the genders is very common across cultures

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[193]*KSV*, 139; *CI*, 9.

and time. The masculine is considered the dominant, strong, active, and positive while the feminine is considered the inferior, weak, passive, and negative.[194]

In his opening paragraph Kierkegaard maintains that the balance in the relationship between the opposites lies in the responsibility of each side to act appropriately in the role. The feminine "phenomenon" must "submit to the stronger" and in return the masculine "philosophical knight" must uphold a "deferential propriety." While suggesting this type of relationship as normative or even beneficial may not be popular among feminists because it does require the feminine to submit to the masculine, it does admit a respectful and mutually beneficial relationship.[195] Instead of allowing the

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[194]Feminist criticism is one type of literary theory that investigates the meaning of the difference between masculine and feminine and how that difference affects and is affected by society. For a general discussion of the difference between feminism and feminist criticism see Appendix C. The two main branches of feminist criticism, American and French, both began as political movements striving to attain rights for women. In the United States the literary criticism stemming from the women's movement tends to focus on the way women are presented in literature, how female characters are used, and how literature shows the definition and control of women in society. In France the literary criticism precipitated by the women's movement became more theoretical, base on the theories of Jacques Lacan (for an introduction to Lacanian theory see Sean Homer, *Jacques Lacan* (New York:Routledge, 2005). French feminist criticism tended to focus on what feminine literature is and how the characteristics of the feminine sphere differed from the masculine. For a good introduction to the differences between French feminism and American feminism see Toril Moi, *Sexual/Texual Politics: French Feminist Theory* (London: Methuen & Co.) 1985. This thesis takes much more of its criticism from the French feminist criticism than from American feminist criticism.

[195]Kierkegaard's reasoning may seem similar to Annie Leclerc's in "Parole de Femme" trans. Roisin Mallaghan in *French Feminist Thought: A Reader* ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd) 1989, 73-79 who speaks of the joy of child-bearing. She comments that "It was not man who decided to allot to me the painful burden of procreation, but it is he who has done all he can to make my lot a painful one. . . Likewise, once this division of labor was established, accepted man did all he could to make sure it is perceived as a division between a good and a bad role." This type of position has been criticized by other feminists because it can propagate the same problems that it is trying to correct. Christine Delphy "Proto-feminism and Anti-feminism" ed and trans Diana Leonard in *French Feminist Thought: A Reader* ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd) 1989, 80-109 calls this argument "anti-feminism" because "all her arguments take

masculine complete dominion of the feminine, it requires the masculine to use his authority only for the benefit of the feminine. Although the knight must "have a sense of his own predominance" if he uses that predominance for anything but "to help the phenomenon obtain its full disclosure" the relationship would become exploitative instead of upbuilding.

Against the common view that the masculine's authority over the feminine translates into unconditional control of it, Kierkegaard also comments that too often instead of "deferential propriety" from the knight there is "the jingling of spurs and the voice of the master." This image is one of a knight on a horse who uses spurs and orders to force the horse into submission. For Kierkegaard this relationship of the masculine as a knight and the feminine as a beast of burden to be commanded is not appropriate. Instead Kierkegaard says that the masculine element should be an "erotiker" or amorist (rather than a master). He should be an observer who premises not "indifferent to any feature, any factor," but who presumably values them instead. Additionally, the masculine genius must not use his dominance to violate the feminine phenomenon. For Kierkegaard, "it is still of great importance that the phenomenon remain inviolate." The standard of leaving the feminine inviolate allows the feminine phenomenon to maintain her own nature even in its submission to the masculine. If the masculine has this premise from which he approaches the feminine then the potential of a "magnificent manifestation" of the philosophical endeavor can be obtained.[196] Kierkegaard's statement

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the basic premise of, and are tied to, the dominant ideology." While Delphy does raise very valid objections to Leclerc's assumptions, she sees radical political change as the only reaction, which I think is too restrictive.

[196]*KSV*, 139, *CI*, 9.

about the feminine nature of the phenomenon and the masculine nature of the genius demonstrates that he accepted the basic differences assumed in most cultures including his own.

Several commentators have investigated Kierkegaard's opinion of women and feminine characteristics.[197] One complication in understanding Kierkegaard's opinion on women arises from the differing and sometimes opposite opinions offered by Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms. Considering the effort that Kierkegaard effected to write from many points of view, it is not surprising that his writings contain such diverse opinions on any subject, including women. In some writings of the Kierkegaardian corpus women seem applauded because their feminine characteristics are better catalysts for inwardness. In other writings of the corpus women are disparaged and considered inferior to men. Some statements seem so derogatory as to leave no doubt that Kierkegaard was misogynist.[198] Some other readers try to rehabilitate Kierkegaard as a

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[197]Though to my knowledge there have been no feminist interpretations specific to *Fear and Trembling*, there have been some recent studies done about women in the Kierkegaardian corpus. For a discussion of Kierkegaard's works and their relationship to females, the feminine, and feminist criticism see *Feminist Interpretations of Søren Kierkegaard*. This volume presents several approaches, readings, possibilities, and problems of how to understand Kierkegaard from a feminine perspective. It offers a useful introduction to many of the complexities of feminist criticism. One particular article is Leslie A. Howe, "Kierkegaard and the Feminine Self" 217-249. Some other notable feminist commentators are Sylvia Walsh, "Issues that Divide: Interpreting Kierkegaard on Woman and Gender," in *Kierkegaard Revisited* eds. Niels Jørgen Cappelorn and Jon Stewart, Kierkegaard Studies Monograph Series I. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter) 1997, 191-205.

[198] Julia Watkin, "The Logic of Søren Kierkegaard's Misogyny, 1854-1855"in *Feminist Interpretations of Søren Kierkegaard* Eds. Celine Leon and Sylvia Walsh (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press) 1997, 69-82 gives numerous examples of statements by Kierkegaard in his last two years which seem unreconcilable with any view of women that is not wholly misogynistic. Additionally, she discusses how these statements relate to Kierkegaard's personal situation and what can be gained from them despite their bias.

feminist because of other statements praising woman's feminine characteristics.[199] However, even with the many different pseudonyms and texts offering varying opinions, there seems to be a general reoccurring theme in Kierkegaard's writings. Kierkegaard seems to appreciate and value the characteristics that are considered feminine as well as women's ability to help man engage those characteristics, but Kierkegaard did not seem to think that a woman could sufficiently become an individual. Sylvia Agacinski concludes that Kierkegaard appreciated and admired women for their feminine characteristics, particularly the feminine's being-for-other and submissiveness. Kierkegaard saw these characteristics as necessary for a man to acquire so that he could have a relationship with God. While Kierkegaard sees the need for women because of these characteristics, once a man has learned them then women are no longer necessary because they cannot appropriate the necessary masculine characteristics to become an individual themselves.[200] In short, Kierkegaard acknowledged and appreciated the characteristics of the theoretical feminine, but did not hold actual females in high esteem.[201] In the opening paragraph of *The Concept of Irony* Kierkegaard's choice to

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[199] For example Jane Duran, "The Kierkegaardian Feminist," in *Feminist Interpretations of Søren Kierkegaard*, eds. Celine Leon and Sylvia Walsh (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press)1997, 249-266 argues that a "gynocentric view" can be found in Kierkegaard's writings. Another example is Mark Lloyd Taylor "Practice in Authority: The Apostolic Women of Søren Kierkegaard's writing," in *Anthropology and Authority: Essays on Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Poul Houe, Gordon D. Marino, and Hakon Rossel (Amsterdam: Rodopi) 2000, 85-98 who sees the women addressed in the *Upbuilding Discourses* as proto-apostolic.

[200]See Sylvia Agacinski, *Aparté: Conceptions and Deaths of Søren Kierkegaard*, trans. Kevin Newmark. (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1988). This necessary but disparaging view of women by Kierkegaard is often the conclusion of women/feminist readers.

[201]It is possible that the reason that Kierekgaard's oft-noted relationship to Regina Olsen ended with a separation was due to Kierkegaard's inability to reconcile his view of the feminine and his relationship with a female. See Joakim Garff's *Søren Kierkegaard: A*

point out that the masculine should not use its strength to subject the feminine shows that such subjection was often the reality.[202] The preference of masculine over feminine precipitates the assumption that the masculine is the normative experience and the feminine is other. As Simon de Beauvoir concludes in *The Second Sex,* woman is the other of man because man is self in most cultures, governments, etc.[203] Most of the masculine characteristics deal with positivity while the feminine deal with negativity. This definition of woman as other assumes a negative space between woman and the whole of a masculine-dominated world. For a man, ironic living is separation between (him)self and the aggregate other of society. If woman is man's other then for a woman ironic living can be seen as separation between other (herself) and other (man).

The relationship between masculine and feminine in the opening paragraph of *The Concept of Irony* is portrayed as an opposite pair or complementary opposites. For most opposite pairs, the elements represent two poles of one category. Hot and cold are opposites of temperature, low and high are opposites of space, near and far are opposites of distance, weak and strong are opposites of power. Like these opposite pairs, male and female are opposites within a category, the category of humanity. Most types of human characteristics are divided along masculine and feminine lines and the division shows a preference of the masculine characteristics as positive and self making the feminine characteristics negative and other. Submissiveness is generally considered to be a

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Biography, trans Bruce H. Kirmmse (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1984 for a treatment of Kierkegaard's life including his relationship to Regina Olsen.

[202]Despite the respect for the feminine that this statement suggests it does seem that the motive for leaving the phenomenon inviolate is for the benefit of the masculine to obtain the full fruit of the feminine rather than for the benefit or right of the feminine.

[203]See Simon de Beauvoir, "Women and Creativity," trans. Roisin Malyghan in *French Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.) 1989, 17-32.

characteristic of the feminine with the masculine opposite being aggressiveness. A few other characteristics that are generally divided into masculine and feminine opposite pairs are rational/emotional, *chronos/kairos*, language/silence[204], competitive/nurturing, revealed/veiled, active/passive, assertive/compliant, commanding/obedient.[205] This separation of male and female into opposites within a category dates to many mythological accounts of the creation, including the account in Genesis. According to the Biblical account of the creation, God created all types of living things both male and female.[206] That account shows both the proximity of the sexes because both are the same in type, and the separation of them because each is created separately. While many types of animals are mentioned (birds, fishes, creeping things), the only distinction within a category is that of male and female.

It seems reasonable that the need to distinguish the creation of male and female within each category is at least partially due to the anatomical differences of the sexes.

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[204]It may initially seems strange to assign language to a masculine category and silence to a feminine category because it often seems, at least in modern culture, that women speak more than men. The feminist theory based on a Lacanian model of an infant's development is that an infant's world is first ruled by the maternal and characterized by silence because the baby cannot speak (a subject that will be taken up later). Another reason that silence is associated with the feminine sphere is because it is one reaction to the inadequacy of language to express many experiences of the human condition. Another attempt to compensate for the inadequacy of language is by speaking in as many ways and with as many words as possible to approach something outside of language. Both silence and verbosity can be seen as feminine reactions to the inherent boundaries of language.

[205]Of course these are very broad categories and statements that within any given circumstance may not apply. However, the persistence of so many cultures to similarly identify masculine and feminine characteristics suggests an inherent shared premiss. Whether that premiss has been propagated because it was conceived by men who wanted to maintain dominance or because it is an accurate view of the differences between the sexes will always remain impossible to discern.

[206]Genesis 1:27.

Many of the characteristics deemed either masculine or feminine follow along the lines suggested by anatomy. In a literal sense the most distinctive biological features that separate male and female associate the masculine with positive space and the feminine with negative space. The male phallus is the positive space, and the female vagina and uterus is the negative space. The English word *vagina* pronounced in Latin as wah-gee-nah, originally meant "sheath."[207] Understandably the Latin word *gladius*, which means sword, also means phallus. The duel meaning of *gladius* show the connotation of the masculine sphere to power, action, dominance, and positivity.[208] On the other (hand) the word *vagina* demonstrates how the feminine sphere provides the negative space (for the masculine), and the connotation to being submissive, passive, and dominated. It is the walls of the vagina, i.e. the positive space, which binds the negative space and gives the negative space its meaning.

While the positive elements, the phallus and the walls of the vagina, are specifically masculine and feminine, it is the negative space of the *vagina* that sexually binds and separates the two. This means that the relationship between the sexes is precisely one of irony. It is the negative (ironic) space between the positive elements that constantly attracts and constantly separates the elements. While the negative space itself is neither feminine or masculine, it is the structure of the feminine that provides the negative space, which creates both difference and union between the sexes. The negative

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[207]*Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Ed. P.G.W. Glare (New York : Oxford University Press) 1982, 2004. See also J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 20, 115, and 219 for the use of *vagina* and *gladius*.
[208]According to Lacan the phallus is the transcendental signifier.

space, which makes the relationship between the sexes ironic, is contained in the feminine sphere.

The relationship between the sexes is ironic not only, or even predominately, because of the anatomical negative space between them. Rather it is how the negative space can be overcome and create meaning that makes the relationship ironic. I previously discussed that Kierkegaard's example of the magnets suspending Mohammed's coffin shows how an ironic relationship can be a separation that binds. I then suggested that the opposite example is also one of irony. When the magnets are turned so that they are bound to each other, it is their union that separates them. The sexual relationship between the masculine and feminine parallels the example of the magnets that attract each other. The male and female elements are opposites that are attracted to each other. The negative space contained in the feminine sphere allows for the union of the opposites. When the magnetic force attracting the magnets binds them together, the point of union is also the point of separation. It is actually in the moment of union that the two opposites remain separate. When the phallus enters the vagina, the union between masculine and feminine is created. However, like the magnets, the expression of union also defines the separation. Though the magnets or flesh can be unified, the boundaries are never overcome because the edge of the magnet or the flesh still separates the elements from each other.

Additionally, it is the shared union that also defines the difference of the separate experiences. The joined experience fills the ironic space between the sexes, but it also accentuates the difference between the sexes. The penetration of the phallus into the vagina is the most distinctly masculine experience, and the vagina's acceptance of the

phallus is the most distinctly feminine experience.[209] It is the very act that creates the closest union that also most fully separates them into the opposites of masculine and feminine. Male and female are never more unified than during intercourse, but they are also never more defined in their difference. The negative space within the feminine creates the ironic separation between the sexes, but the same negative space when filled creates an ironic union between the sexes. The very irony that makes the relationship between the sexes possible also creates irony by the union.

Although I have made an argument for an ironic relationship between the spheres of masculine and feminine that should not be ignored, I am not suggesting that biology and theory are the same. Returning to biological facts can help readers understand the possibilities of the relationship between masculine and feminine. Theory as a subject is prone to becoming more abstract until it sometimes renders itself useless. By harnessing the masculine abstract (i.e. absent) tendencies of theory with the feminine presence of the body, theory can gain the benefit of both masculine and feminine spheres. Because of the association of the feminine with the maternal body some of feminist literature strives to "write the body."[210] This recognition of the basic separation of masculine and feminine should ground feminist literary, but it should not make theory exclusive to male or female anatomy. The spheres of masculine and feminine are not essentially biological

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[209]Even in the case of Tiresias, he could not have both experiences at once. He could only have a female experience with female anatomy or a male experience with male anatomy. It was only after both experiences that he could compare them.

[210]Hélène Cixous is famous for suggestion that woman need to "write herself." See, for example, "The Laugh of the Medusa" trans Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen in *Critical Theory Since 1965* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press) 1986, 309-320.

categories nor can theoretical concepts be reduced to biological essentialism.[211] The differences between the sexes needs to be recognized for mutual gain rather than exploited for power of one over the other. Instead of competition between categories the categories should represent complementary opposites (or maybe even ironically complementary others) of one single category, which is humanity. The technical name for the species is *homo sapiens* meaning "perceiving man." In its taxonomy humanity distinguishes itself from animal life by his ability to think and understand. It is the ability of humanity to be self-consciously aware of its own existence and condition that defines it. Since all humans, male or female, are subject to the human condition they share the difficulty of that condition. Because both males and females live jointly in patriarchal, masculine-dominated society each must use irony to become a self.

[211]See Toril Moi *What is a Woman? And Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1999, where she discusses the problems of translating French feminist theory into English. She delineates how in French there is only one word that means both female and feminine. In English female is a noun that means a body with female anatomy, and feminine is an adjective which means pertaining to females.

Chapter 6

The *Foeminini Generis*, Irony, and Faith

From the perspective that the masculine and feminine are related through irony and that the most meaning is found in both the separation/difference and the proximity/union of them, we return to Kierkegaard and the problem of faith. I previously argued that irony is a prerequisite for faith because faith requires the ironic separation of self and other in order to establish a relationship to the absolute. Faith also requires a separation from (masculine) actuality to create a closer proximity to the absolute. Since faith seems to be unable to exist in the actuality of a masculine, patriarchal world, I would like to suggest that irony provides the necessary separation from actuality or *Standpunkt* to access the feminine characteristics essential to faith. The irony prerequisite to faith is contained, but not defined, by the feminine sphere and provides access to the feminine characteristics required for faith. To illustrate how this theoretical perspective can offer interesting possibilities in *Fear and Trembling*, I would first like to compare the passage about the Virgin Mary to a passage from "The Seducer's Diary" in *Either/Or*, and second to examine the weaning passages in the "Exordium" of *Fear and Trembling*.

Mary is comparable to Abraham because Abraham committed to kill his son in order to obey God, and Mary chose to bear an illegitimate son in order to obey God. In this way, both figures had to suspend the ethical and rely on faith. Both decisions moved them away from the ethical sphere and required a movement suspending them between actuality and ideality. When discussing Abraham, Johannes refers to this movement as

"Troens Bevægelse [the movement of faith]" and as "Springet [the leap].[212] Though the phrase "a leap of faith" does not occur in the Kierkegaardian corpus, that phrase is often used to describe the type of movement that Johannes calls "the movement of faith."[213] The movement cannot be thought of as a transition made by walking or even running because both of those suggest that the person can keep their[214] feet in contact with the ground and that the ground remains beneath them. Instead the leap requires a suspension in negative space between differing elements. If the phrase "of faith" is interpreted as an appositional phrase instead of as a phrase describing means, then the phrase "a leap of faith" could be appropriately used in reference to Kierkegaard because it is a leap that is a movement and the movement itself is faith. It is the assumption that "of faith" should be read "by means of faith" suggesting that faith is something like a trampoline to jump from that is not appropriate to Kierkegaard's works. In this way, the leap is a movement into ironic space.

In "The Seducer's Diary" the seducer reaches a point at which he can no longer move the relationship forward, and the next movement can only be provided by the maiden. A detailed discussion of "The Seducer's Diary," much less the entirety of *Either/Or* is far beyond the scope of this thesis. However, this passage can effectively

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[212] *KSV*, 1893, 1895; *FT*, 37, 41.

[213] M. Jamie Ferreira, "Faith and the Kierkegaardian Leap," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 207-234 discusses Kierkegaard's "theory of the leap." He discusses how the phrase "a leap of faith" is not ever found in the Kierkegaardian corpus, but also justifies its use when understood not as a leap by means of faith, but a "leap to faith."

[214] I am aware that the antecedent is singular, but since the antecedent is also sexually ambiguous purposely because the person refers to Abraham or Many or any other man or woman who has to take a leap of faith, it would defeat the point of that ambiguity to use a masculine pronoun. I therefore have chosen to use the singular "their" even though it is not yet an accepted form.

exemplify the nature of the Kierkegaardian idea of a leap. Probing the meaning of the Kierkegaardian leap will then offer some illumination to our discussion of faith, irony, and the *foeminini generis*. "The Seducer's Diary" offers an interesting commentary on the relationship between masculine and feminine, not least because it is arguably the most misogynistic text in the corpus (and possibly a much wider field than that).[215] In the diary, Cordelia, the object of seduction, is so objectified that she "becomes Johannes' own creation. . .[and] agency and autonomy are denied her."[216] At least from Johannes the seducer's point of view, in the relationship between him and Cordelia "the jingling of spurs and the voice of the master" are the defining characteristics. Johannes the seducer[217] assumes that his masculine position is the normative and authoritative one. Johannes' assumption of the relationship between masculine and feminine is the type of assumption addressed in *The Second Sex*. Johannes is the self and Cordelia is his other. Johannes' pursuit of Cordelia is to assimilate the other into himself.

In his diary Johannes the seducer explains how the maiden makes a leap by referencing a folktale. According to the folktale, there is a ravine named *Jomfruspring* or Maiden's leap, so named because a maiden can leap over its vast chasm. Johannes compares this impossible leap to the movement he needs from Cordelia. The movement must come from the maiden, and he describes the movement in detail saying,

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[215] Duran, 250-253 discusses "The Seducer's Diary" and its misogynist tone commenting that "there is little about either of these works [the Seducer's Diary and the Immediate Stages of the Erotic] that signifies to us that anything other than the most extreme objectification is to come of Kierkegaard's attempts to deal with notions of the feminine."

[216] Duran, 251.

[217] Because both the author of *Fear and Trembling* and the protagonist of "The Seducer's Diary" are named Johannes I will distinguish them by using the phrase Johannes the seducer for the Johannes from the diary and Johannes for the author of *FT*.

Hendes Sjæl maa bevæges, agiteres i alle mulige Retninger, ikke imidlertid stykkeviis og for Kastevinde, men totalt. Hun maa opdage det Uendelige, erfare, at det er det, der ligger et Menneske nærmest. Dette maa hun opdage, ikke ad Tankens Vei, der for hende er en Afvei, men I Phantasien, der er den egentlige Communication mellem hende og mig; thi hvad der er Deel hos Manden, det er det Hele hos Qvinden. Ikke ad Tankens moisommelige Vei skal hun arbeide sig hen til det Uendelige; thi Qvinden er ikke født til Arbeide, men ad Phantasiens og Hjertets lette Vei skal hun gribe det. Det uendelige er en ung Pige ligesaa naturligt som den Forestilling, at al Kjærlighed maa være lykkelig. En ung Pige har overalt, hvor hun vender dig hen, Uendeligheden om sig, og Overgangen er et Spring, men vel at mærke, et qvindeligt, ikke et mandligt. Hvor er dog i Almindelighed Mændene saa kloderagtige. Naar de skulle springe, saa skulle de tage Tilløb, gjøre lange Forberedelser, maale Afstanden med Øiet, flere Gange løbe til: bilve skye og vende tilbarge igjen. Endelig springe de of falde i. En ung Pige springer paa en anden Maade. I Bjerg-Egne træffer man ofte tvende fremragende ned i. Ingen Mand vover dette Spring. En ung Pige derimod, saa fortælle Egnens Beboere, har vovet det, og man kalder det Jomfru-Spring. Jeg troer det gjerne, som jeg troer alt Udmærket om en ung Pige, og det er mig en Beruselse at høre de enfoldige Beboere tale

derom. Jeg troer Alt, troer det Vidunderlige, forbauses deraf blot for at troe; som det Eneste, der har forbauset mig i Verden, er en ung Pige, det Første og bliver det Sidste. Og dog er et saadant Spring for en ung Pige kun et Hop, mdeens Mandens Spring altid bliver latterligt, fordi, hvor langt han end skræver ud, hans Anstrængelse paa eengang bliver Intet i Forhold til Toppenes Afstand og dog afgiver en Art Maalestok. Men hvo kunde være saa taabelig at tænke sig en ung Pige tage Tilløb? Man kan vel tænke sig hende lobende, men da er denne Løben selv en Leeg, en Nydelse, en udfordelse af Ynde, hvorimod Forestillingen om et Tilløb adskiller hvad der hører sammen hos Qvinden. Et Tilløb har nemlig det Dialektiatter her være uskjøn nok til at adskille hvad der hører sammen! Hendes Spring er en Svæven. Og naar hun da er kommen over til den anden Side, da staær hun atter der, ikke udmattet af Anstrængelse, men skjønnere end ellers, sjælfuldere, hun kaster et Kys over til os, som staæ paa denne Side. Ung, nyfødt, som en Blomst, der er skudt op af Bjergets Rod, gynger hun sig ud over Dybet, saa det næsten sortner for vort Øie.- - - Hvad hun maa lære, er at gjøre alle Uendelighedens Bevægelser, at gynge sig selv, at vugge sig i Stemninger, at forvexle Poesi og Virkelighed, Sandhed og Digt, at tumle sig i Uendelighed. Naar hun da er fortrolig med denne Tummel, sa sætter jeg det Erotiske til, da er hun hvad jeg vil og ønsker. Da er

min Tjeneste fobi, mit Arbeide, da deager jeg alle mine Seil ind, da sidder jeg ved hendes Side, det er for hendes Seil vi fare frem. Og i Sandhed, naar denne Pige først er eritisk beruset, saa kan jeg have nok at gjøre med at sidde ved Roret, for at moderere Farten, at Intet kommer for tidligt eller paa en uskjøn Maade. En Gang imellem prikker man et lille Hul paa Seilet, of i mæste Øieblik bruse vi atter frem. [Her soul must be set in motion, agitated in every possible direction; not, however, piecemeal and by sudden gusts, but totally. She must discover the infinite, experience what it is that lies nearest to man. This must she discover, not by way of thought which for her is the wrong way, but in imagination which is the real mode of communication between her and me; for what is but a part with man, is the whole with woman. Not by the toilsome labor of thought should she work toward the infinite, for woman is not born for intellectual work, but she should grasp it through imagination and the easy way of the heart. The infinite is just as naturally a part of a young girl (*pige*) as is the conception she holds that all must be love and happy. A young girl has above all, wherever she turns, the infinite about her, and the transition is a leap, but, it is well to note, a feminine not a masculine leap. Why are men so generally clumsy? When a man would leap, he first takes a run, makes lengthy preparations, measures the distance with his eye, takes several running starts, becomes afraid, and

> turns back again. A young girl leaps in a different fashion. In mountainous regions one often sees twin peaks towering above the mountain range. A yawning chasm separates them, terrible to gaze down into. No man would dare this leap. A young girl, however, so the mountain folk say, did venture it, and for this reason it is called the Maiden's Leap (*Jomfru-Spring*). . .And yet, such a leap is for a young girl only a hop, while a man's leap always becomes ridiculous, because however far he straddles, his exertion at once becomes nothing, compared with the distance between the peaks, and yet is acts as a sort of measuring stick. . . Young new-born like a flower which has shot up from the root of the mountain, she swings out over the abyss, so that it almost turns us dizzy. . . .What she must learn is to go through all the movements of infinity, to sway, to lull herself through moods, to confuse poetry and reality, truth and romance, to be tossed about in the infinite. When she becomes familiar with this confusion, then I set the erotic in motion, then she becomes what I wish and desire. Then is my duty ended, my labor; then I take in my sail, then I sit by her side, and under her sail we travel forward.][218]

Johannes wants to manipulate Cordelia into taking a leap, specifically "it is well to note, a feminine not a masculine" leap. According to Johannes, if a man attempted this same

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[218] *KSV*, 1189. Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* trans. David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1959, 386-388.

leap, he would first make lengthy preparations including gauging the distance. He would then take a running start, but become afraid and stop. When he finally did jump, he would fall, never making it to the other side. Here the masculine is characterized by analysis and preparation. The man considers whether the leap is possible or impossible by measuring the distance with his eyes. He takes several running starts trying to build the momentum and courage to jump, but he cannot complete the leap. According to Johannes the seducer, in this type of movement, men are "generally clumsy" because of an inability to trust the infinite possibility against the rational expectation.

A feminine leap is very different. It is not performed after lengthy preparations. The emphasis is on the doing, the experience, not the thinking about doing or experiencing. There is no attempt to measure the distance by staring at it. The maiden does not abstract herself and objectify or analyze the situation, instead she lives it. According to Johannes, the maiden does not approach the leap by any intellectual means, but "through imagination and the easy way of the heart." The phrase "the easy way of the heart" suggests a much more emotional approach to the leap than rational. The maiden does not quantify the leap in order to know whether or not it is possible. The leap cannot be quantified because it is a matter of believing in the infinite.

This leap allows the maiden to "discover the infinite." The result of this leap is that it brings the maiden into the arms of her seducer so that he can take his sail in and "sit by her side, and under her sail we travel forward." When the leap is completed, the seducer is no longer the driving force because as he puts it, "then is my duty ended, my labor." This shows on the one hand a degradation of the feminine at the same time that it shows its necessity. The maiden is naive and unthinking, but she can do something the seducer

cannot.

In a text where Johannes the seducer is the active, rational, superior self, this particular movement can only be done by the woman. Without her specifically feminine ability, the seducer would be left without a means to continue the relationship. Interestingly enough, it is in "The Seducer's Diary," a notably misogynistic text, where the necessity of the feminine is pronounced, even though the feminine is depicted as the passive, emotional, inferior, and other. Despite the degrading perspective on women, Johannes the seducer needs the woman he seduces. In fact, Johannes depends on the feminine for his own definition of (him)self. He would not be the masculine seducer without a feminine woman to seduce. There is a significant degree of irony in Johannes' perception of that relationship because Johannes is dependent on that which he controls. Although Johannes sees the feminine as inferior to himself, he is impotent without it.

The maiden's leap over the ravine causes the maiden to be suspended in the negative space separating the sides as she leaves one actuality and enters another. For Cordelia the metaphor suggests that she is leaping from her actuality into the actuality of her seducer. Since Cordelia believes her seducer, i.e. has faith in him, she thinks that her leap will produce a happy relationship for her. In essence, she has lept from her isolated position through the ironic space separating masculine and feminine to her seducer. After she has made the leap, she becomes "erotically intoxicated" because she experiences the infinite and devotes all of herself to the relationship. Johannes says that she is now "what I wish and desire" presumably because she has completely submitted herself to him and he is now "sitting by the rudder" and controlling the relationship. The nature of the leap places the maiden in a submissive position to her seducer because she

has faith in the relationship and in her other. The maiden's faith is what makes the movement possible and is also what makes it feminine. A man can attempt the leap, but while he remains in the masculine sphere, he cannot have enough faith to complete the leap. The maiden's presence in the feminine sphere makes possible her faith in the other. The maiden separates herself from actuality, what was impossible in the masculine sphere becomes possible for in the feminine. Because she is removed from actuality and toward ideality (or what she perceives as ideality, her seducer), she completes the movement seemingly without effort.

The maiden's leap emerges as feminine in nature because it requires a person to have qualities that generally belong to a feminine sphere rather than a masculine one. The leap suspends a person in negative space between ideality and actuality, and when completed the leap transfers the person from actuality to ideality (or another actuality) and binds possibility and impossibility. It also creates a relationship between self and other that both unifies and separates. The binding and separating negative space, the relationship between ideality and actuality and the overlapping of possible and impossible suggest that the leap is ironic. The leap is an ironic movement that requires feminine characteristics to be performed.

That the same characteristics that make the leap ironic as those that make it feminine can be ascribed to the presence of irony within the feminine sphere. The defining characteristics of the feminine serve as a link between irony, faith, and the feminine sphere.

The characteristics of the maiden's leap that make it specifically feminine can

also be found in the movement Mary makes.[219] The first parallel between Mary and the maiden is that both women are maidens and virgins. In the passage describing the maiden's leap the name of the place is *Jomfru-Spring*. *Jomfru* means maiden and *spring* means leap.[220] Mary is distinguished by her title "virgin," which in Danish is *jomfru*. Like the maiden's leap, Mary's faith requires her to move to an other, in her case not just an other but the Other. She surrenders her position of an isolated being to a position of union with another being when she says, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord" (Luke 1:38). Such an expression shows her willingness to move into a union based on faith in the other. In fact, if God is considered masculine then both leaps move the feminine into a union with the masculine.[221] The movement is completed not just through an expression of faith, but more accurately by a movement that is faith.

In both cases the willingness of the leap appears to come from a trust in the other member of the relationship. A shared result of the two leaps is that both put the woman

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[219]Oliva Blanchette, "The Silencing of Philosophy" in Fear and Trembling *and* Repetition *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press) 1993, 30-32 describes faith as a movement that is related to love, expectancy, and passion. The correlation between faith, movement, and emotion is another expression of how faith is related to a leap and to feminine qualities.

[220]As in English in Danish there are two words meaning "girl of marriageable age," *pige* and *jomfru*. In the text of the Maiden's leap, the term *jomfru* which means both maiden and virgin, is not the only term used. It is the term used when naming the Maiden's leap, but it is not the generic term he uses for the girl who takes the leap. That word is *pige* which means either "girl" or "girlfriend." The difference between *pige* and *jomfru* is less technical than the distinction between maiden and virgin. The distinction in English is that a maiden has not married while a virgin has not had sex. Mary's title is *jomfru* but Johannes also refers to her as *pige*. She has acquired the title the Virgin Mary probably because she does marry and therefore is no longer a maiden even thought she is a virgin until after Jesus birth. Mary however is the only exception to a virgin not also being a maiden. Of course the reverse is not always true. Some unmarried women are no longer virgins, a circumstance that Johannes the seducer enjoys producing.

[221]Since the result of Mary's movement is her pregnancy, it is appropriate in this context, to consider God as male.

in a submissive position to her partner. A prerequisite of faith, or trust in the other, necessitates willingness to comply to the relationship and submit to the union. Even though Mary's union is not sexual like the maiden's is, it does produce a child which implies a union that remains sexual in nature or category without the actual intercourse.[222] For Cordelia the result of her leap is intercourse, which both overcomes the irony between the sexes and produces it. After the union, Johannes betrays the faith Cordelia put in him and abandons her. On the other hand, for Mary the result is a child, but instead of being desecrated, Mary remains "inviolate." As Kierkegaard suggests in the opening paragraph of *The Concept of Irony*, "Om derfor end Betragteren fører Begrebet med sig, gjælder det dog om, at Phænomenet bliver ukrænket, og at Begrebet sees tilblivende ved Phænomenet [does bring the concept along with him, it is still of great importance that the phenomenon remain inviolate and that the concept be seen as

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[222]It is well established that Mary was a maiden when she gave birth to Jesus because "Joseph knew her not" until after the birth. The need to maintain Mary's purity precipitated the Catholic doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary and the immaculate conception. The immaculate conception does not refer to Mary, but to Mary's mother so that Mary does not inherit original sin. The perpetual virginity of Mary is mention in an apocryphal writing, *The Proto-Euangelion of James* (See Charlesworth). The compulsion to preserve Mary both from being conceived sexually and conceiving sexually is the abhorrence of sex as evil in the western tradition. This prejudice is born not from scriptural sources nor from Jewish culture, but from a platonic understanding of Jewish scriptures. Without the later influences, the original Jewish context of the text would not need to preserve Mary as asexual because for the Jews sexuality was a normal, healthy, and enjoyable part of mortality. Part of the problem is the linguistic transition between Hebrew and Greek. In Greek the word used is *parthane* which does imply virginity, but the Hebrew word *Alma* carries the connotation of maiden. Without the cultural prejudice against sex, it is not necessary to exclude Mary from sexual conception. In fact, because of the symbolic importance of sex it is more fitting that the most important conception in the history of the world was the result of a sexual relationship overcoming (and defining) the irony both between the sexes and the spheres of actuality and ideality, especially since the result of the conception is the very person who bridges humanity and divinity.

coming into existence through the phenomenon]."[223] Because Mary did not have a sexual relationship with Joseph before the birth of her first-born son, she remained inviolate.[224]

Johannes the seducer stresses that the maiden did not make preparations before her leap. When the moment came the maiden did not hesitate. In a similar way, Mary chose to leap as soon as she understood that the leap was required of her. The angel's appearance and announcement seems to have been quite surprising because the angel has to reassure her to not be afraid. According to Johannes the seducer, a man cannot make the leap because even after he "first takes a run, makes lengthy preparations, measures the distance with his eye [and] takes several running starts," he still "becomes afraid and turns back." Fear is an element that inhibits a leap. But the fear that the angel quiets cannot be the fear of the leap because the angel has not yet discussed what will happen. Mary's fear stems from the shock of an angelic visitor. Once that fear is pacified, the fear that could stop her leap does not seem to be present.

After the angel's reassurance that fear is unnecessary, Mary's first reaction to the announcement is to ask how she can conceive when she is a virgin. Although one characteristic of the maiden's leap is that she does not consider whether the leap is possible or impossible before she leaps, that does not preclude her from considering other things about the leap.[225] She acts without such a question, but Cordelia spent much time

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[223]*KSV*, 139, *CI*, 9.
[224]Unlike Cordelia who put her faith in a Seducer who abandoned her, Mary puts her faith into God. Even so, was Mary less abandoned than Cordelia?
[225]The relationship of possibility and impossibility to faith is very interesting. Walsh, *Living Poetically,* 76 maintains that "Kierkegaard defined faith as *holding on to possibility* in the face of, and in spite of, seeming impossibility or absurdity" (emphasis in original)

being convinced by her seducer before she decided to make the leap.[226] Mary's question is about the possibility of conception without a sexual partner. Neither maiden considers the possibility or impossibility of the leap only about the precursors to the leap.

Another problem of possibility and impossibility that Mary accepts without inquiry is how she can survive the pregnancy to bear an illegitimate child. Since Deut. 22:22-27 says that a woman who is engaged and then found to not be a virgin should be stoned, Mary as an unmarried pregnant woman could have been put to death. Mary's execution would inevitably also kill the child she carried, but Mary does not analyze the possibility or impossibility of safely delivering the child. Instead of questioning this paradox, when the angel explains her first question, Mary responds by deciding to make the leap of faith with her statement, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord."

Inherent in the maiden's leap is a trust in the other and willingness to submit. Mary's statement acknowledges her acceptance of unconditional trust in the other and willingness to submit to the union and its consequences. As Johannes de Silentio points out, that Mary was favored does not make her great because a favor could apply to anyone. Her greatness comes from her willingness to submit and be faithful. In both cases, the faith shown is based on something subjective rather than objective.[227] Part of

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[226]Celine Leon, "(A) woman's Place Within the Ethical" in *Feminist Interpretations of Søren Kierkegaard*. Eds. Celine Leon and Sylvia Walsh (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press,) 1997, 103-130 discusses how Judge William views women. Though the maiden is part of the Seducer's Diary and not part of Judge William's letters, she fits the ethical sphere more than the aesthetic.

[227]Generally, in the Western world objectivity is privileged over subjectivity much like the rational and empirical are favored over the emotional and spiritual. This bias can be argued to be a result of the domination of the masculine and the inherent supremacy of masculine qualities. For a discussion of subjectivity and objectivity in Kierkegaard see Sylvia Walsh "Subjectivity versus Objectivity: Kierkegaard's *Postscript* and feminist Epistemology" in *Feminist Interpretations of Søren Kierkegaard*, eds. Celine Leon and

this subjectivity comes from the emotions such as trust, love, and the expectance of reciprocation that seem to be part of the relationship.[228] Johannes the seducer describes the maiden's leap as a discovery of "the infinite." The leap allows the maiden to leave the finite, objective (masculine) sphere and experience the infinite, emotional (feminine) sphere. For Mary who was "overshadowed" by the "highest" the removal from her own actuality was literal rather than figurative. Mary moved from the actuality of her own mortality into the ideality of God's immortality.

Another similar characteristic that the two maidens share is how they react to the leap and its consequences. For Cordelia the result of the leap was the completion of the seduction, the consequent abandonment by Johannes the seducer, and Cordelia's reflection on the relationship, its meaning and result. Though Johannes the seducer believes that thinking is not part of the feminine sphere, reflection is a result of the leap. The feminine bases the moment of decision on something other than intellect, but she does reflect after. When she reflects her reflection includes the feminine element of emotion that is absent from the abstract masculine reflection of Johannes the seducer. Although Johannes' diary does not record anything after the seduction, Victor Eremita

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Sylvia Walsh (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press) 1997,103-130.

[228] David J. Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1996, 152 states "faith in the Christian context is closer to 'expecting,' 'hoping,' and 'loving'" and that "faith is what is needed by my *heart*, my *soul*, not my speculative intelligence." These qualities fit a feminine nature of faith. This is also part of the reason that Christianity is sometimes considered "absurd" because it relies on things that cannot be quantified or explained. According to John Heywood Thomas "Christianity as Absurd" in *The Sources and Depths of Faith in Kierkegaard*. Bibliotheca Kierkegaardina 2. eds. Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulova Thulstrup (Copenhagen: Reitzels) 1978, 58-61 "religious faith is absurd" not because it signifies "the adoption of an irrationalism" but because the philosophies of religion could not describe it.

found letters from Cordelia to Johannes with the diary. Those letters are reproduced at the beginning of the diary and show that Cordelia did reflect on her experience. For Johannes the relationship was complete after the leap and consummation. For Cordelia, the relationship is not complete. Having made the leap to Johannes' actuality, Johannes leaves her stranded with no relationship in the new actuality and no immediate way to return.[229] This causes her a great deal of reflection on the relationship and its meanings. Her reflection is not the abstract reflection that characterizes Johannes thinking. It is more of an inward reflection on her emotions and feelings, characteristics much more associated with the feminine sphere than the masculine.

For Mary, the result of the union was a child. This left Mary to reflect on her experience as she "kept these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). This reflection by Mary also seems to be part of the feminine because Mary does not ponder them in her mind or that she abstracted herself in order to objectify and analyze the situation. Mary pondered her experience in her heart; she did not analyze it, quantify it, or itemize it. Mary also "kept these things." Her experience and ponderings were hers alone and she did not share them with anyone else.[230]

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[229]Presumably since the maiden made the leap once she can make it again, but probably only under the right circumstances. The ability to make the initial leap came from faith in her seducer. With her faith having been misplaced she likely would not have the ability to leap again.

[230]Inwardness is an important characteristic of faith which Mary seems to embody. For a discussion of that topic see F. Sontag "Inwardness" in *The Sources and Depths of Faith in Kierkegaard*. Bibliotheca Kierkegaardina 2. eds. Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulova Thulstrup (Copenhagen: Reitzels) 1978, 105-113. Some readers (Taylor and Walsh) use *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* to show that "feminine inwardness" is a lesser inwardness. This distinction could be applied to Mary, but then it should also probably apply to Abraham.

Johannes the seducer sees the heart as the "easy way" perhaps because it does not require the effort of logical thinking and ability to abstract oneself and objectify the situation. Johannes de Silentio seems to see the way of the heart as the harder way because it cannot depend on rationalization and ""Ham kan Betragteren slet ikke forstaae [The observer cannot understand him at all]."[231] The only person who can understand is the one choosing to be faithful. When a person can rely on logic, it is easy to explain choices to others; when a person relies on faith, no explanation can be given and so the faithful person remains in silence.[232] As Johannes de Silentio points out, the angel did not explain to everyone and say, "foragter ikke Maria, hændes det Overordentlige [Do not scorn Mary, the extraordinary is happening to her"[233] Mary did not have a logical excuse to explain why she was pregnant, she had only her leap of faith. Similarly Abraham had no explanation why he was taking Isaac to the mountain without an animal sacrifice.

At least in the case of Mary and Abraham, not only does faith not offer rational explanations, it asks the person to suspend themselves between the possible and impossible. While both Mary and Abraham pondered and reflected on the difficulties that faith required, their decision to be faithful had to be based on something foreign to the masculine world because in either case (or Cordelia's for that matter), faith was not a good business decision or a practical decision or even a logical one. Abraham was endangering his own posterity through sacrifice; Mary was endangering her own life

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[231]*KSV*, 1933; *FT*, 60.
[232]Blanchette, 63-66 discusses how prominent silence is in *Fear and Trembling* and how it causes philosophy to silence itself when philosophy encounters faith.
[233]*KSV*, 1939; *FT*, 65.

(which when pregnant was also the life of her child and her posterity) through pregnancy. It is only through the characteristics of the feminine that a person is able to make a leap, a leap that is faith. The leap is a movement of faith, which suspends a self in the negative space contained within the feminine sphere, which space creates the ironic relationship between masculine and feminine. It is this irony that separates the sexes. It also makes possible the union of the sexes, and within that union defines them as male or female.

The ability to access feminine characteristics is not provided by biology but by irony. Because the human condition applies to men and women alike it includes both the spheres of feminine and masculine and allows access of both spheres to male and female. The leap is feminine because it represents feminine characteristics and a movement like the maiden's leap. It would unfair to say that women cannot be rational, analytical, or empirical. Likewise it would be unfair to say that men cannot be emotional, faithful, or spiritual. Although the leap's characteristics are feminine and therefore perhaps more easily accessed by females, the categories of masculine and feminine are not biologically essential. It is irony that allows a separation from masculine actuality and makes possible an engagement of the feminine sphere. Since all humanity, both males and females, live in a masculine society, anyone whether male or female must become separated from the masculine sphere through irony in order to access the feminine sphere. Perhaps it is easier for a woman to access the feminine sphere because she is already partially marginalized from the masculine sphere because and already associated with the characteristics that define her gender. However, even women who appreciate the difference of feminine and masculine still live in a masculine world so that irony is needed to engage certain concepts such as faith.

The obvious examples that any characteristic in either the masculine or feminine category can be felt, used, or appreciated by someone either male or female are Socrates and Abraham. The first half of this thesis discussed Socratic irony and the second half argued that irony is contained in the feminine sphere. I also argued that Abraham had to live ironically before he could have faith, an element contained in the feminine sphere. I cannot very well argue that the categories of masculine and feminine are biologically essential if I have already argued that two males, Socrates and Abraham, have not only engaged an idea from the feminine sphere, but embody it. However, I also maintain that there is a significant, complex, opposite, and complementary relationship between the feminine and masculine. The reason that some modes of living such as irony or faith are so difficult to find and maintain may be because anyone (male or female) who wants to pursue them must create some separation from the masculine, patriarchally-ruled world to engage them. Therefore, faith emerges as feminine because it requires a person to have qualities that generally belong to a feminine sphere rather than a masculine one. Both had to create an ironic separation between self and other, and an ironic proximity between actuality and ideality in order to produce a mode of living that could allow faith.

Chapter 7

Irony, the Feminine, and the Maternal

Now the discussion turns from the relationship of irony, faith, and the feminine to the relationship between irony, the maternal, and faith. For this discussion we return to the weaning passages mentioned in the first half of the thesis, which follow each of the accounts of the imagined Abrahams. When discussing these passages in the context of the *Stemning* as a whole, I suggested that they are designed to stun the reader into considering the ironic play in the text, but the ironic possibilities of the text can be advanced far beyond shock value. Each of the four weaning passages is concerned with the stage of motherhood when the mother weans the child from her body's milk. The weaning passages follow each of the four narratives about the imagined Abrahams and imply a comparison between the weaning mother and Abraham. Although the comparison between the weaning mother and Abraham does yield some interpretive possibilities, it cannot explain many questions that the weaning passages raise.

The weaning passages have received little attention usually because they are explained away as personal messages to Regina Olsen. Such a reading suggests that Kierkegaard had to wean Regina of her relationship with him (or that he had to be weaned from Regina).[234] While this reading is possible, even if the passages do contain an autobiographical message, it would be very surprising for them to have no other purpose in the text. Against this position Linda Williams claims "Kierkegaard was too gifted a writer to simply leave these passages as thinly veiled explanations and apologies

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[234]Williams, 310-311.

for his own actions."[235] Another commentator, Edward Mooney concludes that the weaning passages are "moral-of-the-story appendages" to the Abraham accounts, a reading that does offer some useful insights.[236] Mooney suggests that the weaning passages explain why each Abraham story does not illuminate the biblical story. He explains the weaning passages as illustrations of a theme he calls "giving up and getting back."[237] A mother has to give up the intimate relationship of nursing her child in order to get a child back in a new and mature relationship.[238] Though the theme of giving up and giving back is certainly present in and appropriate to *Fear and Trembling*, there are other elements of the weaning passages that do not seem to be illustrating the theme of giving up and giving back because the "giving up and giving back" of the weaning passage does not correspond to the "giving up and giving back" of the Abraham story. Upon closer examination there are both congruence and disparity between the Abraham story and the weaning paragraph. Instead of a clear lesson related to the story, which is what would be expected from a moral-of-the-story statement, the weaning passages only partially relate to the emotion attributed to Abraham (or Isaac) or to the emotion attributed to the mother (or child).

The weaning passages may also contain an allusion to scriptures. Isa. 28:9, 1 Cor. 3:2, and Heb. 5:12 are all passages comparing a infant's transition from milk to meat to a believer's transition from beginning doctrine to faith.[239] A mother's milk is very

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[235]Williams, 311.
[236]Mooney, 30.
[237]Mooney, 31.
[238]Mooney, 31.
[239]1 Corinthians 3:2 γάλα ὑμᾶς ἐπότισα, οὐ βρῶμα, οὔπω γὰρ ἐδύνασθε. ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ἔτι νῦν δύνασθε [I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able *to bear it*, neither yet now are ye able]. Hebrews 5:12 καὶ γὰρ ὀφείλοντες εἶναι

nutritious, easy to swallow, and easy to digest. For an infant whose digestive system has never before been used, mother's milk provides the best nourishment with relatively little work so that the infant's system is able to absorb the nutrients needed for growth. For a certain period the mother's milk provides everything the child needs. However, after the infant has grown enough the mother's milk is no longer sufficient to sustain the child's. If the child is to continue to grow and thrive, it must begin to eat solid foods. The suggestion from these scriptures is that when a person first comes to believe, like an infant he first needs nutrition that is easy to digest. He is taught with simple principles and general concepts so that he is not overwhelmed. As the new believer matures, he transitions from the simple ideas that are easy to swallow to beliefs that require much more work and strength in order to be able to stomach. The original nourishment is not sufficient to support the believer's growth. Without more substantial nourishment the believer cannot continue to grow.

This metaphor can be further expanded because the scriptures do not suggest only that the child be weaned from the mother's milk, but also that the child learn to eat meat.[240] In the range of food that humans eat, meat is one of the most difficult to digest.

διδάσκαλοι διὰ τὸν χρόνον, πάλιν χρείαν ἔχετε τοῦ διδάσκειν ὑμᾶς τινὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τῆς ἀρχῆς τῶν λογίων τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ γεγόνατε χρείαν ἔχοντες γάλακτος [καὶ] οὐ στερεᾶς τροφῆς [For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat].

Isaiah 49:15: הֲתִשְׁכַּח אִשָּׁה עוּלָהּ מֵרַחֵם בֶּן־בִּטְנָהּ גַּם־אֵלֶּה תִשְׁכַּחְנָה וְאָנֹכִי לֹא אֶשְׁכָּחֵךְ׃

[Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. μὴ ἐπιλήσεται γυνὴ τοῦ παιδίου αὐτῆς τοῦ μὴ ἐλεῆσαι τὰ ἔκγονα τῆς κοιλίας αὐτῆς εἰ δὲ καὶ ἐπιλάθοιτο ταῦτα γυνή ἀλλ' ἐγὼ οὐκ ἐπιλήσομαί σου εἶπεν κύριος]

[240]Although in the KJV translation of 1 Cor. and Hebrews reads "meat," it is not necessarily the meat of an animal. This is the more general use of the word "meat," which refers to any food that is solid rather than liquid. The two passages each use a

Although the Greek words used in 1 Cor 3:2 and Heb 5:12 do not refer explicitly to the flesh of an animal, animal flesh is included in the idea of βρῶμα and τροφή. That the meat of an animal is included in the idea of βρῶμα seems clear from a passage in John 6. In verse 55 Jesus makes the statement "mou sark. . ." The words βρῶμα and brosis share a root and both mean solid food. The distinction between them lies in connotation. While βρῶμα means food or nourishment generally, brosis is more specifically food or a meal.[241] Despite the minor difference between the words, their primary shared definition suggests that flesh, even sacrificial flesh, is included in their meanings.

If the meat or "stronger sustenance" referenced in 1 Cor, Hebrews, or the weaning passages, the metaphor becomes even more significant because the meat that was eaten in the ancient world was often the meat from a sacrifice. Specifically in the case of the Jews, the priests would sacrifice an animal on an altar, burn a portion of the body, and the rest would be eaten. The suggestion that a believer needs to eat meat may be very explicit if the meat referenced is meat from the altar. Since the sacrifice of animals is a symbol of the sacrifice of God, the meat actually eaten is the flesh of the sacrificed God.

This interpretation would have significance to the story of Abraham because it suggests that Abraham was ready to make a transition from speculative belief to actual faith. For Abraham to learn to eat meat he had to sacrifice his own son on the altar. Although this interpretation also adds interesting possibilities to the interpretation of the

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different word, which were both translated as "meat."

[241]See Baur, 184 for βρῶμα. See Baur 1017 for τροφῆς. The passage in Heb 5:12 may also refer more specifically to flesh because it uses the word "στερεᾶς" meaning "strong or firm" to describe the "τροφῆς."

weaning passages,[242] it only explains a general relationship of Abraham to weaning not the specific relationship of the imagined Abraham's to the corresponding weaning passage. It also does not explain why the emphasis of the weaning passages is not on learning to eat other food but on the weaning from the mother's milk and the relationship between the mother and her child. To further consider why the emphasis of the passages is on the relationship between mother and child the passages need to be read ironically.

That each Abraham story and its accompanying weaning paragraph must be understood together is evident from their placement on the same page under the same Roman numeral. However, in each of the four versions the weaning passage is separated from the Abraham story by a blank line. There is nothing to explain the reason for the shift in topic or the relationship of the two passages leaving the reader to interpret the negative space (literally in this case) between the two. Like the four passages as a whole, the weaning paragraphs follow a shared structure. Each begins with a variation of the statement "when the child is to be weaned;" each describes some emotion associated with weaning; each concludes with a statement of "how fortunate" a certain situation of weaning is. Each weaning passage is both joined to and separated from the Abraham story above it, and the four weaning passages are all associated with and separated from each other.

The most obvious correlation between the Abraham stories and the weaning passages is that they both deal with the relationship between a parent and a child, a father's relationship to his child on the one hand and the mother's relationship to her

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[242]To my knowledge the relationship of weaning to the meat of sacrifice has not been explored by readers of *Fear and Trembling*, which I found quite surprising.

child on the other.[243] It is the mother's relationship to her child that is the substance of the weaning passage, and the placement of the maternal presence also calls to mind the presence of Sarah who is mentioned at the beginning of each Abraham story. Because Sarah is one of the few elements that is repeated in all four accounts, the whole story of Abraham and Isaac becomes bracketed by a maternal presence. Sarah provides the opening bracket and the weaning passage provides the closing bracket.[244] More specifically than just the presence of a mother, the separation from the maternal creates the bracket. Sarah is mentioned in each account as the one being left by Abraham and Isaac just as in the weaning passages it is the separation from the mother that is emphasized. Interestingly enough, the maternal presence that is pronounced here is a silent presence. Sarah does not speak nor does the mother weaning her child. Like Mary or Abraham whose silence was a necessary circumstance of faith, here it is the maternal that is present but silent.[245] This silence is in contrast to when Sarah laughed upon

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[243] The separation from the maternal is a critical transition in Lacanin theory and in French feminist theory. However, these theories focus on the experience of the child who is part of a maternal world and is making a transition to a paternal world. Though these theories acknowledge the importance of the maternal experience, they do not investigate it for itself but only for its importance to the child. This thesis turns the attention to the experience of the mother in order to understand more fully the possibilities and implications of the theory of a pre-oedipal maternal sphere. The French feminist theory appeals to me (more than American feminist theory) because it explores more of the complexities and difficulties of feminist theory, epistemology, and politics. These difficulties are articulated well by Tori Moi in *What is a Woman?* as well as in *Sexual/Texual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* and in the introduction of *Feminist Interpretations of Søren Kierkegaard* by Céline Léon and Sylvia Walsh. See Appendix C for a discussion of feminist criticism.

[244]See Derrida, 76. Because of the lack of a feminine presence Derrida asks, "Does the system of this sacrificial responsibility and the double 'gift of death' imply at its very basis an exclusion or sacrifice of woman?" Derrida, 77 then quotes Hegel and asks whether woman is "the eternal irony of the community"?

[245]French theorists and their successors tend to focus more on the experience of the feminine and a discussion of what both what it means to be female, what the value of the

hearing that she would bear a child, a detail of the story that Johannes mentions in the "Eulogy on Abraham."[246] If Sarah did not believe then and laughed, but now she believes and like Abraham is silent, then Sarah's faith becomes an implicit part of the story.[247] The maternal presence here is also noteworthy because neither Sarah nor a weaning mother is mentioned anywhere else in *Fear and Trembling*.[248]

In addition to providing a closing bracket of maternal presence, the weaning mother can be compared to Abraham and God. In some ways the comparison is between

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feminine is, and how to read texts not only in terms of the use of female characters but also in the style of writing and the understanding of language. Even though both movements have been politically oriented French feminism is founded on the theories of Jacques Lacan and others who investigated the nature of language and is more theoretically based as a result. By appropriating theories of language Julia Kristeva, Lucy Iragary, and Helene Cixious and others have written about the difference of the maternal sphere from the paternal sphere. Central to these theories are Freud's Oedipal complex and the pre-Oedipal maternal experience. The Oedipal break forces an infant to the patriarchal world. This break from maternal to patriarchal is located in the onset of language. Because language serves as the catalyst to indoctrinate the child in the patriarchal system, language remains insufficient to fully express or access the maternal sphere. Even of these theorists of whom some (Cixcious) see the feminist project as "writing the body," most still deal with the maternal theoretically and only in respect to how a child experiences the world. One notable exception is Julia Kristeva who discusses the maternal experience more specifically. See "Motherhood according to Giovanni Bellini" in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 237-270. This article opens with a general discussion of the maternal and focuses on how Giovanni Bellini depicts Mary and the infant Jesus.

[246]*KSV*, 1870; *FT*, 19.

[247]For Johannes Abraham's silence includes keeping his plan to sacrifice Isaac from Sarah. In Jewish tradition, Sarah seems to have anticipated the situation. When Abraham tells Sarah that he is taking Isaac to teach him about God, Sarah agrees. She then calls Isaac to her and has him stay with her overnight and in the morning Sarah weeps because she wonders if she will ever see her son again. See Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, trans. Henriett Szold (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 1998, 274-276.

[248]Sarah is mentioned briefly in the "Preliminary Expectoration" and in "*Problema* III," but in relationship to Abraham rather than her relationship to Isaac. Mooney, 30 notes that her presence is lacking in the rest of the work but still concludes that "the archetype of *maternal nurturance* to be fundamental to faith" (italics in original).

Abraham weaning Isaac to the mother weaning her child. In other ways the comparison seems more likely to be God weaning Abraham as a mother weans her child.[249] In order to examine these comparisons more closely, I have given the basic account of Abraham in parentheses with the complete correlating passage about weaning below. As we examine each passage, we will consider first the ways the weaning mother compares to the Abraham that precedes her and then possible significance of the passage.

I. (Abraham tells Isaac about the sacrifice and when Isaac does not understand Abraham pretends to be a monster.)

"Naar Barnet skal vænnes fro, da sværter Moderen sit Bryst, det var jo og Synd, at Brystet skulde see lifligt ud, naar Barnet ikke maa faae det. Saa troer Barnet, at Brystet har forandret sig, men Moderen hun er den samme, hendes Blik er kjæligt og ømt som altid. Held den, der ikke behøvende forfærdeligere Milder for at vænne Barnet fra! [When the child is to be weaned, the mother blackens her breast. It would be hard to have the breast look inviting when the child must not have it. So the child believes that the breast has changed, but the mother–she is still the same, her gaze is tender and loving as ever. How fortunate the one who did not need more terrible means to wean the child!]"[250]

In the first passage Abraham makes himself appear as a monster even though his feelings for Isaac do not change. Likewise, the mother blackens her breast (makes it monstrous) so that the child will think the breast has changed even though the mother has

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[249]Williams, 316 wonders if there were any cultural expectations of weaning that Kierkegaard and his contemporary audience would have assumed and that would affect how we read this.
[250]*KSV*, 1850; *FT*, 11.

not. In both cases the parent deceives the child, but in an "ethically justified" way.[251] It is precisely because the deception is ethically justifiable that this cannot be the true story of Abraham. Abraham's concern cannot be whether his actions are ethically justifiable, but whether he is correctly responding to an absolute duty to God. Additionally the last sentence of the weaning paragraph does not fit this reading. The statement, "Held den, der ikke behøvede forfærdeligere Midler for at vænne Barnet fra! [How fortunate the one who did not need more terrible means to wean the child]," suggests that blackening the breast is a moderate method to weaning. Whether we understand the mother weaning to be compared to Abraham's sacrifice or God's commandment, how can either be considered moderate? Is the commandment to sacrifice one's own child such a mild test of faith that someone who has to accomplish it has an easy road?[252]

II. (Abraham remains silent throughout the sacrifice, but after the ordeal he ages and his eyes darken.)

"Naar Barnet er blevet stort og skal vænnes fra, da skjuler Moderen jomfrueligt sin Barm, saa har Barnet ingen Moder mere. Held det Barn, der ikke anderledes tabte Moderen! [When the child has grown big and is to be weaned, the mother virginally conceals her breast, and then the child no longer has a mother. How fortunate the child who has not lost his mother in some other way!]"[253]

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[251]Williams, 313.
[252]Williams, 312 explains this by saying that Abraham's deception puts this Abraham into the category of tragic hero because he acts in favor of the greater good (Isaac's good). She says this qualifies the weaning as fortunate because it is much easier to understand a tragic hero than a knight of faith. This is certainly possible, but the story does not end with Isaac understanding his father, only with Abraham being relieved that Isaac does not hate God.
[253]*KSV*, 1853; *FT*, 12.

In the second passage, both the story and the weaning focus on loss. Abraham becomes lost as the mother is lost to the child because he never recovers from the trauma of the sacrifice. In both cases the parent is not actually lost. Neither the mother nor Abraham has physically died, but a part of the relationship has and is never recoverable. What works about this analogy is that a mother cannot begin nursing her child again once he is weaned because her body also responds to the weaning and stops producing milk. In a similar way, this Abraham can never regain the "milk" that he had before the test of sacrifice. What does not work in this analogy is that it is not necessarily Abraham's relationship with Isaac that is lost. Abraham is lost to himself or to his God; it is only by extension that the loss would effect the relationship with his son. Again, the "how fortunate" ending is puzzling. It is reasonable that a weaned child has not truly lost its mother, but the Abraham described above sounds completely lost. If God is the appropriate comparison to the mother and Abraham to the child then it would be Abraham who is fortunate to not have lost God in some other way. But what "other way" could possibly be a worse circumstance for Abraham to lose himself and his relationship to God? Because the relationship between a parent and child is the negative space that both binds and separates the two, Abraham is both bound to Isaac and separated from him, as he is bound to and separated from God. The ironic relationship between the parent and child is what is at stake when the two ironic relationships cannot be mutually supported.

III. (Abraham is willing to be obedient but prays to God to forgive him for his willingness to sacrifice his son.)

"Naar Barnet skal vænnes fra, da er ei heller Moderen uden Sorg, at hun og Barnet mere og mere skilles ad; at Barnet, der først laae under hendes Hjerte, senere dog hvilede ved hendes Bryst, ikke skal være saa nær mere. Saa sørge de sammen den korte Sorg. Held den, der beholdt Barnet saa nær, og ikke behøvede at sørge mere! [When the child is to be weaned, the mother, too, is not without sorrow, because she and the child are more and more to be separated, because the child who first lay under her heart and later rested upon her breast will never again be so close. So they grieve together the brief sorrow. How fortunate the one who kept the child so close and did not need to grieve any more!]"[254]

The third passage focuses on a lack of separation. In this case Abraham wonders if the commandment could possibly be from God. He grieves because he has become caught in a paradox. He can neither save Isaac nor sacrifice him. The corresponding weaning passage also mentions the grief that the mother and child share during weaning, and the pain accompanying the knowledge that a mother cannot give up her child, but she cannot keep it either. However, the concluding comment does not follow that correspondence. What does it mean that the one who can keep the child close and not grieve is fortunate? Is the weaning passage suggesting that a mother and child "grieve the brief sorrow," but then do not complete the weaning? Is it suggesting that for Abraham to be willing to sacrifice Isaac but then to chose not to means that Abraham keeps his relationship with Isaac? In that case Abraham does not give up Isaac or get him back, and Abraham's faith is either non-existent or void.

IV. (Isaac sees Abraham's despair and loses faith.)

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[254]*KSV*, 1857; *FT*, 13.

"Naar barnet skal vænnes fra, da har Maderen den stærkere Føde ved Haanden, at Barnet ikke skal omkomme. Held den, der har den stærkere Føde ved Haanden! [When the child is to be weaned, the mother has stronger sustenance at hand so that the child does not perish. How fortunate the one who has this stronger sustenance at hand!]"[255]

The final passage is the most difficult to find a correspondence with the Abraham story. Both focus more on the child than the parent, but the child's position is very different. Isaac sees his father's hand clenched in despair and loses faith as a result. The weaned child is fortunate that his mother has "den stærkere Føde ved Haanden [stronger sustenance at hand]"[256] to replace her milk. Linda William's details the many difficulties trying to find a fitting interpretation for this account. She admits that it is "the most troublesome for me to understand" and after positing some possibilities decides that she "will simply leave it to you to decide which interpretation is more plausible."[257]

Even for competent and experienced readers of Kierkegaard the weaning passages are troublesome and difficult. Because the Abraham story and weaning passage are placed together, we expect them to correspond. We expect that if we look long enough we will be able to solve the riddle, and one obvious interpretation will show itself. Nehemas' critique of Vlastos is this assumption that irony can always be explained and interpreted. Vlastos assumed that Socrates knew the answer to the riddles in the dialogues, but Nehemas believes instead that there may not have been one specific, certain answer.[258] Nehemas believes that Socrates was more interested in opening his

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[255]*KSV*, 1861; *FT*, 14.
[256]*KSV*, 1861; *FT*, 14.
[257]Williams, 315 and 316 respectively.
[258]Nehamas, 101-102 claims that "the most important and most controversial element in Vlastos's interpretation of Socrates is his governing assumption that there are truths that

interlocutor's eyes to the riddle rather than in solving it. The "Exordium" as a whole may function in a similar way, i.e. to open ironic space without answering the riddles it presents. The riddle of the "Exordium" assumes that a relationship between parent and child exists both on the maternal and paternal side, but that does not necessarily mean the author knows exactly what that relationship is. The text proposes that the relationship does relate to the Abraham story, but it may not claim to know how. The last account shows the riddle more explicitly than the others (just in case we missed the point with them) and resists interpretation. It begs a number of questions without giving any hint to answer the riddle or even suggest what could have been the author's intent or reason to include them at all.

Of course since Kierkegaard is the author of the text's author but not the author of the text itself, it is impossible to establish the authorial intent of the text (if establishing authorial intent is possible to begin with) since the author is a fictional character. Additionally, even if Kierkegaard himself had been the author he would not necessarily have known the answer to the ironic questions in his text. According to Nehemas, it is such open-endedness that creates the most ironic irony. The weaning passages may represent such a riddling irony because not even the author knows the answer. This type of irony is comparable to how Kierkegaard saw Socrates' relationship to the divine. Kierkegaard claims that "han vidste, at det var, men han vidste ikke hvad det var [he knew that it was, but he did not know not what it was]."[259] Socrates understood that the

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Socrates knows and that he knows that he knows them."
[259]*KSV*, 266; *CI*, 169.

divine did exist, but he could only see the category not the characteristics, i.e. he could understand the riddle without knowing the answer.

Since Kierkegaard saw himself as a new Socrates, perhaps it is appropriate that Kierkegaard's relationship to the feminine may follow a similar pattern. Previously, it was noted that Kierkegaard's opinion of feminine things may be that he appreciated the value of feminine characteristics, but not of actual females. Kierkegaard's opinion of motherhood is further ambiguous because of the lack of comment on it. Nowhere in Kierkegaard's journals is his own mother mentioned, not even once.[260] Since Kierkegaard never married or fathered any children there is no information on how he may have perceived his position as a parent or the relationship between his child and its mother. The weaning passages suggest an interest in the relationship between mother and child, but it is difficult to know what that relationship is. The discussion of Mary in *Fear and Trembling* seems very favorable to the significance of a mother and child. However, in his discussion on Mary (like his discussion on Abraham) Johannes does not discuss what Mary is or what her position means, only what she is not (i.e. a woman idling in her finery, playing with a divine child). Perhaps the reason for the ambiguity is that Kierkegaard's relationship with the feminine is the same as Socrates' relationship with the divine. He knows that it is, and that it holds particular significance, but he does not know what it is.[261]

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[260]Julia Watkin, *Kierkegaard* (New York: Geoffrey Chapman, 1997), 7-8 suggests that Kierkegaard's mother could still have been a substantial influence on Kierkegaard although Kierkegaard's mother is never mentioned and Kierkegaard's father is mentioned numerous times.

[261]Because of this I think Kierkegaard would appreciate the irony of a reading devoted to understanding the ironic implications of the marriage between masculine and feminine and the ironic nature of the relationship between a mother and child when the creator

behind the text did not experience either marriage or parenthood.

Chapter 8

Maternal Irony and Faith

While admitting that the irony in the weaning passages could not be explained by any one reading and without presuming to answer a riddle that Kierkegaard himself did not know, this section explores the possible relationship of the maternal to irony and faith. The weaning passages create irony in several ways. They create irony by bracketing the paternal story of Abraham with a maternal presence, by implying a comparison of a weaning mother to Abraham, and by raising the question of a mother's relationship to her child. This section focuses on that relationship of a mother to her child in order to understand the irony that the relationship creates.

This thesis has based its conception of irony on the separation and union created by the negative space between elements. In some cases, it is the union of separated elements that creates the irony such as the irony between a male and female. In other cases of irony, it is the separation between the elements that is emphasized. The irony exists because the negative space takes on more meaning than the positive space that creates its boundaries. Kierkegaard's example of the picture of Napoleon's grave was such an instance. The positive space in the image was two trees, but in the negative space between the trees was Napoleon's profile. Once someone has seen the profile, he can never see just trees again. The profile stands out as a vibrant image and creates a depth to the work that could never have existed before. However, while the negative space becomes more meaningful than the positive space. The positive space is still entirely necessary, and it is only the relationship of the separation and proximity of the positive space that allows the negative space to have such meaning. If we apply this idea

to the ironic separation between masculine and feminine, it is the relationship between them that should take on more meaning than either could achieve independently.

In the opening paragraph of *The Concept of Irony* where Kierkegaard gives his abstract account of the philosophical project in terms of masculine and feminine, he concludes with a caution about the nature of the relationship between the masculine "genius" and the feminine "phenomenon." He cautions that the masculine must always respect the feminine's ability to create. The masculine must acknowledge that it is through the feminine that the concept is born even if the masculine supplies the concept. "Om derfor end Betragteren fører Begrebet med sig, gjælder det dog om, at Phænomenet bliver ukrænket, og at Begrebet sees tilblivende ved Phænomenet [Even if the observer does bring the concept along with him, it is still of great importance that the phenomenon remain inviolate and that the concept be seen as coming into existence through the phenomenon]."[262] It is the feminine element which can bring something into being, and no man (or person) came into being except through a woman. The seed for that being may be provided by the masculine, but it is only through the feminine that it can obtain existence.[263]

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[262]*KSV*, 139, *CI*, 9.

[263]Much of French feminist theory is based on and expands from the Lacanian model of how an infant experiences and learns about the world. Before the infant becomes a part of the patriarchal world, the child experiences a maternal world. While the patriarchal world is based on masculine traits or absence, language, *chronos*, and dominance the maternal world is based on the feminine traits of presence, silence, *kairos*, and submission. The break from the maternal comes with the acquisition of language. In most cultures the time for weaning and the beginnings of language acquisition would overlap. Language acquisition generally begins around six to eight months and is not fully developed until over 3 years, and the weaning process often begins sometime between six months and 2 years.

In a very literal way the relationship between male and female can create meaning in negative space that neither could attain individually. When the ironic relationship of intercourse creates a union of sperm and ovum, a new other comes into existence. It is the ironic space between the sexes that binds them in an act of creation. It is the ironic relationship between the sexes that allows negative space to become positive space and (re)produce a child, a wholly other other who never before lived nor who could ever be duplicated. [264] *Tout autre est tout autre*.[265] The word *uterus*, which English utilizes to mean the part of a woman's anatomy in which a fetus grows, is more general in Latin. The Oxford Latin Dictionary lists three meanings for *uterus*. The first is "belly," the second "womb," and the third "cavity."[266] The defining factor of all three meanings is the negative space created within boundaries of positive space.[267] A woman's uterus is literally negative space.

The sexual anatomy, which define a woman, are both themselves defined by the negative space they create, but the function of the negative space differs between the two. While the negative space of the vagina is designed for use with an other, the negative space of the uterus is designed to produce an other. This negative space within the feminine is unique from all other negative space because it is the space that not only

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[264]Perhaps the word "never" is too absolute since cloning is being explored and may become possible. However, since the beginning of human history up to and including today, every individual is wholly other.

[265]In his discussion of *Fear and Trembling,* Derrida (70-71-) coins this phrase. He suggests that Abraham's sacrifice of the other to whom he has a responsibility is not unique to Abraham but is common in every person at all times.

[266]*Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 2117. See also Adams, 100-101 for the various Latin words for "womb." He suggests that *uterus* was the *vox propria* to mean womb and was more specific to the womb than other Latin terms such as *aluus* or *uenter*.

[267]In Vergil's *Aeneid* the word *uterus* is used several times to describe the cavity within the Trojan horse where the soldiers hid (e.g. Verg. *A*. 2.20, 2.43, 2.50).

sustains a relationship with an other, but also actually allows the creation of an other through conception. Not only theoretically but literally a woman becomes the negative space for an other during pregnancy. The negative space, which both separates and binds the woman to the child makes the relationship between them one of irony. This ironic relationship is even more complex than other ironic relationships because the negative space does not only exist between the elements, but also within one element. The relationship between a mother and her child is at once an ironic relationship formed by a separation that binds self and other, and an ironic relationship formed by a union that separates the self and other.

A mother and her child are related through irony because they are bound together and separated from each other at the same time. What creates the separation is also what creates the union. When conception occurs, the unified seed of the male and female is not connected to the mother's body but floating in the negative space of the uterus (which is still bound within the mother's body). The cells cannot exist long while separated from the mother; they need the union with the mother to survive and grow. After the fetus becomes imbedded in the wall of the uterus, the relationship between mother and child is union. For the first part of the pregnancy the fetus is so completely dependant on the mother that it has no control over its body as an individual self. Even in this implantation the fetus still maintains an element of separation because the uterus is hollow so that the flesh of the child and the flesh of the mother are separated by space filled with fluid. Like the relationship between male and female, the union between mother and child serves both to join the elements and define their difference. Additionally, the negative space that separates the child from its mother is entirely

contained within the body of the mother. The new other can only survive by union with the mother for the first several months. The mode of living for a pregnant woman is one of irony because her body is no longer self. It is self and other.[268]

The complexity of this relationship continues as the child develops in the womb. The child grows and continually fills more and more of the negative space of the uterus until there does not seem to be sufficient space for either the mother or child. The mother's body continually expands to make more space for the child and her own organs become more and more compressed. As the child grows it comes more and more into contact with the walls of the mother's body creating more contact and also more defined boundaries. It also continually gains control and independence over its own body. The child begins to move its legs, arms, and head causing tension between the self of the mother and the self of the child.

Because of the pregnancy, the woman shifts from woman as other to mother as other. As woman, man remains her other, and she remains man's other, but now she is also providing the negative space for the new other. It is interesting (maybe even ironic) that the word "other" in English is present in the word "mother," even though the two words do not share an etymology. To emphasize this role of mother as an other to the child sometimes the word mother is written (m)other.[269] If a woman is other as self, other

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[268]This is of course at the heart of the question about whether a woman has the right to terminate a pregnancy. Our culture has reached the maturity to admit that a woman has the right to control her own body, but the question is not whether she can control her own self rather at what point does her body become not just self but other.

[269]The mother's role as other to the child is pronounced because the child's first relationship is with its mother. Some theorists suggest that initially the infant cannot identify where the mother's body ends and its own body begins. It is only through a process that the child realizes its own independence and isolation. The phase when the child becomes aware of itself and can abstract itself is called "The Mirror Stage" in

to man, and (m)other of child then the ironic space of her relationships is not only contained in the feminine sphere, but the irony fills her feminine sphere. In the same way that the relationship between the sexes is one of irony, a mother's relationship to the child she carries is also one of irony.

When the child is born the relationship continues to be ironic because of the dependence of the infant on the mother's body as well as the dependence of the mother's body on the infant. As the child nurses there is again an irony in the separation and unification between the mother and child. The woman's breast, the nipple of which must be in a raised state, when stimulated by the child produces fluid that gives life. The negative space within the child's mouth allows for the nipple to enter the child and creates a union between the two bodies. This union in negative space serves both to separate and bind the mother and her child. The point of contact between the mouth of the infant and the breast of the mother both creates the union and defines the separation. The relationship between the mother and child is one of intimacy and irony.[270] While in

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Lacanian theory. Additionally, it is the relationship of the mother to the father that forces the child from the maternal world of presence into the paternal world of abstraction when the child learns to use a symbol (the word "mother") to represent the absence of the mother and call for her to be present.

[270]Whether the maternal response to a child comes is inherited as part of the female body or is learned through culture is something of a debate. That the maternal instinct is recognized in many cultures in many different time periods suggests that the reaction of the maternal is a natural part of the feminine sphere. Some feminists argue that it is only because of masculine oppression that women in so many cultures have been indoctrinated into caring for their child and that the maternal reaction to a child is taught. Elizabeth Badinter, "Maternal Indifference," trans. Roger DeGaris in *French Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1989), 150-178, claims that maternal instinct does not exist. As proof she documents the "maternal indifference" of upper-class mothers in eighteenth century Paris in order to show that "maternal indifference" is the natural reaction to pregnancy and childbirth. This study does show that in one specific culture, during one specific time period, one class of women were indifferent to their children. She uses this example to argue that love is not the natural

the womb the mother and child are joined to the extent that neither can recognize the other as other. When born the mother can now recognize the child as other and appreciate the closeness between them. In other words, while in the womb a mother's body carries her child, but after the child is born the mother can hold the child in her arms.

The proximity between the two is never more full than while the mother is nursing the child she holds in her arms. For several months the relationship of child and mother is the defining characteristic for both of them. Until the time of weaning, the infant's body and the mother's body are interdependent. The child needs the milk, but the mother also needs the child to express the milk. Without the child to nurse, the mother's body will overproduce. The overproduction becomes painful and even dangerous to the mother's body. If the child needs more than the mother has produced the child becomes uncomfortable, and if the mother's body stops producing the child will die. Both bodies respond to each other and compensate for the other, and without constant contact both lives can be threatened. Without the interdependent ironic relationship neither can maintain the needed balance.[271]

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reaction of a mother to her child, but indifference is. However, it does not show that such indifference is natural. It is just as possible that the indifference is the learned reaction and love is the natural reaction. Since there are numerous cultures that recognize love as the natural reaction and only this example claiming that indifference is the natural reaction, this author has not met the burden of proof to support her claim.

Although I do believe that love is the natural, instinctual reaction of a mother to her own child, I do not assume that this instinct is never overcome or missing in any given circumstance. There are occasional instances when a mother is indifferent to her child or even more likely she is hateful to it. Since the *Medea* the reaction of a mother killing her own children has been one of horror. The intensity of the reaction shows how foundational the expectation that a mother love her child is.

[271]A child nursing is often pictured as one of the most intimate, safe, trusting, and fulfilling experiences, even perhaps to the point of *jouisance*. The security and comfort

While nursing an infant the mother's body cannot be separated from the child nor the child from the mother for more than a few hours. As the child grows, however, the interdependent relationship lessens towards independence. By the time the child is six months old, the milk provided by the mother is no longer sufficient to sustain the growth of the child. The child needs "further sustenance" in order to live. The transition from milk to solid foods takes place over a period of time, and during the process of weaning the mother's body is continually more separated from the child's body until the two bodies are no longer interdependent.[272]

During the time of pregnancy and nursing the mother's existence is devoted to providing for the child's existence. Instead of living her own life for herself, the mother's life becomes defined by the child's.[273] The experience of motherhood embodies the Kierkegaardian idea of existing entirely for an other (or the Other). Experiencing life as (a) being-for-other teaches a person the type of interdependence and self-sacrifice that

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of nursing is part of the infant's innocence because of the complete dependence of the child on the mother. The weaning process then is the first loss of innocence a child experiences. In some ways nursing is intercourse in reverse (perhaps even its opposite). Both are ironic unions and separations by the physical contact and fluid exchange of two others. During intercourse the woman is the negative space; during nursing she is the positive space. The initial sexual experience causes a loss of innocence (for the woman); the termination of nursing causes a loss of innocence (for the child). It is this loss of innocence and the disruption of the safety in the relationship that Johannes comments in the weaning passages. Each of the weaning passages imply a difficulty in the weaning. As the child loses the closeness with the mother, it has to reinvent its relationship to the new world in which it lives and the others in it. The natural conclusion of the weaning is that the child ends its dependence on the liquid food provided by the mother and becomes dependent on the solid food brought home by the father.

[272]The child still needs almost constant care for many more months, but after weaning is complete that care does not have to be provided by the mother. Once weaning is complete the child's need for the mother's body is completed.

[273]This often causes an identity crisis for the mother. As one mother explained, "I feel like my entire purpose of existence is to take care of another person's bodily needs."

is need for a relationship with God. As a being for other, the mother cannot be self without other.[274] The paradoxical relationship between a pregnant or nursing mother and her child both constitutes the self and threatens it.

This multifaceted presence of irony is unique to the feminine experience.[275] Although the relationship between a father and child can certainly be one of irony, and a man can be other to other selves, the complexity of the ironic relationships within the maternal sphere is limited to that sphere. It cannot even be experienced by a woman unless she chooses to engage the ironic relationship between male and female as well as the ironic relationship between mother and child. The most singularly unique experience available to women is pregnancy and motherhood.[276] The irony is that neither experience

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[274]I found this experience exceptionally surprising when I became a mother. I had never needed a specific other to define myself. Although I had a very good relationship with my mother, I did not need her to constitute my own concept of self. My relationship with my husband, while also formative of my self, did not define me. It was not until I gave birth to a child that I needed an other to define myself. The realization that I was dependant on an other was terrifying (especially when I realized that the other upon whom I was dependent would never be so dependent on me). Motherhood forced me to reevaluate my self and actually reconstitute it.

[275]Because every society of which a record remains is ruled by males, every perception of the world comes from a male's point of view. This circumstance produces the assumption, accepted by both males and females, that the male point of view is normative, and any other point of view stems from an other. The result of this cultural assumption is that all experience that is uniquely had by females is considered other. This idea evolves from female experience being other to females themselves being other. Because a woman can be so surrounded by an ironic relationship of self as other, other to man, and other to child, her experience can easily become one of overwhelming inability to find (her)self, but it can also provide the most rich becoming of self because of the meaning that can be found in the negative space between self and other that can take on more meaning than any positive element could ever have alone.

[276]A similar argument can be made that sex and fatherhood are the most distinctive experiences of the masculine sphere, which experiences will never be available to women. The point here is not whether the masculine or feminine experience is better than the other, but that they are both unique. The different experiences cannot be fully appreciated by either sex without acknowledging the inherent uniqueness of each experience and the inevitable inaccessibility of the masculine to the feminine or the

(of the mother or child) can be fully accessed by the other, and at the same time neither can have as much meaning without the other. This is an ironic position because not only does the self need others to separate itself from, but it needs an other to be self. The mother is not self without her child, and the child is part of herself because her body gave itself for the new self. The mother because she is still a woman is still man's other and even more so because she has further removed herself from the masculine sphere by participating in something only available in the feminine sphere. The irony of a woman's position becomes increasingly complex because it can be seen as a relationship between other (herself), other (man), and other (the child). The complexity of this irony permeates the mother's existence because she encounters the ironic relationships almost every moment, even to the point that finding (her)self becomes very difficult. In other words, the experience of motherhood is itself a personification of an ironic mode of living.

What then does the irony created by the maternal experience have to do with faith? Both motherhood and faith necessitate an ironic mode of living because they both create separation and proximity. Motherhood creates a separation from the masculine world and a dependant relationship between mother and child. Faith creates a separation from actuality and a dependent relationship between self and God. Comparing the experience of the maternal to faith can enhance the understanding of faith because the maternal experience is a visible, bodily, and actual example of an ironic mode of living while faith is a invisible, spiritual, and theoretical example.

The comparison of a mother and child to God and believer is not unique to

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feminine to the masculine.

Kierkegaard. In addition to the metaphor of milk and meat, the relationship of a nursing mother is used more explicitly in Isaiah 49:15-16,

הֲתִשְׁכַּח אִשָּׁה עוּלָהּ מֵרַחֵם בֶּן־בִּטְנָהּ גַּם־אֵלֶּה תִשְׁכַּחְנָה וְאָנֹכִי לֹא אֶשְׁכָּחֵךְ׃

הֵן עַל־כַּפַּיִם חקקתיך חוֹמֹתַיִךְ נֶגְדִּי תָּמִיד׃

[Can a woman forget her sucking child that she not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yeah, they may forget, but I will not forget thee, I have graven thee on the palms of my hands]." By comparing a nursing mother to God's people this statement shows how intense both relationships should be. The reason for using a nursing mother for the comparison is possibly because the relationship of a mother to her nursing child can be seen as the strongest instinctual relationship available to humanity. The expected answer to the rhetorical question, "Can a woman forget her sucking child that she not have compassion on the son of her womb?" is "No, not really." A woman's relationship to her child is so intimate that it should be impossible for her to forget. The relationship is such that the mother's body is so linked to the child's that it responds to it and provides for it involuntarily. Pregnancy and nursing also separate the mother from the rest of actuality and other(s) so that she exists almost solely for the new other her body has created. For the mother to forget her nursing child is not only emotionally unlikely, but physically almost impossible because of the interdependence of the two bodies on each other.

Following the rhetorical question the next statement shows how intense the relationship between God and his people should be. "Yeah, they may forget, but I will not forget thee, I have graven thee on the palms of my hands." This scripture suggests that even if the strongest earthly relationship, that should never be broken, somehow is broken, God's relationship can never be broken. The comparison between the two

relationships is that while a mother's love is perhaps the strongest emotion on Earth, the emotion of Heaven is stronger still. Additionally, the statement suggests that it is the physical reminders that prevent God from forgetting his people. Like a mother, whose body is linked to the child, God's hands are linked to his people. Although neither should be capable of forgeting because of the emotional link, the physical link precludes an abandonment of the relationship.

This passage shows how a mother's relationship to her child is comparable to God's relationship to his chosen people, and it implies what the people's feelings toward God should be. To consider the expectation of the believer to God we return to Abraham and faith. In the weaning passages it is not clear whether the weaning mother represents God weaning Abraham or Abraham being weaned from Isaac. Perhaps part of the irony is that a knight of faith is comparable to both the mother and the child. The knight is comparable to the mother because contains a relationship to the Other within himself. Like the relationship of a pregnant woman to her unborn child, the relationship of a knight of faith to God is an internal relationship. The mother carries the child and is related to it through her own body. Though as the pregnancy progresses others can see that she is carrying a child, no one else has access to that child except the mother. For a knight of faith, the relationship with God is also an internal one. The knight has to become subjective and look inward to find access to the eternal. No one else has access to the knight's relationship with God, and no one can understand it.

The knight of faith is also comparable to the child because either as a fetus or a nursing infant he is completely dependent on the Other. For someone aspiring to be a knight of faith, the pursuit is to be weaned from the world but nursed by God. If a knight

became more sovereign than a nursing child, his independence would compromise his faith. The relationship between a knight of faith and the absolute must be as intimate as the relationship between a mother and her nursing child. For a knight of faith all his nourishment must come from God. If he receives sustenance from any other source his dependence on God is lessened. Unlike the nursing mother, God's nourishment can never be outgrown by the knight. Perhaps this is because the sustenance provided by God is not milk, but the meat from the sacrifice of God. When knight is truly a knight of faith, his own existence is sustained by and devoted to the God whose sacrifice gives life to believers. Not only is God's relationship with a believer stronger than a mother's to her nursing child, the devotion of a knight of faith must make him more dependent on God than even a nursing child on its mother.

Perhaps the irony of the maternal experience is an appropriate comparison to faith because they both not only define but also threaten the self. Faith defines the self because it requires the irony that allows subjectivity. It also destroys the self because it demands complete submission to an Other. The self is no longer defined by (its)self but by its relationship to an other. However, the other that defines the relationship is only available to the self, and cannot be identified or regulated but anything external to the self. The self becomes entirely defined by and dependant on the Other while remaining separate and independent of all other(s). Someone who has faith then both loses his self and finds it.[277]

Abraham's relationship to God was one of faith. Faith is the ironic space that both bound and separated Abraham to/from God and created Abraham's silence.

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[277]Cf. Matt. 10:39, Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24.

Abraham's silence kept his secret, his secret faith. Abraham's did not reveal his secret not only because he should not, but because he could not. The relationship is such that is it was entirely individual to Abraham and could be had by no one but Abraham, and yet even Abraham could not know what his secret was. Mary also had a secret, as does any mother because her relationship to her child is entirely individual. That secret the mother holds but can never divulge because she herself can never entirely know it. No one else can bear her child, and though that relationship dictates who she is, not even she can know what that secret truly is. Like Abraham's relationship to God, a mother's relationship to her child is a secret, a precious secret because it can be held by no one else. It is one of the very few things that exists entirely individually. Mary, more than any other mother and perhaps more than any knight of faith including Abraham, understood the secret. For Mary, the secret was not just her relationship with her child or with her God, but with her child who was her God.

The message of the weaning passages, Abraham, and Mary is that the strength of a parent's relationship to a child is the closest comparison to the relationship of faith. The love and devotion a parent feels for a child may be the only sufficient teacher for a person to understand the depth of devotion required by faith.[278] If the relationship between mother and child were not so intimate, weaning would mean nothing. If Abraham had loved Isaac less, then his faith would not have been proven. If Mary's virtue had been less precious, her pregnancy would be more acceptable. In loving a child a person can sufficiently learn how to lose one's self in (an)other. For a person to have

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[278]See Derrida, 64-65 for a discussion of how it is only because Abraham's love for Isaac is so intense that makes the hate possible to give death.

faith, the sole purpose of their existence should be for the Other. Like a mother who exists almost solely for her child, disciples must exist solely for the purpose of their God. In the maternal experience, the relationship to the child is both what constitutes the self and what threatens the self. Similarly, the relationship of faith both defines and destroys the self. The irony lies in the contradiction that in the same action, faith and maternity both conquer the self by constituting the self.

According to the Biblical record, God fully possesses the capability to have such a relationship with his believers. The God of Abraham was willing to give his only son for Abraham to have life. In order to enter the covenant that provides the life, God demands Abraham's faith in return. The question is whether Abraham loves his God sufficiently to produce the faith necessary, first to obtain and then to maintain such a relationship. Abraham clearly loved Isaac with the intense love instinctual to most parents. If a parent's love for a child is spontaneous, uncontrollable, and overwhelming how can such love possibly be reproduced at all, much less towards a being who is not seen or heard? The question of faith is not how a parent can overcome their relationship to their child, but how anyone can acquire such a relationship with God. Such is the mystery of faith.

Concluding Thoughts

This thesis began with the comparison of Socrates to Abraham in order to establish that Abraham used an ironic mode of living. The comparison between Mary and Abraham demonstrated that both used an ironic mode of living in order to create the necessary circumstance for faith. The following discussion of the masculine and feminine spheres concluded that the relationship between the sexes is irony and that the irony is contained within the feminine sphere. The comparison of Mary to Johannes the seducer's maiden suggested that the movement of faith is feminine in nature whether that movement comes from the intimacy between male and female or the binding of a human to the absolute. My analysis of the weaning passages suggests that there is a relationship between the story of Abraham and a mother's relationship to her child. The final section suggested that the other made possible from the ironic union of masculine and feminine is how negative space can take on more meaning than the positive space that created it could ever have had alone. The relationship between the parent (especially the (m)other) and the child demonstrates the intensity required for a believer to have faith in God and the irony inherent in that relationship because the believer both loses (its)self and finds (its)self.

Irony begins the journey to self. Like Socrates, a person must separate himself from actuality in order to create a proximity to ideality. In order to find faith the person then must go beyond Socrates to Abraham and Mary. Instead of just creating a proximity to ideality, a person needs to have a relationship with ideality and the Absolute within it. To create such a relationship a person must leap from their actuality to ideality. The leap is based on emotion and trust instead of on empirical evidence and as such is contained in

the feminine sphere. In order to perform a leap from actuality to ideality a person must access the characteristics of the feminine sphere and trust in things that are hoped for but seem impossible. The leap suspends the person in negative space and both separates and joins them to actuality and ideality. The requirements of the leap necessitate an ironic mode of living so that the knight of faith can access both spheres once the leap is completed. As shown in the examples of Mary and Abraham, faith requires complete submission and trust in the Other. One of the few experiences of mortality that can produce emotion comparable to faith is the experience of parenthood, particularly the maternal experience. The experience of maternal irony typifies the relationship between self and other needed to maintain a relationship with the Absolute. With such love a person can return to their actuality and live in faith.

For Abraham and Mary (and even Cordelia) faith was constituted by a complete submission and trust in an other. According to Johannes, what made Mary and Abraham great was their willingness to be entirely dependent on God regardless of the effect that relationship had on other(s). Mary's relationship to her child was an issue only because that relationship was a result of her faith. Abraham's relationship to Isaac was an issue only because the need to sacrifice Isaac was a result of Abraham's faith. Any relationship, no matter the expectations of the ethical, must be trumped by the relationship to God. In Luke 14:26 Jesus maintains, "Εἴ τις ἔρχεται πρός με καὶ οὐ μισεῖ τὸν πατέρα ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τὴν μητέρα καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα καὶ τὰ τέκνα καὶ τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ τὰς ἀδελφὰς ἔτι τε καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἑαυτοῦ, οὐ δύναται εἶναί μου μαθητής [If a man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.]" The

relationship with the Other must supercede all other relationships and create an ironic relationship between actuality and ideality as well as between possibility and impossibility. The knight of faith has entirely given (his)self to the Other and is bound to the Other through obedience. The knight of faith is also bound to his own actuality because submission to the Other demands obedience within the lifetime of the knight of faith.

Understanding the ironic nature of both the structure and subject of *Fear and Trembling* offers a chance to engage the space opened around faith and to explore the possibilities about faith that may otherwise go unnoticed. Because Johannes de Silentio points out numerous times how Abraham's story is problematic, he offers the reader a chance to interrogate the complexities and possibilities of faith. The goal of the text is to encourage the reader to grapple with the ironic complexity of the nature of faith. One possibility of that irony has been explored in this thesis by the discussion of how Mary is an example of faith and the maternal experience is a comparable ironic mode of living. Irony can be very sharp, like a juggler with knives, a reader can be easily cut. But perhaps that is the point of *Fear and Trembling*, to demonstrate the danger of juggling knives, especially if the knife is Abraham's knife.

Appendix A:

An Expanded Reading of Kierkegaard's Socrates

Numerous times Kierkegaard demonstrates how Socrates purposely remained distant in a relationship in order to increase the play of his negative space. Socrates created distance often by his silence. He would either ignore someone talking to him or talk in such a way that the person addressed could not understand him (riddling irony). This separation allowed Socrates to use his external appearance for various purposes and with different personae. The many personae of Socrates did not make him a less earnest person, simply a less accessible one. In fact, one of the things his interlocutors found most frustrating about Socrates was how he would speak without communicating.[279]

Socrates' relationship with Alcibiades, which Kierkegaard cites, is an example of this riddling silence even when speaking. When Alcibiades desired a more personal relationship with Socrates, Socrates responded to Alcibiades in such a way that Alcibiades did not understand what Socrates meant. Kierkegaard agrees with the assessment of Rötscher that

> "Thi vel har Socrates i Stykket, som Socrates i Livet havde det, Disciple, men disse staae ikke i noget Forhold til ham, eller rettere sagt, han staaer ikke i noget Forhold til dem, han giver sig ikke hen til dem, men han er bestandig, i Analogi med hans tidligere beskrevne Forhold til Alcibiades, frit svævende over dem, gaadefuldt tiltrækkende og frastødende. Betydningen af hans Fordyben i sig selv bliver dem altid uforklarig [Socrates does indeed have pupils in the play, just as he did in life, but they are not involved in any relationship with him, or more

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[279] *KSV*, 175; *CI*, 48.

> correctly, he is not involved in any relationship with them; he does not become attached to them, but analogously to his earlier described relationship with Alcibiades, he continually hovers freely above them, enigmatically attracting and repelling. The significance of his immersion in himself never becomes clear to them."[280]

Socrates' distance from other members of his actuality created a position of complete isolation"[281] in which Socrates "stod ironisk over ethvert Forhold, og Loven for Forholdet var en bestandig Attraction og Repulsion. . . Den ironiske Frihed, han nød, idet intet Forhold havde Styrke nok til at binde ham, men han bestandig følte sig fri derover, den Nydelse at være sig selv nok, hvilken han hengav sig til [stood ironically above every relationship, and the law for the relationship was a continual attraction and repulsion. . . The ironic freedom he enjoyed because no relationship was strong enough to bind him and he continually felt himself free above it, the enjoyment of being sufficient unto himself, to which he abandoned himself]."[282] Socrates' silence both bound his students to him and separated him from them.

Kierkegaard insists that Socrates could not posit anything, his irony produced only negativity.[283] Contra Hegel and other commentators, Kierkegaard sees Socrates as only destroying the old Athenian order without positing anything to replace it.

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[280]*KSV*, 248, *CI*, 146.
[281]Socrates'"Standpunkt er skildret som et fuldkomment Isolations-Standpunkt [position as one of complete isolation]" (*KSV*, 248, *CI*, 146).
[282]*KSV*, 274; *CI*, 182.
[283]In order to make this claim, Kierkegaard looks to the early Platonic dialogues, which are much more concerned with questions than the later dialogues, which are more concerned with answers. Kierkegaard defends this argument by attributing a greater influence of Platonic thought that overshadows the original Socratic negativity (*KSV*, 237; *CI*, 125-126).

Søderquist discusses Kierkegaard's portrayal of Socrates and points out the Kierkegaard is not creating a historically objective view of Socrates.[284] Rather Kierkegaard's reading presents Socrates as more radical and more negative than even the sophists. This places Socrates in a position more separated from and dangerous to his culture and society.[285] Of the three sources for Socrates, Kierkegaard prefers Aristophanes over both Plato and Xenophon because Aristophanes portrays Socrates as completely empty. According to Aristophanes Socrates lives in a basket suspended among the unsubstantial clouds, and his world burns up into ash and smoke. Even Socrates *daimon* produces only negativity according to Kierkegaard. He sides with Plato that the *daimon* only warned Socrates not to do something, rather than ever commanded him to do something as Xenophon states.

Even when referring to the self Kierkegaard maintains that Socratic irony cannot posit anything. Kierkegaard states that the phrase "know thyself" is often used to characterize Socrates, but this phrase does not entail positive knowledge because:

> "At nu Subjectiviteten i dens hele Fylde, Inderligheden i dens hele uendelige Rigdom ogsaa kan betegnes med de Ord: gnothi sauton, det er vel sandt; men Socrates betræffende, da var denne Selverkjendelse ikke saa indholdsrig, den indeholdt egentlig ikke mere end Adskillelsen, Udsondringen af det, der senere blev Erkjendelsens Gjenstand. Ordet "kjend dig selv" betyder: *adskil dig selv fra Andet* [It is certainly true that the phrase *gnothi sauton* can designate subjectivity in its fullness, inwardness in its utterly infinity wealth, but for Socrates this self-

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[284]Søderquist "Nihilistic Socrates," 217. He reminds us that "even if Kierkegaard gives an academically unpersuasive interpretation of Socrates, it is nevertheless important to be clear about his unique characterization."
[285]Søderquist "Nihilistic Socrates," 220.

knowledge was not so copious; it actually contained nothing more than the separating, the singling out, of what later became the object of knowledge. The phrase "know yourself" means: *separate yourself from the other*]."[286]

The reason that self-knowledge was not copious was because it was not full; it was empty. The object of knowledge was the self, but this knowledge was not what the self was, but how to separate it from the other. This reading diverges from the usual understanding of Socrates. Reece sums up the reading saying "Unlike the Platonic Socrates, Kierkegaard's Socrates does not show the way to truth as introspection but rather shows the emptiness of this pursuit. Kierkegaard has Socrates turn inward but then argues that he finds nothing there."[287] For Kierkegaard's Socrates even the self does not contain positivity, only the negativity left from the separation of self from other.

Because Socrates separates himself from all other, he has resigned his actuality. Because he knows that the ideal exists but he does not (and cannot) know what it is, he has resigned ideality. Not only is Socrates' an example of resignation, he also resigns infinitely. Socrates' irony "er Negativitet, thi den negerer blot; den er uendelig, thi den negerer ikke dette eller hiint Phænomen; den er absolut, thi det, i Kraft af hvilket den negerer, er et Høiere, der dog ikke er [is infinite because it does not negate this or that phenomenon; it is absolute because that by virtue of which it negates is a higher something that still is not]],"[288] and this infinite negativity resigns Socrates from ideality and actuality.

Socrates' resignation can be compared to the knights of infinite resignation.

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[286]*KSV*, 271; *CI*, 177 (emphasis mine).
[287]Reece, 15.
[288]*KSV*, 339; *CI*, 261.

Socrates shares another trait with the knight of infinite resignation discussed by Johannes; they are both easily recognizable. The knights of infinite resignation are visibly removed from their actuality. Socrates stood out among his peers because his irony removed him from actuality. Johannes claims that infinite resignation can offer peace because the knight is resigned to any possibility. Likewise Socrates is not troubled by any possibility of actuality, even his own death. Socrates' resignation showed itself in Johannes' description of Socrates' response to his sentence:

> "Dødsdommen bliver ham forkyndt, i samme Øieblik døer han, i samme Øieblik overvinder han Døden og gjennemfører sig selv i det berømte Tilsvar: at det forundrede ham, at han var bleven dømt med en Majoritet af 3 Stemmer. Ingen løs og ledig Tale paa Torvet, ingen taabelig Bemærkning af en Idiot kunde han have spøget mere ironisk med, end med den Dødsdom, der dømmer ham selv fra Livet. [The verdict of death is announced to him, and in that same moment he dies, in that same moment he triumphs over death and consummates himself in the celebrated response that he is surprised to have been condemned by a majority of three votes. He could not have bantered more ironically with the idle talk in the marketplace or with the foolish comment of a idiot than with the death sentence that condemns him to death]."[289]

Socrates responds to the news of his death ironically by making a statement so casual and indifferent that it displays a complete resignation.

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[289]*KSV*, 2047 (note 15); *FT*, 117note*.

Socrates' statement that he was surprised to be condemned by only a three-vote majority also shows a relationship of Socrates to the tragic hero.[290] Though Kierkegaard does not completely agree with the traditional lauding of Socrates' martyrdom, he does see a tragic element in Socrates' death both in *Concept of Irony* and *Fear and Trembling*. In his discussion of the third *problema*, Johannes claims that if a tragic hero's life has intellectual significance then the hero ought to have last words, and he uses Socrates as an example. Johannes points out that instead of providing silence when he is sentenced, Socrates' irony in this case requires an ironic statement. Socrates' statement is ironic not because it means its opposite, nor because its meaning is a riddle, but because it means nothing. Socrates makes a simple statement of fact that offers nothing more than his own negativity. In this statement, Socrates' irony comes full circle because now everything is nothing to Socrates, his life, his death, his actuality, and ideality. Since according to Kierkegaard Socrates' silence is both the means and result of Socrates' irony, it is perfectly ironic that it is an act of speaking (especially speaking that has no meaning), with which Socrates accepts the death of his ironic existence.[291]

Though Socrates' does not sacrifice a child as the tragic heroes Agamemnon, Jephthah, or Brutus, he exhibits some of their same characteristics. The three heros are

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[290]*KSV*, 294; *CI*, 211 states "Her haaber jeg nu, at det skal vise sig, saavel at Ironien har en verdenshistorisk Gyldighed, som og at Socrates ikke bliver forkleinet ved min Opfattelse, men at han ret egentlig bliver en Heroes, saa at man seer ham i hans Færd, at han bliver anskuelig for den, der har Øine at see med, hørlig for den, der har Øren at høre med [At this point, I trust that two things are apparent–namely, that irony has a world-historical validity and that Socrates is not depreciated by my interpretation of him but really becomes a hero, so that he is seen going about his business, so that he becomes visible to the one who has eyes to see, audible to the one who has ears to hear]."

[291]Kierkegaard declines to comment on the dialogues which discuss Socrates' conversations after the trial.

tragic because they breach one ethical standard for another. Socrates' is a hero because he breached his actuality in order to find ideality. Like Agamemnon whose sacrifice opened the path for the Greeks to sail to a new conquest, Socrates' sacrifice opened the path to the ideal for all of Western society. Unlike the three fathers, the life Socrates sacrifices is his own. For the three fathers sacrificing the life of a child was more difficult than their own, but for Socrates' whose irony isolated him from actuality, the only life available to sacrifice was his own. In *Concept of Irony* Kierkegaard comments that the ironist is the sacrifice required to destroy the old age and bring in the new. "Den forbigangne Virkelighed viser sig endnu berettiget derved, at den kræver et Offer, den nye Virkelighed derved, at den bringer et Offer [The past actuality shows itself to be still justified by demanding a sacrifice, the new actuality by providing a sacrifice]" and Socrates blev et Offer [became a sacrifice]."[292] Johannes points out that part of the tragedy is that the child is not be sacrificed by someone other than the father. In each of the cases described by Johannes (including Abraham's) the father has to perform the death blow. Socrates' case corresponds to this because he was the one to administer the hemlock. Because he was both the sacrificer and the sacrificed, he performed the death blow to himself.

Although Kierkegaard does not believe that Socrates saw his death as a tragedy, much of scholarship "sketches Socrates as a tragic hero" because Socrates was executed, and his death achieved him the image of a martyr dying for the right to live ironically. For Kierkegaard "Socrates' Død egentlig ikke tragisk. . .Døden har ingen Realitet for Socrates [Socrates' death is not basically tragic. . .because death has no reality for

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[292]*KSV*, 348; *CI*, 261. *KSV*, 347; *CI*, 271.

Socrates]." In this sense Socrates is not a tragic hero because "den tragiske Helt har Døden Gyldighed, for ham er Døden i Sandhed den sidste Strid og den sidste Lidelse [for the tragic hero, death has validity; for him death is truly the final battle and the final suffering]."[293] This statement assumes that it is the hero who dies, but the three tragic heroes discussed in *FT* do not die, rather they kill. In the cases of the three fathers, the tragedy was not so much in the death as in the waste of a life. Seen this way Socrates remains a hero because he open the path to subjectivity and ideality. But Socrates was never able to walk the path he opened. I would suggest that the tragedy of Socrates was not in his death, but in the waste of a life, which strove for the ideal but could never make the movement necessary to achieve it.

When concluding his discussion of Socratic irony, Vlastos reinterprets the phrase *eironeia* to mean that Socrates' irony

> "is not unique in accepting the burden of freedom which is inherent in all significant communication. It is unique in playing that game for bigger stakes than anyone else ever has in the philosophy of the West. Socrates doesn't say that the knowledge by which he and we must live is utterly different from what anyone has ever understood or even imagined moral knowledge could be. He just says he has no knowledge, though without it he is damned, and let us puzzle out for ourselves what that could mean."[294]

Presumably, the "bigger stake" for which Socrates was playing was his own life, and his irony seems ultimately to have cost him his life. But, if Socrates' stakes were higher than

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[293]*KSV*, 348; *CI*, 271.
[294]Vlastos, 44.

anyone else in the West then perhaps Abraham's stakes were higher than anyone else in the world because Abraham was not risking his own life, but risking the entire sphere of the ethical and with it the life of his only son.

Even if Socrates' *daimon* had been absolute, Socrates' interest in it may not have been any greater. Socrates' irony was such that "idet intet Forhold havde Styrke nok til at binde ham, men han bestandig følte sig fri derover [no relationship was strong enough to bind him and he continually felt himself free above it]."[295] The lack of strength of any relationship to bind Socrates seems to extend to abstract ideas as well as actual people since the personality created by subjectivity is a *"status absolutus*."[296] Kierkegaard describes the lack of binding power of abstract ideas stating, "Ironikeren tager sig det aabenbart saare let endog med Ideen, han er i høieste Grad fri derunder, fordi det Absolute er ham Intet [The ironist, however, is obviously very casual even with the idea; he is completely free under it, for the absolute to him is nothing]."[297] For Socrates his separation from actuality in order to become closer to ideality caused his actuality to be nothing. Because Socrates' never accessed the absolute beyond knowing that it existed, it also was nothing. As Kierkegaard explains it, "Realiteten blev ved det Absolute til Intet, men det Absolute var igjen Intet [By way of the absolute, reality became nothing, but in turn the absolute was nothing]."[298] Since nothing, including Socrates' *daimon*, provided access to the absolute, Socrates' irony remained infinitely and absolutely negative. For Socrates' his separation from actuality made his relationship to actuality

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[295]*KSV*, 274; *CI*, 182.
[296]*KSV*, 162; *CI*, 28.
[297]*KSV*, 247; *CI*, 145-146.
[298]*KSV*, 311; *CI*, 236.

negative. Socrates' inability to access ideality caused another negative relationship. Socrates was then left only with himself, but he also did not know who his self was except that it was separated from the other.

For Socrates "Ironien er det uendelig lette Spil med Intet [Irony is the infinitely light playing with nothing]."[299] Irony's result then was ignorance, albeit a learned ignorance. Kierkegaard believes that Socrates "føler sig ret egentlig fri i denne Uvidenhed, det er ham altsaa ikke Alvor med denne Uvidenhed, og dog er det jo hans ramme Alvor, at han er uvidende [genuinely feels quite liberated in this ignorance. Consequently, he is not in earnest about this ignorance, and yet he is altogether earnest about being ignorant]."[300] The result of "uendelige absolute Negativitet [infinite, absolute negativity]"[301] is that the individual becomes absolute to himself only, nothing other than the self, which is also negative, is valid. Because Socrates' position was one of pure irony Socrates remains infinitely resigned to himself and absolute within his own negativity.

According to Kierkegaard, Socrates' desire to remain absolute to himself was the reason Socrates accepted the death sentence imposed on him. Socrates "Han var ikke kommen for at frelse Verden, men for at dømme den. . .Athenienserne kunde berøve ham Livet, det skulde han finde sig i; men en Frifindelse paa det Vilkaar, at han skulde opgive denne guddommelige Mission, vilde han aldrig antage, da det vilde være et Forsøg paa at myrde ham i aandelig Forstand [had come not to save the world but to judge it. . .The Athenians could take life–to this he would submit–but an acquittal on the condition that

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[299]*KSV*, 347; *CI*, 270.
[300]*KSV*, 347; *CI*, 270.
[301]*KSV*, 339; *CI*, 261.

he give up this divine mission he would never accept, since that would be an attempt to murder him in an intellectual and spiritual sense]."[302] For Kierkegaard the "guddommelige Mission [divine mission]" of Socrates was to create the existence of an individual who was absolute unto himself and to lead others in that same direction. Kierkegaard comments that a death sentence was a perfectly ironic end for Socrates because Socrates did not know if death was negative or positive, the possibility of either was open.[303] Socrates' successfully opened ironic space himself and by doing that was able to keep all possibilities open even in the face of execution. Although those who condemned him believed they were punishing him, Socrates did not see death as punishment because he "is ignorant of what death is and of what there is after death, whether there is anything or there is nothing at all." Since there was no way to prove that it was negative or positive, Socrates did not have to avoid it or consider it a punishment. He could maintain a negative position, and within the negative space of his irony be absolute.

Ironically, when irony is uncontrolled it becomes a controller. Socrates' irony made him "at være sig selv nok [sufficient unto himself],"[304] but that also meant that Socrates was completely bound within himself of which, according to Kierkegaard, Socrates still only had a negative knowledge. Though Socrates irony freed him from actuality and created a space within which he was absolute, Socrates' was bound by his ironic suspension. Mohammed's coffin was free from earthly gravity because of the magnets, but it was also bound in the negative space by the magnets. For both Socrates

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[302]*KSV*, 268; *CI*, 173.
[303]*KSV*, 286; *CI*, 196.
[304]*KSV*, 274; *CI*, 182.

and Mohammed's coffin, the means used to produce freedom also produce another captivity.

Kierkegaard thinks Socrates recognized his bound position, but Socrates was not bothered by it. Socrates knew he knew nothing, but he did not try to escape the nothingness; instead, he embraced it. Kierkegaard concludes that "Man kan derfor sige om Ironien, at det er den Alvor med Intet, forsaavidt som det ikke er den Alvor med Noget. Den opfatter bestandig Intet i Modsætning til Noget, og, for at frigjøre sig for Alvor med Noget, griber den Intet. Men Intet bliver det den heller ikke Alvor med, uden forsaavidt som det ikke er den Alvor med Noget [Therefore we can say of irony that it is earnestness about nothing–insofar as it is not earnestness about something. It continually conceives of nothing in contrast to something, and in order to free itself of earnestness about anything, it grasps the nothing. But it does not become earnestness about nothing, either, except insofar an it is not earnestness about anything.]"[305] The nothingness which Socrates embraced, only existed in opposition to the positivity around it. Because of the necessary relationship of irony to both the nothingness and the somethingness by which it distinguishes itself, Kierkegaard suggests that irony does open space for something that is wholly different (other) from everything in actuality.

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[305]*KSV*, 347; *CI*, 270.

Appendix B:

Hebrew text of Abraham's story and Greek text of Mary's story

Luke 1:26[306] Ἐν δὲ τῷ μηνὶ τῷ ἕκτῳ ἀπεστάλη ὁ ἄγγελος Γαβριὴλ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς πόλιν τῆς Γαλιλαίας ᾗ ὄνομα Ναζαρὲθ
27 πρὸς παρθένον ἐμνηστευμένην ἀνδρὶ ᾧ ὄνομα Ἰωσὴφ ἐξ οἴκου Δαυὶδ καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς παρθένου Μαριάμ.
28 καὶ εἰσελθὼν πρὸς αὐτὴν εἶπεν· χαῖρε, κεχαριτωμένη, ὁ κύριος μετὰ σοῦ.
29 ἡ δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ διεταράχθη καὶ διελογίζετο ποταπὸς εἴη ὁ ἀσπασμὸς οὗτος.
30 καὶ εἶπεν ὁ ἄγγελος αὐτῇ· μὴ φοβοῦ, Μαριάμ, εὗρες γὰρ χάριν παρὰ τῷ θεῷ.
31 καὶ ἰδοὺ συλλήμψῃ ἐν γαστρὶ καὶ τέξῃ υἱὸν καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν.
32 οὗτος ἔσται μέγας καὶ υἱὸς ὑψίστου κληθήσεται καὶ δώσει αὐτῷ κύριος ὁ θεὸς τὸν θρόνον Δαυὶδ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ,
33 καὶ βασιλεύσει ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον Ἰακὼβ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας καὶ τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔσται τέλος.
34 εἶπεν δὲ Μαριὰμ πρὸς τὸν ἄγγελον· πῶς ἔσται τοῦτο, ἐπεὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω;
35 καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ ἄγγελος εἶπεν αὐτῇ· πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σὲ καὶ δύναμις ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει σοι· διὸ καὶ τὸ γεννώμενον ἅγιον κληθήσεται υἱὸς θεοῦ.
36 καὶ ἰδοὺ Ἐλισάβετ ἡ συγγενίς σου καὶ αὐτὴ συνείληφεν υἱὸν ἐν γήρει αὐτῆς καὶ οὗτος μὴν ἕκτος ἐστὶν αὐτῇ τῇ καλουμένῃ στείρᾳ·
37 ὅτι οὐκ ἀδυνατήσει παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ πᾶν ῥῆμα.
38 εἶπεν δὲ Μαριάμ· ἰδοὺ ἡ δούλη κυρίου· γένοιτό μοι κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου. καὶ ἀπῆλθεν ἀπ' αὐτῆς ὁ ἄγγελος.

Luke 2:4 Ἀνέβη δὲ καὶ Ἰωσὴφ ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας ἐκ πόλεως Ναζαρὲθ εἰς τὴν Ἰουδαίαν εἰς πόλιν Δαυὶδ ἥτις καλεῖται Βηθλέεμ, διὰ τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν ἐξ οἴκου καὶ πατριᾶς Δαυίδ,
5 ἀπογράψασθαι σὺν Μαριὰμ τῇ ἐμνηστευμένῃ αὐτῷ, οὔσῃ ἐγκύῳ.
6 Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ εἶναι αὐτοὺς ἐκεῖ ἐπλήσθησαν αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ τεκεῖν αὐτήν,
7 καὶ ἔτεκεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς τὸν πρωτότοκον, καὶ ἐσπαργάνωσεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἀνέκλινεν αὐτὸν ἐν φάτνῃ, διότι οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς τόπος ἐν τῷ καταλύματι.
8 Καὶ ποιμένες ἦσαν ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ τῇ αὐτῇ ἀγραυλοῦντες καὶ φυλάσσοντες φυλακὰς τῆς νυκτὸς ἐπὶ τὴν ποίμνην αὐτῶν.
16 καὶ ἦλθαν σπεύσαντες καὶ ἀνεῦραν τήν τε Μαριὰμ καὶ τὸν Ἰωσὴφ καὶ τὸ βρέφος κείμενον ἐν τῇ φάτνῃ·
17 ἰδόντες δὲ ἐγνώρισαν περὶ τοῦ ῥήματος τοῦ λαληθέντος αὐτοῖς περὶ τοῦ παιδίου τούτου.
18 καὶ πάντες οἱ ἀκούσαντες ἐθαύμασαν περὶ τῶν λαληθέντων ὑπὸ τῶν ποιμένων πρὸς αὐτούς·
19 ἡ δὲ Μαριὰμ πάντα συνετήρει τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα συμβάλλουσα ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτῆς.

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[306]Greek text from *The Greek New Testament* 3rd edition corrected, ed. Kurt Aland et al. (Stuuttgart: United Bible Societies by Biblia-Druck GmbH) 1966.

Genesis 15: 1-6[307]

1 אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הָיָה דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם בַּמַּחֲזֶה לֵאמֹר
אַל־תִּירָא אַבְרָם אָנֹכִי מָגֵן לָךְ שְׂכָרְךָ הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד׃
וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם אֲדֹנָי יֱהוִה מַה־תִּתֶּן־לִי וְאָנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ עֲרִירִי וּבֶן־מֶשֶׁק בֵּיתִי הוּא
2 דַּמֶּשֶׂק אֱלִיעֶזֶר׃
3 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם הֵן לִי לֹא נָתַתָּה זָרַע וְהִנֵּה בֶן־בֵּיתִי יוֹרֵשׁ אֹתִי׃
דְּבַר־יְהוָה אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר לֹא יִירָשְׁךָ זֶה כִּי־אִם אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִמֵּעֶיךָ הוּא יִירָשֶׁךָ׃
4 וְהִנֵּה
אֹתוֹ הַחוּצָה וַיֹּאמֶר הַבֶּט־נָא הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וּסְפֹר הַכּוֹכָבִים אִם־תּוּכַל לִסְפֹּר
5 וַיּוֹצֵא
אֹתָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ כֹּה יִהְיֶה זַרְעֶךָ׃
6 וְהֶאֱמִן בַּיהוָה וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ לּוֹ צְדָקָה׃

Genesis 17:19-27
אֱלֹהִים אֲבָל שָׂרָה אִשְׁתְּךָ יֹלֶדֶת לְךָ בֵּן וְקָרָאתָ אֶת־שְׁמוֹ יִצְחָק וַהֲקִמֹתִי
וַיֹּאמֶר
אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתּוֹ לִבְרִית עוֹלָם לְזַרְעוֹ אַחֲרָיו׃
שְׁמַעְתִּיךָ הִנֵּה בֵּרַכְתִּי אֹתוֹ וְהִפְרֵיתִי אֹתוֹ וְהִרְבֵּיתִי אֹתוֹ בִּמְאֹד מְאֹד
20 וּלְיִשְׁמָעֵאל
שְׁנֵים־עָשָׂר נְשִׂיאִם יוֹלִיד וּנְתַתִּיו לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל׃
וְאֶת־בְּרִיתִי אָקִים אֶת־יִצְחָק אֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵד לְךָ שָׂרָה לַמּוֹעֵד הַזֶּה בַּשָּׁנָה הָאַחֶרֶת׃
21
22 וַיְכַל לְדַבֵּר אִתּוֹ וַיַּעַל אֱלֹהִים מֵעַל אַבְרָהָם׃
23 וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָהָם אֶת־יִשְׁמָעֵאל בְּנוֹ וְאֵת כָּל־יְלִידֵי בֵיתוֹ וְאֵת כָּל־מִקְנַת כַּסְפּוֹ
כָּל־זָכָר בְּאַנְשֵׁי בֵית אַבְרָהָם וַיָּמָל אֶת־בְּשַׂר עָרְלָתָם בְּעֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר
אִתּוֹ אֱלֹהִים׃
24 וְאַבְרָהָם בֶּן־תִּשְׁעִים וָתֵשַׁע שָׁנָה בְּהִמֹּלוֹ בְּשַׂר עָרְלָתוֹ׃
25 וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל בְּנוֹ בֶּן־שְׁלֹשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה בְּהִמֹּלוֹ אֵת בְּשַׂר עָרְלָתוֹ׃
26 בְּעֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה נִמּוֹל אַבְרָהָם וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל בְּנוֹ׃

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[307]Hebrew text from *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgatensia* 5th edition corrected, ed. K. Elliger et al. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft) 1997.

27 וְכָל־אַנְשֵׁי בֵיתוֹ יְלִיד בָּיִת וּמִקְנַת־כֶּסֶף מֵאֵת בֶּן־נֵכָר נִמֹּלוּ אִתּוֹ׃ ף

Genesis 21:1-2

1 וַיְהִי אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהָאֱלֹהִים נִסָּה אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו
אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי׃
קַח־נָא אֶת־בִּנְךָ אֶת־יְחִידְךָ אֲשֶׁר־אָהַבְתָּ אֶת־יִצְחָק וְלֶךְ־לְךָ אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַמֹּרִיָּה
2 וַיֹּאמֶר
וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה עַל אַחַד הֶהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ׃

Genesis 22:1-13

׃וַיְהִי אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהָאֱלֹהִים נִסָּה אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו
אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי׃
קַח־נָא אֶת־בִּנְךָ אֶת־יְחִידְךָ אֲשֶׁר־אָהַבְתָּ אֶת־יִצְחָק וְלֶךְ־לְךָ אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַמֹּרִיָּה
2 וַיֹּאמֶר
וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה עַל אַחַד הֶהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ׃
אַבְרָהָם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיַּחֲבֹשׁ אֶת־חֲמֹרוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־שְׁנֵי נְעָרָיו אִתּוֹ וְאֵת יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ
3 וַיְבַקַּע עֲצֵי עֹלָה וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־אָמַר־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים׃
4 בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם מֵרָחֹק׃
אַבְרָהָם אֶל־נְעָרָיו שְׁבוּ־לָכֶם פֹּה עִם־הַחֲמוֹר וַאֲנִי וְהַנַּעַר נֵלְכָה עַד־כֹּה
5 וַנִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְנָשׁוּבָה אֲלֵיכֶם׃
6 וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֲצֵי הָעֹלָה וַיָּשֶׂם עַל־יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיִּקַּח בְּיָדוֹ אֶת־הָאֵשׁ
וְאֶת־הַמַּאֲכֶלֶת וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו׃
וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֶּנִּי בְנִי וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה הָאֵשׁ
7 וְהָעֵצִים וְאַיֵּה הַשֶּׂה לְעֹלָה׃
8 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה־לּוֹ הַשֶּׂה לְעֹלָה בְּנִי וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו׃
אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּבֶן שָׁם אַבְרָהָם אֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וַיַּעֲרֹךְ
9 וַיָּבְאוּ
אֶת־הָעֵצִים וַיַּעֲקֹד אֶת־יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיָּשֶׂם אֹתוֹ עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ מִמַּעַל לָעֵצִים׃
10 וַיִּשְׁלַח אַבְרָהָם אֶת־יָדוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הַמַּאֲכֶלֶת לִשְׁחֹט אֶת־בְּנוֹ׃
11 וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי׃
אַל־תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ אֶל־הַנַּעַר וְאַל־תַּעַשׂ לוֹ מְאוּמָה כִּי עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־יְרֵא
12 וַיֹּאמֶר
אֱלֹהִים אַתָּה וְלֹא חָשַׂכְתָּ אֶת־בִּנְךָ אֶת־יְחִידְךָ מִמֶּנִּי׃

אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה־אַיִל אַחַר נֶאֱחַז בַּסְּבַךְ בְּקַרְנָיו וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הָאַיִל וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ לְעֹלָה תַּחַת בְּנוֹ׃ 13 וַיִּשָּׂא

Appendix C:

Feminism and Feminist Criticism

Concluding that the difference between the masculine and feminine experience is defined by the ability of the feminine to have a child and the numerous ironic relationships stemming from there, may seem a strange conclusion for a woman writing about feminist theory. It is indeed a different point of view than much of feminism. While I think there is much to be gained from feminism, I think a distinction should be made between the general term feminism and the more specific term feminist criticism. Feminism is a broad category that includes feminist criticism, political feminist agendas, and individual feminists with varying opinions. Of these categories the one I find most useful is feminist criticism, particularly French feminist criticism. As a tool of critical theory, feminist criticism offers another perspective and insights in the pursuit of truth. Although no single philosophy can give direct access to truth, the various approaches each provide a way to investigate the possibilities and meaning of the human condition.

Unfortunately some feminists seem more interested in being belligerent than in using their unique situation to pursue truth. I do sympathize with the frustration and fury that can be aroused at the abuse women have suffered at the hands of men, but I do not know that in itself such emotion is beneficial. For some feminists men are the enemy who need to be fought on every front. Some feminists believe that a woman cannot be a feminist and heterosexual because if a woman sleeps with the enemy, she can not fight the enemy. Many feminists care only to liberate women from the oppression created by

the relationship to the masculine world.[308] Other feminists believe that it is motherhood that has oppressed women. If a man follows the advice to "keep your wife barefoot and pregnant," a woman will have little, if any, independence to be (her)self. Caring for and raising children becomes the primary (or only) use for a woman in society. She exists solely to satisfy the bodily needs of those around her. One answer to this oppression of the masculine system by proposing to overthrow the patriarchal order.[309]

I question that agenda not only because it is impractical, but also because I do not think it would be beneficial to eliminate the difference between the sexes or to privilege one over the other. Despite the apparent opinion of some feminists, the human race cannot survive without both males and females. Additionally laying the full weight of blame on the patriarchal order is not an accurate evaluation of the system. It cannot entirely be men's fault that women have been oppressed. In most cultures it is the mothers who teach their sons to take a dominant role and their daughters to accept a submissive role. Granted that those mothers were taught (and sometimes forced) by mothers who were taught by mothers who were taught (*ad infinitum*) to accept and

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[308]The problem of what the sexual difference of the sexes means has been greatly debated. One of the earliest writers on the problem is Luce Irigaray "Sexual Difference," trans Seán Hand in *French Feminish Thought: A Reader*, ed Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd) 1989, 118-130.

[309]Delphy, 93-94 states that society has transformed "the material conditions of periods or motherhood. . .in themselves natural, into actual *handicaps*" (emphasis in original). She concludes that "it is in the interests of society to hide the fact that periods are not a natural phenomenon but a constructed phenomenon." She argues that sexually anatomy is as constructed as gender, meaning that without society's interpretation of the anatomy, the anatomy would have no meaning. From this point of view, feminists cannot separate what it means to be a woman (i.e. have and use female anatomy) from what society dictates it means. While Delphy is correct in a practical sense that female anatomy has probably never had meaning outside the construct of a society, it does not mean that the female anatomy has no essential meaning or that any given woman can not access (at least in part) that essential meaning despite what society dictates.

propagate the patriarchal system. However, the fact remains that the women did accept the system and have been a means of propagating it. Privileging the feminine over the masculine would be making the same mistake of privileging the masculine over the feminine that has dominated societies for thousands of years. While some feminists might say it is only fair that the roles be reversed because women have been marginalized for so long. They may have a point about being fair; however, that would not make it right or beneficial.

Some feminists suggest that women should enter the patriarchal order and become leaders of it. Since both the American and French feminist movements began as political movements, entering the masculine public life offered necessary avenues for the political advancements the feminists purposed. Because of the political nature of the inception of feminism much of feminist theory evolved from the need for women to interact and advance in the masculine world.[310] Many of the issues of feminism are centered on woman's ability to control her body, woman's place in the workforce, woman's right to equal pay, and other traditionally masculine dominated areas. I have great respect for the women who chose to enter the patriarchal system and excel in it. Those women become excellent businesswomen, lawyers, doctors, teachers, and other professionals. Many of these women who have dedicated themselves wholly to a career and are very successful consider themselves the most progressive and successful feminists.

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[310]See Arlette Farge, "Women's History: An Overview" trans Roisin Mallaghan as well as Anne Tristan and Annie de Pisan "Tales from the Woman's Movement" in *French Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd) 1989, 133-149 and 33-69 respectively.

Many feminists who become successful career women chose not to have families. Some of them claim that being a liberated woman requires a woman to abandon the tradition roles of wife and mother. Marriage, pregnancy, and child rearing have been modes of oppression for women as far back as history has recorded. Because marriage, pregnancy, and child-rearing have been a modes of oppression for such a long time, they are often considered the oppression itself. If a woman wants to escape the oppression, the way she escapes is to not be married and not have children. Instead she devotes herself to a career where she can pursue an equal measure of appreciation and honor available to men. Some women manage to have both a family and career, but those who want to be feminists understandably do not want to participate in the modes of oppression from which they are seeking liberty. Some even go so far as to say that marriage and children prevent a woman from ever being anything more than a man's other, from ever being a self, or ever understanding what it means to be a self. Truly marriage and children complicate a woman's life and keep her from being as successful in a career as she might otherwise be. But, to claim that marriage and motherhood should be considered anti-feminist is both extreme and irresponsible.

Marriage and childbirth also complicate the ability to define a self. However, pregnancy and childbirth are the most uniquely feminine experiences available to any woman. To reject pregnancy and childbirth because they have been modes of oppression is literally "throwing the baby out with the bath water." A woman cannot divorce herself from seeing any validity in the most uniquely feminine experience without divorcing herself from a significant aspect of what it means to be female. I suggest that the women who do not who want to have children in order to have a career and do not want to be

women; they have rejected the most feminine part of human experience. Instead they want to be female men. They want participate in the masculine world, be treated the same as everyone else (i.e. men) in that world, and be successful in that world.

Again, I have nothing against a woman who chooses to give up her possibility of motherhood to be successful in a masculine world. I just disagree that such a choice should be considered the pinnacle of feminism. I think a woman has every right and should have every opportunity prove herself in the masculine world based on her talents and work ethic, not how beautiful she is or with whom she is willing to sleep. When women do find successful careers, they bring a feminine element with them into the masculine world, which I hope will continue until the world is more balanced between the feminine and masculine. Despite whatever of the feminine they bring, the women who are successful in a career are generally successful because they have learned to follow the rules and expectations of the masculine system. Because of this situation, I do not know that women who chose a life devoted to the masculine system (even if they are trying to incorporate feminine elements into it) should necessarily be called successful feminists. Rather they should recognize themselves as females successfully filling a (masculine) role in the masculine world.[311]

With many other feminists I recognize the danger that by recognizing

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[311]As a disclaimer let me say that I have nothing against women participating in a masculine world. I think many benefits can come from women bringing some femininity into a masculine dominated business or university or any other profession. I myself have continued to participate in academics even though I am married and have children. I do not think that women are "baby machines" or that their only valuable contribution is as a mother. I hope to be able to continue my academic interests by working in the field, but at the same time I value and even give priority to my experience as a mother. (This priority is evidenced by the fact that this thesis has mostly been written between the hours of 10 pm and 1 am.)

traditionally feminine things as important to women feminism can perpetuate the very oppression that it seeks to escape. However, I also recognize that to divorce women from their "traditional" (and biological) characteristics, denies the most uniquely feminine experiences. By accepting pregnancy, childbearing, and child-rearing as normative and meaningful for women, it could be construed that women's liberation landed them right where men thought they should be all along. These many difficulties of feminism are articulated with the questions, "Should feminism concern itself with establishing ideals grounded in the acknowledgment of traditionally feminine qualities; that is, a relational mode of being that tends to value self-sacrifice? Are ideals appropriate? How can one articulate a "feminine" mode of being without grafting this project upon essentialist characterizations? Does the use of stereotyped characterizations of the sexes risk perpetuating dangerous cultural identifications of women—and men? Do the feminists who oppose femininity to masculinity ultimately reinscribe western dichotomous thinking, even when they do not associate these terms with women and men? By propounding a common ideal for all does androgyny, by combining traditionally masculine traits with traditionally feminine traits, constitute a problem for feminism?"[312]

Despite the dangers and difficulties, the ironic relationship between the sexes is such that without its opposite neither side would be able to experience as much meaning in its own uniqueness. In my view a successful feminist is a woman who understands the singularity of the feminine experience including the maternal experience. Of all the aspects of feminism it is probably the maternal aspect that has been least acknowledged, but is most distinctive. Feminism needs to acknowledge the uniqueness of the maternal

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[312]*Feminist Interpretations of Søren Kierkegaard*, 22.

experience and examine how it should be addressed. Women who cannot or choose not to participate in pregnancy or childbirth can still appreciate and experience what it means to be feminine without those, but they should not deny the value of those experiences as part of the feminine sphere. Whether any particular woman does or does not experience pregnancy or motherhood, those experiences do remain the most unique experience available only women. To reject those experiences entirely suggests that women should be defined by their masculine characteristics rather than their feminine experience.

Feminism has women who can speak about the value of engaging in the masculine sphere. Feminism needs more women who can articulate the meaning and value of pregnancy and motherhood from experience. Without women to speak about, analyze, and interpret the meaning of the maternal aspect of the feminine, the most unique feminine experience will remain the traditional and oppressive experience that feminists reject instead of becoming a forum for understanding the irony that both threatens the self and gives the self more meaning. Instead of ostracizing the traditional feminine roles, feminists need to reclaim them as their own and allow women to define and vocalize what those experiences mean for woman.

Both sexes are important to a balanced, healthy society. Although many women, and even more wives, would like to think that life would be much better if men would just care about the things women care about, that would only produce an easier life for women not actually a better one.[313] I propose that the reason that both sexes need to acknowledge and understand their shared subjection to the human condition and their

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[313]On the other hand there are probably many men might agree that living without the expectations of a wife and pressure to support children would be easier. Again, easier does not mean better.

differences in that condition is because the relationship between the sexes is irony. Without the irony relating and separating the sexes fuller relationships cannot be found nor can the complementary opposites learn about the possibilities of a union that separates or negative space that binds nor can either experience the miracle of making the ironic space of the sexes (re)produce more meaning than either could achieve individually.

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