

Irony and Kierkegaard - Cheryl .A Walsh

Title: IRONY AND KIERKEGAARD

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Award: Ph.D 1997

ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to gain an understanding of irony, chiefly through considering Kierkegaard's treatment of it, and to gain an understanding of Kierkegaard's position through seeing it in the light of irony.

Chapter I examines irony as negation and considers whether absolute negation is intelligible. It is found to be self-contradictory. If irony is to be coherent its negation must be limited. Examination of the effects of limited and unlimited negation illustrates those conclusions.

Chapter II examines irony as a way of living which is mainly characterized by detachment. Analysis of detachment finds, as in the case of negation, that absolute detachment is self-contradictory and that if irony is to be a coherent standpoint its detachment must be understood as being limited, that is, as not entirely negative freedom but also as involving positive freedom or engagement.

Chapter III focuses on the typical strategies of irony, all of which involve indirectness. The ironic strategies discussed are brevity, deception, "intensification of the madness", and seduction.

Chapter IV raises the question of the significance of irony. It looks further at the dialectical logic that, I have argued, governs all of the movements of irony discussed. I conclude that not only is irony dialectical, but dialectic is also ironic. Irony thus limits any dialectical system of thought or existence but is also limited by it.

So far as Kierkegaard is concerned, there is emphasis on those of his works that I consider to be most relevant to irony. The thesis is not intended as an even examination of all aspects of his position, though the findings on irony have implications for his position.

There is some discussion of Hegel, mainly in so far as he is relevant to Kierkegaard and often only in so far as Kierkegaard's interpretation of Hegel is concerned. Hegel is most prominent in so far as I draw on him for a notion of dialectic. I am not directly concerned with Hegel's writings on irony.