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February 20, 2014: A Norm Free Space/a Mathematical Universe

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2/20/2014— Kierkegaard referred to the story of the binding of Isaac in the Bible as the teleological suspension of the ethical. By this, Kierkegaard was pointing to the terrible command of God to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. The story of the binding of Isaac always presents a dilemma for the ethical religious believer. Although the story turns out “happily,” that is not much comfort in terms of what the religious believer should do when confronted with a command of God that conflicts with accepted ethical principles. In reading about the grace of God in Karl Barth’s theology today, my friend and colleague suggested that the grace of God through Jesus Christ is a suspension of the ethical in what one might call the opposite direction. That is, through Jesus Christ all humanity is saved even though we are all sinners and do not “deserve” to be saved. The suspension of the ethical seems a meek term for a command to kill one’s son or a grace that includes the undeserving. A better term might be a “norm free space.” In dealing with the acts of God in relationship with human beings, one is dealing with a norm free space. This concept of a norm free space is consistent with a number of parables in the gospel, for example that of the prodigal son, in which the undeserving receive more than they should. A norm free space also describes how Jesus deals with the law in a very loose and easy way, much to the chagrin of the Pharisees. It also describes Jesus’ command to judge not. All this is well and good as a matter of Christian theology, but is reality really this way? There is a structured, but norm free, realm—mathematics. Mathematics has been suggested as the underlying structure of the universe. That is why mathematical equation sometimes predict nature’s actual behavior. Mathematics has been known as a way to look into the mind of God. In terms of the norm free space, mathematics may be a way to look into the heart of God as well.