

2 Faith and religious knowledge

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Schleiermacher, famously, regards religious faith and theology as grounded in religious consciousness, and thus as broadly empirical. This is the source of much of the fascination of his religious thought, and also of many of the objections that have been raised against it. The aim of this chapter is to provide a critical analysis of Schleiermacher's epistemology of religion and its theological implications. In the limited space available we will concentrate on his masterpiece, the *Christian Faith*, looking from time to time for relevant background in other works.

RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS AND ITS OBJECT

Schleiermacher has been accused of replacing God with human consciousness as the object of theology and religious thought. The charge is not exactly groundless. He himself said (in a text from the period of the *Christian Faith*) that "it can rightly be said that in religion everything is immediately true, since nothing at all is expressed in its individual moments except the religious person's own state of mind" (*KGA*, I.12, 136; *OR*, Oman, 108).¹ An important motive for this claim is explicit in the statement: to the extent that religion does not go beyond the religious person's own state of mind, it can hope to have the certain truth commonly ascribed to direct ("immediate") experience of one's own consciousness. The accusation of anthropocentrism or subjectivism thus has some relation to Schleiermacher's focus on experience.

To conclude, however, that religious faith and theology, in Schleiermacher's view, are not about God, but only about human states of mind, is to adopt a badly one-sided reading. There is plenty of evidence in his writings about religion, early and late, that he regarded religious consciousness as having at least an implicit intentionality or reference to a being much greater than ourselves. How he conceives of this reference is one of the difficult things to understand in Schleiermacher; it will be our next concern.

In an important recent criticism, Wayne Proudfoot has written that “Schleiermacher is trying to have it both ways. The religious consciousness [according to him] . . . is both intentional . . . and immediate,” where “a mental state is intentional if it can be specified only by reference to an object,” and immediate insofar as “it is not dependent on concepts or beliefs.” Proudfoot objects that what is intentional “cannot be independent of [conceptual] thought” because of its object reference.²

It is certain that Schleiermacher (at least in his mature writings) held that religious consciousness, in its most essential form, is preconceptual or independent of concepts, in the sense of not being structured by concepts. Both in the *Speeches* and in the *Christian Faith* he distinguishes the fundamental religious consciousness from speculation or thinking on the one hand, and from ethics or doing on the other hand. Religion does not need the grounding in more or less “speculative” metaphysics that so many philosophical theologians have tried to give it, nor the grounding in morality that Kant proposed as its sole proper basis. Religion “has its own province in the mind in which it reigns sovereign” (*KGA*, 1.2, 204; *OR*, Crouter, 17). Its province is constituted by a faculty or faculties different from those of conceptual thought and voluntary action. I believe this is consistent with Schleiermacher’s treating religious consciousness as having at least an implicit intentionality, but the intentionality of a nonconceptual religious consciousness may be importantly different from that of conceptual thought or language.

The intentionality of religious consciousness is most obvious, and its nonconceptual character perhaps least clear, in the first edition of the *Speeches*, in 1799. There the central religious consciousness is characterized as intuition (*Anschauung*) and feeling, and the senior partner is clearly intuition (a sort of mental seeing, distinct from any systematic theory). “Intuition of the universe . . . is the highest and most universal formula of religion” (*KGA*, 1.2, 213; *OR*, Crouter, 24). The formula wears its implication of intentionality on its face: intuition *of* the universe. Schleiermacher holds explicitly that “the universe and the relationship of the human being to it” is the object (*Gegenstand*) of religion, as also of metaphysics and morality (*KGA*, 1.2, 207; *OR*, Crouter, 19). Not only does religious intuition have an object; it relates to the object as having a certain character. “Thus to accept everything individual as a part of the whole and everything limited as a presentation (*Darstellung*) of the infinite is religion” (*KGA*, 1.2, 214; *OR*, Crouter, 25).

In the second edition of the *Speeches*, in 1806, feeling becomes the senior partner; indeed, it displaces intuition entirely, not everywhere, but

in many of the key passages of the second Speech, on the essence of religion.³ This change has been much discussed in the secondary literature. Two things are clear and worth noting here. One is that by 1806 intuition has acquired a more theoretical cast in Schleiermacher's thought, and is associated at least as much with science as with religion.⁴ The other is that already in the first edition intuition is seen as looking outward to the object, feeling as turned inward toward the center of the self (*KGA*, 1.2, 220–2; *OR*, Crouter, 31–2). Defining the essence of religion as a matter of feeling rather than intuition is thus in line with the view that the primary religious consciousness is a sort of *self-consciousness*.

Even as feeling, however, religious consciousness still seems to have intentionality in the second edition of the *Speeches*. It is “the one and all of religion to feel everything that moves us in feeling, in its highest unity, as one and the same” (*KGA*, 1.12, 68; *OR*, Oman, 49–50). Here what moves us in feeling is *felt as* having a characteristic that is obviously seen as religiously significant.

In the *Christian Faith* Schleiermacher's formula for the “essence” of religion – or more precisely, of “piety” or personal religiousness⁵ – is that it is a “feeling of absolute dependence” (*CF* [1830], § 4.3). It consists in the fact “that we are conscious of ourselves as absolutely dependent, or, equivalently, as in relation with God” (§ 4). These formulations again bear obvious implications of intentionality. The fundamental religious consciousness is a feeling *of* absolute dependence, a consciousness *of* ourselves *as* absolutely dependent. It is consciousness of a characteristic of *ourselves*, to be sure, but it is a *relational* characteristic. We can hardly be absolutely dependent unless there is something, other than ourselves, on which we are absolutely dependent. This something, “the *whence* that is implied [*mitgesetzt*] in this self-consciousness . . . is to be designated by the expression ‘God’,” and Schleiermacher adds that he takes this to be “the truly original meaning” of the word “God,” which gets its content, in this context, from reflection on the feeling, and not from any knowledge of God that is prior to the feeling (§ 4.4).

Can we say then that according to the *Christian Faith* the essential religious consciousness, the feeling of absolute dependence, has God as an intended object? Not without qualification. Despite the tight connection of this feeling with consciousness of “something distinct from us” on which we are dependent, “still the self-consciousness does not therefore become consciousness of an object, but it remains self-consciousness” (*CF*, 1821–2, § 9.1). According to the 1822 lectures on *Dialectic*, indeed, there is no contrast of subject and object at all in the feeling that is pure immediate self-consciousness

(*Dial O*, 287). The whence of absolute dependence is not given in the feeling itself of absolute dependence, as part of the conscious content of that feeling. How then do we get the idea of God as such a whence? It is *inferred* from the description or interpretation of the essential religious consciousness *as a feeling of absolute dependence*.

It is important at this point that we are concerned with an idea or representation (*Vorstellung*) that is expressed linguistically, by a word ("God"). This is part of the professedly philosophical introductory sections of the *Christian Faith*; but like Christian theology's doctrines or faith-propositions (*Glaubenssätze*), the description here of a feeling as one of absolute dependence is an interpretation (*Auffassung*) of a religious state of mind, presented in speech (cf. *CF*, 1830, § 15). And philosophy's interpretation, as far as it goes, agrees perfectly with theology's: the feeling is a consciousness of absolute dependence, and hence of relation with God. The inference that a whence of the absolute dependence is implied is based no doubt on a *concept* of absolute dependence, and issues in a representation or concept of God which has God as an intentional object in a way that Proudfoot could accept because it is not "independent of thought."

Can we say then that according to the *Christian Faith* God is not an intentional object of the essential religious consciousness, the feeling of absolute dependence, but only of thoughts that reflect on that feeling? Not without qualification. For Schleiermacher is plainly committed to the *correctness* of his interpretative description of piety as a feeling *of* absolute dependence. He gives us no reason to think that this feeling can be specified or identified except in terms of religious concepts expressing such intentionality, as Proudfoot rightly points out.⁶ And Schleiermacher seems equally committed to the correctness of the inference from absolute dependence to a whence that can be called "God." If he is right on these points, then surely it is fair to say that God, as the "whence," is implied or co-positus (*mitgesetzt*) in the feeling of absolute dependence, and in that sense is implicitly an intentional object of the feeling.

Does this (as Proudfoot charges) compromise Schleiermacher's classification of the essential religious consciousness as nonconceptual, as in itself "neither a knowing nor a doing but a determination of feeling or of immediate self-consciousness" (*CF*, 1830, § 3)? That deserves, I think, to remain a controversial issue. The question is whether there can be, and indeed are, states of consciousness that are not conceptually structured but are best understood by us by analogy with the intentionality of conceptual thought. More than one influential philosophical movement is committed to a

negative answer to this question, but it is not obvious that the negative answer is correct. What Schleiermacher seems to be affirming is a sort of self-consciousness, a feeling of how it is with us, that is not conceptually structured but which we can express by assimilating it to conceptually structured claims about how it is with us; and some may find that quite plausible.

This is connected with issues about “the given.” Feeling, for Schleiermacher, is a given in the sense that it is a conscious state that is what it is independently of any conceptual interpretation that we give to it. However, this view does not carry with it two implications that many find objectionable. (1) Feeling, I believe, should be understood here as nonconceptual only in the sense that it is not *structured* by concepts. This does not imply that feeling is *causally independent* of conceptual thought. In fact it is evidently Schleiermacher’s view that the feeling of absolute dependence will exist in a pure, clear, strong form only in contexts in which it is supported by appropriate conceptual thought. This appears, for instance, in the relation of the feeling of absolute dependence to the sequential development in each individual of self-consciousness, from infantile to mature, in *CF*, 1830, § 5.1–3. (2) Most important is the other point: the givenness of feeling does not guarantee the truth of anything we say about the feeling. A verbal characterization of a feeling is a conceptual interpretation of a nonconceptual state of consciousness, and as such it can be mistaken, or at any rate off target. Thus dogmatic propositions can have more or less “ecclesiastical value,” depending on their “relation [of more or less adequate correspondence, I take it] to the religious emotions themselves” (§ 17.1).

Indeed, even granting that we have states of nonconceptual self-consciousness that are best understood by analogy with the intentionality of conceptual thoughts, we may still wonder whether Schleiermacher has rightly interpreted any such state in speaking of a feeling of absolute dependence. There are possible theoretical as well as introspective reasons for misgivings on this score. Schleiermacher holds that such a feeling is “an essential element of human nature” (*CF*, 1830, § 6.1), and hence presumably present, permanently, in typical human adults. Introspectively, then, you should be able to find it in yourself; look for a feeling of not having made yourself to be as you are [of *Sichselbstnichtsogeseztzhaben*] with respect to your whole condition and particularly with respect to your consciousness of your own spontaneity, freedom, and action on other things (§ 4.1 and 3). My own experience, and that of my students, suggests that it is not easy to be sure, introspectively, whether we have it.

At the level of theory, some may be troubled by the *Christian Faith's* clear implication that causal relations to other things (not only to God but also to the rest of the created universe [CF, 1830, § 4.1–2, § 8.2]) are part of the implicit content of forms of immediate self-consciousness. This is perhaps the most obvious point at which Schleiermacher's view of experience differs from views that have prevailed in anglophone empiricism, which have typically followed Hume (and Malebranche) in denying that any causal relationship can be part of the content of immediate experience. In German thought, on the other hand, the assumption that such implicitly causal facts about the self can be part of the content of self-consciousness was not unprecedented. Kant, for instance, states that the "I think," which we must always be able to have as part of our consciousness, "expresses the act of determining my existence."⁷ The issue probably deserves to remain controversial.

One might wonder whether Schleiermacher himself is consistent on this point; for the first edition of the *Christian Faith* contains a note in which we may be tempted to see him as expressing a more Humean point of view. Commenting on the dependence of human ills (*Übel*) on sin, he says that "strictly speaking, no causal relation in itself can be perceived and grounded, without any presupposition, purely through experience" (CF, 1821–2, § 99). Although this note, like a number of others, is dropped from the second edition, I think it is probably consistent with the claim of a feeling of absolute dependence. What Schleiermacher is denying in the context of the note is the possibility of immediate experience of a causal relation between two types of experienced particulars. What he affirms in his account of God-consciousness is the possibility of immediate consciousness of oneself as active or affected, and thus of one's own pole of what is implicitly a causal relation, but not of the other, divine pole, which must be inferred and is only an implicit object of the feeling.

FAITH IN GOD

Glaube (faith or belief) is much less prominent than self-consciousness and feeling as a topic of Schleiermacher's writings on religion; but he does develop a concept of faith, and it is particularly important in the *Christian Faith* (as the title would lead us to expect). In the first edition of the *Christian Faith* he defines faith as "nothing but the assenting certainty that accompanies the pious emotions" (CF, 1821–2, § 6). "Faith in God," likewise, in the second edition, is "nothing but certainty about the feeling of absolute dependence as such – that is, as conditioned by a being posited outside us, and as expressing our relationship to that being" (CF, 1830, § 14.1).

In these formulations faith is tightly linked to feeling. A theological proposition floating free of religious feeling cannot be the object of an authentic faith, in Schleiermacher's view. This is not to say that faith is itself a part or aspect of religious feeling. He describes it rather as something that *accompanies* the pious emotions. Is faith conceptually structured, or not? A note in Schleiermacher's hand on § 14.1 of the 1830 edition of the *Christian Faith* suggests that he did think of it as conceptually structured. Adopting formulations of his former student August Twesten, he identifies faith with "the determination of our representing and knowing which the religious feeling immediately brings with it. (In general, faith [is] a holding as true that rests on feeling.)"⁸ I think "representing and knowing" here are most plausibly understood as conceptual (cf. *CF*, 1830, § 4.4).

Is the object of faith in God, then, a conceptually articulated doctrine about God? I think that is not Schleiermacher's view; rather, as he says, faith in God is *about* the feeling of absolute dependence. This does not mean that what faith is certain of is its *interpretation* of the feeling. What faith in God holds as true is principally the feeling itself. Can feelings, then, be true? Schleiermacher plainly implies that they can, and that his faith is committed to the truth of the feeling of absolute dependence (*CF*, 1830, § 40.3).

This is not to say that Schleiermacher thought that faith in God is independent of conceptually formed assent to propositions about God. He explicitly held that "the feeling of absolute dependence could not have any truth" if certain propositions about God and the creation were true (*CF*, 1830, § 40.3), and likewise that Christian piety is incompatible with some forms of speculation or philosophy, apparently including "genuinely atheistic systems of philosophy" as well as some versions of pantheism (*CF*, 1830, § 8 postscript 2 and § 28.3; *BO*, § 214). Perhaps his best formulation of the theoretical commitments of faith in God is suggested by his statement that a Christian theologian is free "to attach himself to any form of speculation so long as it allows an object to which the feeling of absolute dependence can relate itself" (*CF*, 1830, § 50.2). That there is such an object is what must be believed about God in faith in God.

It is significant that in this formulation the divine object is specified in terms of its relation to the feeling of absolute dependence. In these statements the topic is what propositions are *compatible* with Christian piety, and each of the statements occurs in a context in which Schleiermacher emphasizes the diversity of theoretical positions that are compatible with piety. The truth-commitment of his faith in God seems to be roughly of the form: "I am certain of the truth of the feeling of absolute dependence, and if it is true, then there must be an object of which *something like this* is true."

The “assenting certainty” that he defines as faith is a certainty about the truth of religious feeling, and not about the truth of any conceptualized doctrinal formulation. It is only the religious feeling that is related directly or immediately to God; the conceptual articulation is related to God only indirectly, by its relation to the feeling. Schleiermacher seems to see this as significantly softening any theoretical commitment involved in assenting to a doctrinal proposition, when he says about “theological concepts” (according to notes from his 1818 lectures on *Dialectic*) that “if one says . . . they are to be nothing but presentations of the way in which the consciousness of God is in our self-consciousness, then one can consent to them, because then they do not purport to be immediate presentations but only indirect ones” (*Dial J*, 159).

Two ideas that further loosen the connection between the truth of religious feeling and the truth of doctrines based on it play an important part in Schleiermacher’s thought. They are expressed with particular vividness in the second and third editions of the *Speeches*. (1) He held that a religious consciousness essentially the same may be expressed in quite different propositions, which may even be theoretically inconsistent with each other. “Thousands could be moved religiously in the same way, and very likely each would make different signs to characterize his feeling, led not by his sensitivity [*Gemüth*] but by external relationships.” Even of the difference between personal and impersonal ideas of deity it is claimed that which of them a person with a given “sense for the deity . . . will adopt depends merely on what he needs it for, and to which side his imagination principally inclines, to that of being and nature or to that of consciousness and thinking” (*KGA*, 1.12, 72, 124; *OR*, Oman, 52f., 97f.).⁹

(2) For philosophers of religion one of the most interesting ideas in Schleiermacher’s work is that of a superiority of religious feeling or religious consciousness in comparison with religious concepts and doctrines in regard to the truth or adequacy of their relation to the religious object. A person’s “piety, the divine in his feeling, must be better than his concept.” Both personal and impersonal conceptions of God “are faulty, and as neither of them corresponds to its object,” neither of them has religious value, “except insofar as it rests on something in the mind, of which it has fallen far short.” The value of each depends on the fact that it “presents at least one element of the feeling” (*KGA*, 1.12, 121; *OR*, Oman, 95). (The lines about concepts of God failing to correspond with their object and falling far short of religious feeling were added in the 1821 edition of the *Speeches*, and thus in the period of the *Christian Faith*.) If the suggestion is intended that religious feeling does “correspond to [the divine] object,” has “truth” as

correspondence in that way, and that is why it is superior, it is not explicit here; and I have not found these ideas explicitly presented in the *Christian Faith* itself.

In Schleiermacher's *Dialectic* the comparative adequacy of thinking and feeling in relation to the divine object is handled explicitly, and more even-handedly than in the *Speeches*. In the 1814–15 lectures “perfection and imperfection are equally apportioned to both [thought and feeling], only on different sides.” Compared with respect to completeness, “The religious feeling . . . is something really complete,” whereas “the intuition of God [here placed in the theoretical faculty] is never really complete,” because it is “only an indirect schematism,” a sketch that thought is unable to finish. With respect to purity, on the other hand, the thought or intuition of God “is entirely free [*rein*] of everything heterogeneous,” whereas the religious feeling “is never pure [*rein*], for the consciousness of God in it is always in relation to something else.” The sides of the comparison are intimately related. As a parallel passage from the lectures of 1818 indicates, the purity of the thought is a matter of seeking as its intended object the divine “in and for itself,” whereas religious feeling is consciousness of God only insofar as it is consciousness of something else (the self and the world) as absolutely dependent (*Dial* J, 152f.). And the reason why feeling is more complete than speculative thought here is presumably not that feeling can complete what speculation cannot, but rather that knowing the divine as it is in itself is a task that we cannot complete at all, whereas our absolute dependence is completely present in religious self-consciousness.¹⁰

Reticence about the divine as it is in itself is one of the most marked and most persistent features of Schleiermacher's religious thought. Far from claiming more access than thought can have to a divine thing in itself, religious feeling and a theology properly based on it do not address the subject of the inherent nature of such a thing even to the incomplete extent that philosophical speculation may address it. From the first edition of the *Speeches* in 1799 to the definitive edition of the *Christian Faith* in 1830, he insists that religious consciousness is consciousness of something other than ourselves only insofar as it is consciousness of our being causally affected by something. Saying in the second edition of the *Speeches*, that what you “feel and perceive in [religion's] stirrings is not the nature of things, but their action on you” (*KGA*, 1.12, 67; *OR*, Oman, 48), he restates in terms of feeling a claim already made in terms of intuition in the first edition (*KGA*, 1.2, 213f.; *OR*, Crouter, 24f.).

In the *Christian Faith* this point carries over into the thesis that “all the divine attributes to be dealt with in Christian faith-doctrine [*Glaubenslehre*]

must go back in some way to the divine causality, since they are only to elucidate the feeling of absolute dependence" (*CF*, 1830, § 50.3). Although what Schleiermacher says about the attributes of God – for instance, that God is omniscient and that God is love (§§ 55, 167) – may sometimes seem to ascribe some intrinsic character to God, nevertheless it is all to be understood, strictly speaking, as being about the divine causality, as that causality is felt from our side in the feeling of absolute dependence. We may see a skeptical strand in Schleiermacher's thought about God at this point, but it remains a pious skepticism, and may also be seen as a way of honoring the otherness of God.

In this it is connected with a long tradition of theologians (such as Maimonides and Aquinas) who have been reluctant to claim positive knowledge of the divine nature as it is in itself. Schleiermacher places his own view explicitly in that context, commenting that it is "praiseworthy that Albertus Magnus, and several after him, have chosen to derive all divine attributes from the concept of the eternal causality" (*CF*, 1821–2, § 64.3). Referring to three ways that have been accepted for arriving at divine attributes, the ways of eminence (or removal of limits), of negation, and of causality, Schleiermacher insists on the preeminence of the way of causality (*CF*, 1830, § 50.3). Indeed, it is hard to think of a theologian who has adhered more rigorously or more exclusively than he to the way of causality.

The most obvious reason for this adherence is explicitly stated by Schleiermacher himself: "the concept of causality stands in the closest connection with the feeling of absolute dependence itself" (*CF*, 1830, § 50.3). The formative influence of the (causal) idea of absolute dependence on his doctrine of God is rather similar, I think, to that of the idea of "first cause" on Aquinas' doctrine of God. Some of the divine attributes – eternity, omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience – are articulated and affirmed by Schleiermacher simply on the basis of reasoning about what must be true of anything on which we (and the world) are absolutely dependent. Other attributes of God – holiness, justice, love, and wisdom – he derives from specifically Christian consciousness, not just of absolute dependence, but also of sin and of redemption through Christ. These latter, however, still remain for him exclusively attributes of the divine causality as such.

Schleiermacher's commitment to absolute dependence as the content of the essential religious consciousness is momentous for the shape of his theology. A theology might have to be very different from his if its principal foundation were in experience interpreted as communication with a divine Person or as glimpses of a transcendent Good. In connection with the latter possibility, which was historically accessible to Schleiermacher in the

interaction of philosophical theology with the Platonic tradition, it is noteworthy that, among his philosophical heroes, he follows Spinoza and not Plato in identifying good with what advances the development of human life, which for Schleiermacher means especially its domination by the religious consciousness (*CF*, 1830, § 70.2–3; cf. §§ 57.1 and 60).¹¹ He adheres rigorously to the way of causality in ascribing evaluative predicates to God only on the basis of God's causal relation to the developmental goods and evils in human life (see especially §§ 83–4, and 166).

FAITH IN CHRIST

If we stopped with what Schleiermacher says about “faith in God,” we would have a very one-sided account of his conception of faith, ignoring the role faith plays in the largest (and, in his own opinion, the most important) part of his theology. He identifies “faith in Christ” with “the certainty that through the influence of Christ the state of needing redemption is taken away and that [of redemption] brought about.” Unlike faith in God, which is a certainty, but one that concerns a feeling that expresses a relation to “a being posited outside us,” faith in Christ is “a purely factual certainty, but the certainty of a fact that is entirely inward” (*CF*, 1830, § 14.1). The feeling of absolute dependence still plays a part in the self-knowledge that grounds this faith in Christ; for the inward fact about which faith in Christ is certain is a fact about the feeling of absolute dependence. It is not the fact of merely *having* the feeling of absolute dependence. That is not enough to constitute redemption, for it is quite consistent with the feeling of absolute dependence being severely hindered by sin – that is, by tendencies in the self that prevent it from developing and from dominating one's mental life as it should. The inward fact of which faith in Christ is certain is rather the fact that in one's own case such sin has been removed and displaced by a dramatically fuller development and dominance of the feeling of absolute dependence.

There is also, of course, the certainty of the less obviously inward fact that this has happened “through the influence of Christ”; but insofar as we focus on the inward fact, it can seem to be a pretty straightforwardly empirical fact. As Schleiermacher emphasizes, the certainty about it is not about anything external, but about the development of one's own feelings and mental life. Moreover, this aspect of his interpretation of religious experience seems less exposed to doubt than his account of the feeling of absolute dependence. The latter may well remain controversial, as noted above; but it is hardly to be doubted that many Christians have experienced

a dramatic increase in the power and happiness, or “blessedness,” of their religious consciousness in their contact with Christianity, as Schleiermacher claims.

The doctrinal propositions of Schleiermacher’s *Christian Faith* do not all have the same epistemological basis. Some purport to express the implicit content of the feeling of absolute dependence. Others propose an empirical description of the history of that feeling and of related states of mind, as we see in the present context. Others offer explanations of aspects of that history. The argument that supports the proposition that “we are conscious of sin, partly as grounded in ourselves, and partly as having its ground outside our own existence” (CF, 1830, § 69), for example, seems to be empirically grounded phenomenological and causal reasoning of a sort that could be found in the work of many social theorists. More often, however, even in propositions that are directly or indirectly about the sin and redemption that Christians have experienced in themselves, there is also an element of what we could call theological interpretation, which for Schleiermacher is always an implication of relation to the divine causality; and much of what is most interesting in Schleiermacher’s theology depends on this. Here there is room to develop this point only in relation to two areas of doctrine: eschatology and Christology.

Eschatology is of particular interest for the study of Schleiermacher’s epistemology. He himself emphasizes that doctrines of the “last things” are on weaker ground epistemologically precisely because the experience now available to us does not include the future (CF, 1830, § 157.2; cf. § 159.2). This leads Schleiermacher to hedge round with qualifications his assent to traditional doctrines of the last things, but he does endorse in his theology some propositions of predictive force. A clear example is his repudiation of the doctrine of eternal damnation; if there is to be a life after death, he thinks it, emphatically, more reasonable to conceive of it as one in which everyone will eventually be redeemed (§ 163 appendix). And he thinks his Christianity commits him to a prediction about the future religious history of the world, which surely does not have a straightforwardly empirical basis (though it does not get all the way to the last things): “it is essential to our faith that every nation will sooner or later become Christian” (§ 120 postscript).

What is Schleiermacher’s basis for such predictions? He is not as articulate as one might wish about his epistemology at this point. He says in this connection that “in our being conscious of our spiritual life as communicated perfection and blessedness of Christ,” there is contained something that “is at the same time faith in the reality of the consummated church, though only as an efficacious motive force within us.” He adds that

there is not such a good basis for taking “this efficacious principle” to be manifested in time in the ways that eschatology suggests (*CF*, 1830, § 159.2). But he evidently sees such a moving force both as experienced in Christian consciousness and as having an inherent teleology. The teleology of Christian life, which can be experienced also as a challenge or demand (§ 83.1), seems to lie behind such eschatological predictions as he is willing, cautiously, to make.

This teleology is also a feature of the divine causality, and specifically of the divine love, the attribute with which God is most identified for Schleiermacher (*CF*, 1830, § 167). He defines the divine love as “the attribute by virtue of which the divine essence imparts itself,” and says it is “known in the work of redemption” (§ 166). It is in effect God’s property of causing redemption, or equivalently of causing the perfecting of human religious consciousness. This is a teleologically ordered causality. “When we trace to the divine causality our consciousness of fellowship with God, restored through the efficacy of redemption, we posit the planting and extension of the Christian church as object of the divine government of the world” (§ 164). Significantly, God’s love figures explicitly in Schleiermacher’s reasons for his (predictive) rejection of eternal damnation.¹²

This teleology of love is, I believe, the only teleology that Schleiermacher ascribes to the divine causality. And he denies that God’s love can be known, apart from redemption, “in all arrangements of nature and orderings of human affairs that protect and further life” (*CF*, 1830, § 166.1). In this respect what Schleiermacher thinks can be seen about the divine causality through specifically Christian experience is importantly different from what he thinks can be seen through the more general feeling of absolute dependence alone.

This is not to say that two distinct divine causalities are seen here. How could an additional causality of anything in the world be added to the causality on which absolutely everything in the world is absolutely dependent? Yet Schleiermacher does think the way in which God causes redemption is different from the way in which God causes anything else. “The power of the God-consciousness in our souls . . . because we are conscious of it not as our own doing,” may be ascribed “to a special divine impartation,” which is a causality distinct from “that general divine concurrence without which even sin could not be done” (*CF*, 1830, § 80.1).

In what sense can there be a special divine impartation here, given that the divine causality is one and indivisible? This question goes to the heart of Schleiermacher’s Christology. He identified the special existence of God in Christ with a special relationship of the human life of Christ to the divine

causality.¹³ Specifically, “in the redeemer both are the same: his spiritual originality, torn free from every disadvantageous influence of natural heredity, and that being of God in him that likewise proves itself creative” (*CF*, 1830, § 94.3).

The “spiritual originality” mentioned here is also the primary form of the “special divine impartation” that constitutes grace. Schleiermacher is very reluctant to characterize anything in particular in the world as supernatural. He sees the perfect God-consciousness of Jesus and the redeemed God-consciousness of Christians as intrinsically natural; human nature is in principle capable of such religious consciousness (*CF*, 1830, § 13.1). And he sees the propagation of Christ’s God-consciousness to his disciples, and then from person to person in the church, as “no miracle, but just the ethical becoming natural of the supernatural, for every outstanding force draws mass to itself and holds it fast” (§ 88.4; cf. § 108.5). The one thing that is supernatural is precisely the originality of the redeemer, the fact (as Schleiermacher claims) that Christ’s perfect God-consciousness has no explanation in the historical particulars of its “natural heredity,” or in “the state of the circle . . . in which it emerges and goes on to operate” (§ 13.1). It is the fact that “in relation to the hitherto all-encompassing and, for [human] formation, all-dominant corporate life of sinfulness, the new is also something that has come into being supernaturally” (§ 88.4). And this relatively supernatural event (rather than any doctrine about it or any document recording it) is the one thing in Christianity that is most properly regarded as *revelation* (§ 13.1).

CONCLUSION: VULNERABILITY AND INVULNERABILITY

There is no doubt that Schleiermacher aspired to render Christian faith, and to some extent theology, invulnerable to rational criticism, especially to criticism emanating from other intellectual disciplines. That is part of the point of his appeal to immediate consciousness (e.g., *KGA*, 1.12, 136; *OR*, Oman, 108), and it is the point of his efforts to understand “every dogma that really represents an element of our Christian consciousness” in such a way that “it does not leave us entangled with science” (*KGA*, 1.10, 351).¹⁴ There is also no doubt that he is at best partially successful in this aspiration.

His difficulties are nowhere more acute than in his Christology. As I noted above, the essential Christian certainty seems, on Schleiermacher’s account, to extend to a fact not entirely inward: that the redemptive development of Christian religious consciousness has come about “through the

influence of Christ.” Schleiermacher’s main argument for this extension is that by virtue of its experienced character as consciousness of an actual religious perfection and blessedness in which it participates without itself perfectly exemplifying it (e.g., *CF*, 1830, § 110.3), the Christian consciousness can only be explained as arising through the influence of a Christ in whom it arose in full perfection, Jesus being the one to whom Christian history points as that Christ (§ 93.1–4).

Even if one insists, as Schleiermacher surely would and should, that it is not the details but only the general character of these claims that must be regarded as sound if the certainty of Christian faith is not to be undermined or abandoned, his theology remains committed to rather extensive historical views about the psychology of Jesus – more extensively committed to views of that sort than he might need to be if his Christology focused as older Christologies had done on metaphysical claims about the incarnation. Whether these views about the consciousness of Jesus are correct is a historical question to which it seems that historical evidence must be relevant. Indeed it might be thought that such questions “can be answered only through a historical investigation,” as was objected to Schleiermacher in his lifetime by his younger contemporary F. C. Baur (quoted in *KGA*, 1.7/3, 267).

To be sure, historical evidence about Jesus is now widely thought to have proved inadequate to settle such questions. This has left many theologians thinking that Christian faith needs a primary basis in present Christian experience as Schleiermacher proposed, or at any rate in some sort of present contact with the power of the gospel. Still, historical questions seem inescapably involved in any attempt to connect present experience with Jesus of Nazareth, and the question whether Schleiermacher has provided adequate grounds for what seem in part to be historical beliefs is one on which his theology remains open to challenge. How convincing, for instance, is his explanatory argument for the perfection of Christ’s God-consciousness? (cf. Baur in *KGA*, 1.7/3, 250.)

With regard to less Christological issues related to faith in God, which are less historical and more philosophical, Schleiermacher seems to claim for theology a strong invulnerability to philosophical objections. Theology and philosophy are to be so separate, he says, that “so peculiar a question as whether the same proposition can be true in philosophy and false in Christian theology, and vice versa, will no longer be asked” (*CF*, 1830, § 16 postscript). Likewise he claims that a “contradiction” between “the speculative consciousness” and “the pious self-consciousness” (as respectively the highest objective and subjective functions of the human mind) must always

be a “misunderstanding.” But this invulnerability seems to vanish immediately after the second of these claims when Schleiermacher himself imagines “such a contradiction” nonetheless arising, and allows that “if . . . someone rightly or wrongly finds the source of the misunderstanding on the religious side, then this can certainly lead to giving up piety altogether, or at least Christian piety” (§ 28.3). And I believe that vulnerability of this sort is indeed implied by Schleiermacher’s account of faith in God, as I have interpreted it.

I don’t think this greatly worried Schleiermacher. The one thing he thought theology really needed philosophy to admit is the existence of God, or more precisely “an object to which the feeling of absolute dependence can relate itself” (*CF*, 1830, § 50.2); and his *Dialectic* makes clear that he thought philosophy would amply justify positing the existence of a being to whom this role could be assigned. Not that he sees such a philosophical argument as part of the epistemological foundation of theology. Faith in God appears in his dogmatics as an element in Christian faith, and falls, I believe, within the scope of his statements that his dogmatics is written “only for Christians,” and that in it “we entirely renounce every proof for the truth or necessity of Christianity, and presuppose instead that every Christian, before entering” the study of dogmatics, “already has in himself the certainty that his piety cannot assume any other form than this,” which I think is supposed here to amount to certainty of the truth of Christian faith (*CF*, 1830, § 11.5), or perhaps even “the proof of faith” (*CF*, 1821–2, § 18.5).

This certainty is for Schleiermacher something “which the religious feeling immediately brings with it” (see the text cited in note 8). It is grounded not in reasoning about the self-consciousness, but in the self-consciousness itself, and thus is accessible only to those who have the relevant consciousness (cf. *CF*, 1830, § 13 postscript). In Christian dogmatics, at least, he proposes to proceed by taking for granted this certainty and its soundness, as (arguably) we must necessarily proceed with some beliefs or others in any rational inquiry. It may be thought a bold step to treat in this way beliefs as pervasively contested as religious beliefs are; but the legitimacy of doing just that remains in fact an object of lively discussion in contemporary philosophy of religion.¹⁵

Notes

- 1 A semi-colon separates references to the German original and an English translation of the same passage. While I have sometimes adopted the rendering of a cited translation, I commonly quote in my own translation.
- 2 Proudfoot 1985, II, 237, n. 7.

- 3 See Richard Crouter's introduction to the first edition (1988) of his translation of *On Religion* [OR], 57–64.
- 4 KGA, 1.12, 56; mistranslated in OR, Oman, 39. Cf. KGA, 1.2, 212; OR, Crouter, 23.
- 5 Andrew Dole called my attention to the importance of this distinction in Schleiermacher.
- 6 Proudfoot 1985, 11, 18.
- 7 Kant 1998, B 157n.
- 8 Quoted in the apparatus to § 14.1 in KGA, 1.13.1, 115. "Holding as true" (*Fürwahrhalten*) is the most general term for assent, covering all the types and grades of truth-ascription, in the Canon of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, which Schleiermacher (and Twisten) may have in mind here.
- 9 For an affirmation of cultural (if not individual) variability of conceptualization of essentially the same religious content, from the period of the *Christian Faith*, see KGA, 1.12, 135f.; OR, Oman, 107 (explanation 7).
- 10 I am not sure whether Schleiermacher has changed his views, and if so, in what ways, when he says, in notes for his *Dialectic* lectures of 1828, that "the way of having the transcendent in religious feeling is not a higher one." Metaphysics, ethics, and religious feeling seem there to be set on a par as all relating to God as a whence on which we are dependent (*Dial* I, 475).
- 11 This is discussed more fully in Adams 1996, 566–7.
- 12 Schleiermacher, *Über die Lehre von der Erwählung*, KGA, 1.10, 217. On this point and on the teleology of divine causality, see Adams 1996, 570–6.
- 13 I am indebted to an unpublished paper by Edward Waggoner for illumination on this point.
- 14 From the second of Schleiermacher's two published letters to Lücke on the *Christian Faith*.
- 15 See, e.g., Plantinga and Wolterstorff 1983.