What is 'religious experience' in Schleiermacher's Dogmatics, and why does it matter?

Andrew Dole
Amherst College

Abstract: Schleiermacher is often credited with elevating the notion of 'religious experience' to prominence in theology and the study of religion. But his position on religious experience is poorly understood, largely because he is typically read through the lens of his later appropriators. In this essay I make a set of claims about what 'religious experience' amounts to in Schleiermacher's mature dogmatics, *The Christian Faith* (or *Glaubenslehre*). What is noteworthy about Schleiermacher's position is its calculated coherence with religious naturalism, understood as the position that religious phenomena have natural causes. I then argue that Schleiermacher's understanding of religious experience is actually promising for contemporary discussions– partly because it allows for productive conversation with religious naturalists, and partly in virtue of the utility of Schleiermacher's claim regarding the kind of religious experience at the heart of Christian religious identity.

1. Clearing the ground and setting the stage

My concern in this paper is with the conception of religious experience on offer in Friedrich Schleiermacher's epoch-making work of systematic theology, *Die Christliche Glaube*, commonly referred to as the *Glaubenslehre* ('doctrine of the faith'). It is likely that there will be a considerable distance between what I will describe as 'religious experience' and what has figured in many prominent discussions of the notion. The term 'religious experience' can be used to refer to a bewildering variety of phenomena (Wildman 2011, 77-89), and it seems to me that scholarly discussions of religious experience have coalesced into a number of conversations that have some independence from each other. One important strand of conversation is centered on the "perceptual model" of religious experience on display in William Alston's *Perceiving God* (1991). But a proper understanding of Schleiermacher's conception of religious experience leads to a different conversation; and it is part of my aim in this paper to make this clear.

The topic of religious experience in Schleiermacher's dogmatics is worth revisiting for two reasons. One is that Schleiermacher is commonly cited as the figure who introduced the notion of 'religious experience' into the literature on both Christianity and religion in the nineteenth century; I think it interesting both to

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compare his mature position on this topic with the positions of those who would later claim to have been inspired by him and to trace the history of the development of those positions by means of a series of departures from his. And the second is that I actually think that Schleiermacher's conception of religious experience can be made relevant for contemporary projects that have to do with the future of Christianity.[1] To set the stage for my later expansion on this claim, let me identify one point in recent (for some values of that term) history that I claim as evidence for the existence of a 'Schleiermacherian tradition'—one that understands Schleiermacher correctly, or nearly so—of reflection on religious experience:

> Religious experience is 'the whole experience of religious persons', constituting an awareness of God acting toward them in and through the events of their lives and of world history, the interpretative element within which awareness is the cognitive aspect of faith. And distinctively *Christian experience,* as a form of this, is the Christian's seeing of Christ as his 'Lord and Saviour', together with the pervasive recreative effects of this throughout his life, transforming the quality of his experience and determining his responses to other people. Christian faith is thus a distinctive consciousness of the world and of one's existence within it, radiating from and illuminated by a consciousness of God in Christ. (Hick 2010, 245)

This passage is drawn from John Hick's *Evil and the God of Love*, first published in 1966. I will return to this passage in my conclusion.

2. Brief remarks on reception-history

Having indicated that I think the reception-history of Schleiermacher's conception of religious experience is interesting, I will not offer more than a sketch of that history here. Here are three quick claims that will have to suffice to cover the necessary ground.

First: Schleiermacher's reputation as a prominent theorist of religious experience had been established fairly firmly by the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century. The author who bears most of the responsibility for this development is Rudolf Otto, who in 1899 presided over a new edition of

[1] Before proceeding, I want to contextualize this statement. It is unusual for me to argue for a contemporary application of Schleiermacher's theology; my work on him to date has mostly taken the form of rational reconstruction. And I am, I would guess, at least as impatient as you are with claims to the effect that some theological position buried deep in the historical record is the key to escaping from whatever predicament theology finds itself in at the moment. The applications I will venture at the close of this essay are not geared towards facilitating more and better textual productions by academic theologians. Rather, I have my eye on the same phenomenon as did Schleiermacher: the fortunes of Christian religious communities in the present and foreseeable future.

Schleiermacher's youthful *Speeches on Religion*, and who in 1917 published *Das Heilige*, a best-selling book that credited Schleiermacher for anticipating Otto's own conception of 'numinous experience'. Perhaps equally influential for at least a time and in certain spheres was Emil Brunner's 1924 book *Die Mystik und das Wort*, which characterized Schleiermacher's theological position as above all 'mystical,' and attributed to him the position that God is available to human consciousness via introspection, in virtue of the immanence of God in the human soul (Helmer 2013, 23).

Second: later in the twentieth century, both Brunner's description of Schleiermacher as a proponent of 'mysticism' in theology and Otto's positioning of Schleiermacher as his intellectual predecessor seem to have been widely accepted in the English-language literature. By 1975, for example, Eric Sharpe could cite without dissent Otto's depiction of a tradition running "from Luther passing through the Pietists to Schleiermacher and Fries" defined by commitment to the "the essence of religion as consisting in a type of immediate, almost intuitive apprehension of Deity" in his widely influential *Comparative Religion: a History* (1975, 164). And with the rise of attacks on 'experiential' or phenomenological approaches to the study of religion—as, for example, in Wayne Proudfoot's *Religious Experience* of 1985—Schleiermacher was singled out as the archetypal theorist of approaches that postulate as the defining feature of all religion as such a unique and irreducible kind of experience knowable, properly speaking, only through direct acquaintance. And so it came to pass in the fullness of time that Alston could, on Proudfoot's authority, classify Schleiermacher as "the fountainhead of concentration on religious experience in the study of religion" (1991, p. 16 n. 5).

And third: there is a story that to my knowledge has not yet been properly told about the interval between Schleiermacher and Otto. That story is one of progressive changes in the way Schleiermacher was understood and of shifting priorities in German theology. It is a story of the failure of Schleiermacher's call for an 'eternal covenant' between religious faith and scientific inquiry to stem the tide of attempts to erect protective barriers around the Christian faith by theologians and politicians (who, it must be remembered, enjoyed significant control over academic appointments). It is the story of the eventual construal of Christian religious experience as something flatly inaccessible to kinds of scrutiny that might threaten its ability to ground and validate Christian faith. And it is the story of the stages by which Schleiermacher's strenuous protestations against theological defensiveness were forgotten, such that a highly selective memory of his contributions could be appropriated for projects such as Otto's. The best work that approaches this topic with which I am familiar is Brent Sockness's monograph on the disputes between Wilhelm Herrmann and Ernst Troeltsch over historicism, apologetics, and the legacy of Schleiermacher (1998). But there is more to the story, involving as it does the advance from strength to strength of reactionary 'neo-pietism' both before and after the revolutionary year 1848, and the fortunes of those of Schleiermacher's followers such as Karl Rudoph Hagenbach, Adolf Hilgenfend,

and other defenders of 'mediating' or *wissenschaftlich* theology as Prussia slouched towards power and catastrophe.[2]

3. Parameters for a discussion of 'religious experience' in the *Glaubenslehre*

In this section I want to call attention to two broad characteristics of Schleiermacher's mature work of dogmatic theology, translated as *The Christian Faith* (in the original, *Die Christliche Glaube, nach den Grundsätzen der Evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt).*[3] Schleiermacher published the first edition in two volumes in 1820-21, and the second and final edition in 1830-31. The contents of this work owe much to Schleiermacher's several decades as a lecturer on dogmatics at the University of Berlin; they are also profoundly shaped, in ways described by Schleiermacher himself, by his sense of the place of Christianity in modern intellectual life.

First: the fact that Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre* is a work of dogmatics matters for understanding the sorts of claims that it makes. The project of dogmatics, as Schleiermacher understood it, is to gather together, work over, and re-present the entire range of Christian doctrines as these are represented in the contemporary life of a particular range of Christian community (for Schleiermacher, the range comprising the Lutheran and Reformed wings of Protestantism). Dogmatics aims at completeness and systematicity: it aims at a comprehensive overview of distinctively Christian doctrines, and aims to forge coherence among the various doctrines that make up the Christian faith. Schleiermacher's central device for working over Christian doctrines was to evaluate their relationship to the 'essence of Christianity,' the conviction that "redemption has been universally accomplished in Jesus of Nazareth," and to (although Schleiermacher does not use this terminology in the *Glaubenslehre*) the essence of religion in general, the 'feeling of absolute dependence.' Schleiermacher's procedure was to reject any formulation of a Christian doctrine that conflicts with either of these essences (for example, by implying that human dependence on God is not absolute, or by implying that the redemption wrought through Jesus is incomplete or partial), and where necessary, to propose interpretations of doctrines fully compatible with these. What results from this work is a set of claims, spelled out in considerable detail, regarding what should be regarded as the official teachings of the traditions in question, which deserve to be regarded as authentic in virtue of their coherence with the essence of Christianity.

So understood, the project of dogmatics is a bounded one: the project is to say how much, or what interpretation of, received doctrines should be regarded as

[2] See (Bigler 1972), (Howard 2006).

[3] Hereafter (Schleiermacher 1999) refers to the German original and (Schleiermacher 1989) to the English translation. Where references are to the German original translations are my own; otherwise translations are those of Mackintosh et al.

proper to a tradition's distinctive faith. Dogmatics is thus concerned with discerning the common faith of a particular strand of the Christian tradition; it is not a species of metaphysics, a 'science of God,' a form of inquiry that aims to discern what is the case regarding God and God's relationship to human beings. So, in reconstructing the *Glaubenslehre*'s position on religious experience I do not take myself to be reconstructing an account of what sorts of religious experience is possible or actual, but rather an account of what sort of religious experience religious persons (Lutheran and Reformed Protestants specifically) should regard as *proper to their particular form of faith*.

Second: in Schleiermacher's hands, dogmatics aspires to be a resource for church leadership (*Kirchenleitung*), or the project of supervising and guiding the life of church communities. As such, dogmatics ought to be shaped by the dogmatician's conception of the current state of the relationship between Christianity and the wider world. In open letters to his friend Gottfried C.F. Lücke published alongside the second edition of the *Glaubenslehre*, Schleiermacher opined that the only dogmatics that would "adequately meet the needs of our time" would be one that adheres to "an eternal covenant between the living Christian faith and completely free, independent scientific inquiry," and declared his work dedicated to this project (1981, 64).

Interpreters of Schleiermacher have not always agreed in their interpretations of this 'eternal covenant.' Perhaps the most common reading has read Schleiermacher as calling for a 'nonagression pact' or 'separation of spheres' between religion and science. I have elsewhere argued against this 'segregation model' of Schleiermacher's eternal covenant, largely because I cannot see how an arrangement that is supposed to allow for "completely free, independent scientific inquiry" can at the same time declare religion off-limits to scientific investigations. I favor a reading according to which it is the duty of the dogmatician to avoid "entanglements with science" by, simply, refraining from making claims known to or likely to conflict with the deliverances of the sciences (Dole 2010a, 144). I understand Schleiermacher to have aimed to avoid such entanglements in his dogmatics partly by adhering to a policy of determined anti-supernaturalism with respect to the course of events in the world: that is, to a policy according to which Christian dogmatics does not advance, as part of the common faith of the traditions to and for which it aims to speak, any claims to the effect that natural events are caused by the interposition of supernatural forces on the natural order.

I take this reading to be strongly supported by any number of passages from *The Christian Faith*; for the present I will refer to three. First, in discussing the question of miracles Schleiermacher concluded that "the general interests of science… and the interests of religion seem to meet at the same point, i.e. that we should abandon the idea of the absolutely supernatural because no single instance of it can be known by us, and we are nowhere required to recognize it" (1989, §47.3, 183). Second, in discussing the question of whether the vitality of religious feeling is threatened by a view of human beings as thoroughly embedded in the natural causal order, he argued that "the religious feeling is not destroyed even by the completest confidence with which we accept this or that explanation" of the phenomena that stimulate it, and that while it is certainly "an expedient often adopted by human

indolence to attribute what is not understood to the supernatural immediately… this does not at all belong to the tendency to piety" (1989, §46.1, 172). And, third, later in this same discussion he remarked that "It has always been acknowledged by the strictest dogmaticians that divine preservation, as the absolute dependence of all events and changes on God, and natural causation as the complete determination of everything that occurs by the general *Naturzusammenhang* [interconnection of nature], are one and the same thing simply from different points of view" (1989, §46.2, 174).

There are nuances to Schleiermacher's position that are subtler than what I have indicated here. But for present purposes, the upshot of Schleiermacher's 'eternal covenant' is that a conception of religious experience that finds a place in Schleiermacher's dogmatics can be expected not to involve reference to the direct causal activity of God or of other supernatural beings: *religious* experience will be *natural* experience, in the sense of being *naturally caused*.

Before proceeding, I want to quickly note that the existing translation of Schleiermacher's dogmatics obscures the details of his discussion of religious experience for interesting reasons. As I have noted elsewhere, sections 32-61 of the text were translated by Walter Matthews and Edith Sandbach Marshall. Matthews and Marshall favored the term 'religious experience' as an occasional rendering for a variety of terms that Schleiermacher used in a technical sense: *fromme Erregungen* ('pious emotions'), *fromme Momenten* ('pious moments'), and *fromme Lebensmomenten* ('pious life-moments'). I regard this choice as an unfortunate one, as I think a more literal rendering of these terms of Schleiermacher's does not unduly burden the reader; and I believe the choice to be the product of the influence of Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*, as there is good evidence that both Matthews and Sandbach were partial to Otto (Dole 2010b, 458). The result is that the translation is simply not a reliable guide for one in search of Schleiermacher's understanding of religious experience.

4. Religious Experience in the *Glaubenslehre*

In this section I want to make two claims, one negative, and one positive. The negative claim is that there is in the *Glaubenslehre* no account of 'religious experience' in the sense of an experience that is common to all religions. The positive claim is that Schleiermacher does place an experience at the heart of his account of Christianity: the *experience of redemption by Jesus.* It is this latter that I think constitutes the 'religious experience' that is on offer in Schleiermacher's dogmatics.

My negative claim is not a trivial one. For in the *Glaubenslehre* Schleiermacher argued, famously, that all religion is grounded in a "feeling of absolute dependence"; and if the *feeling* of absolute dependence is an *experience*, then there is indeed a distinctive kind of 'religious experience' at the ground of all religions.

Schleiermacher introduces the feeling of absolute dependence (*das schlechthinniger Abhängigkeitsgefühl*) in §4 of the *Glaubenslehre*. This feeling is presented in the train of discussion of the "feeling of freedom" and the simple "feeling of dependence," which Schleiermacher understood to be feelings of *acting upon* and *being acted upon* respectively. He categorizes these feelings not as distinctive forms of experience but as "commonalities" (*Gemeinsamen*) among active and receptive determinations of self-consciousness (*Bestimmtheiten des Selbstbewußtseins*) (1999, §4.2, 25). Thus the 'feeling of freedom' is the common element of all states of mind in which I am aware of being *active*, and the 'feeling of dependence' is the common element of all states of mind in which I am aware of myself as *receptive* or *acted upon*.

Schleiermacher accompanies his introduction of the feeling of absolute dependence with two important claims. First, this feeling does not constitute any moments of self-consciousness, but rather accompanies such moments. And second, the content of this feeling can be expressed in propositional form, such that it can be described not only as a 'feeling of' but a 'consciousness that.'

> …a feeling of absolute dependence, strictly speaking, cannot exist in a single moment as such, because such a moment is always determined, as regards its total content, by what is given, and thus by that towards which we have a feeling of freedom. But the self-consciousness which accompanies all of our self-activity, and therefore … accompanies our whole existence (*Dasein*), and negates absolute freedom, is itself precisely a consciousness of absolute dependence; for it is the consciousness that our entire self-activity comes to us from elsewhere (*von anderwärts her ist*)… . (1989, §4.3, 16)

As I understand this section of the *Glaubenslehre*, Schleiermacher argues that 'feelings' of freedom, dependence, and absolute dependence are *aspects* or *components* of experience rather than distinct *kinds* of experience. One never feels oneself to be free *simpliciter*; rather, one feels oneself to be free inasmuch as one feels oneself to be acting upon things other than oneself, and the specific content of the 'feeling of freedom' is identifiable only by way of abstraction from the particulars of actual experience. In the same way, the specific content of the feeling of absolute dependence is identifiable only by way of abstraction from experience; one never experiences absolute dependence *simpliciter*.

In the abstract of §4 Schleiermacher describes the feeling of absolute dependence as the *Gemeinsam* of all "expressions of piety," and identifies consciousness of absolute dependence with consciousness of "being in relation to God." Both of these claims require comment. In developing the latter claim Schleiermacher makes it clear that he means the term 'God' to refer to that on which we are absolutely dependent: "in the first instance God signifies for us that which is the co-determinant in this feeling and to which we trace our being in such a state." With this meaning of the term 'God' established, Schleiermacher unpacks the two claims in the abstract:

> The feeling of absolute dependence becomes a clear consciousness only as this idea [of God] becomes such. In this sense it can indeed be said that God is given to us in feeling in an original way; and if we speak of an original revelation of God to man or in man, the meaning will always be just this, that, along with the absolute dependence which characterizes not only man but all temporal existence, there is given to man also the immediate self-consciousness of it, which becomes a consciousness of God. In whatever measure this actually takes place during the temporal course of a personality, in just that measure do we ascribe piety to the individual. On the other hand, any givenness (*Gegebensein*) of God is entirely excluded, because anything that is outwardly given must be given as the object of counter-influence, however slight. (1999, §4.4, 30)

So, Schleiermacher's dogmatics denies the possibility of God's being given in experience, on the grounds that the source of absolute dependence could not be internal to the Z*usammenhang* that comprises the sensory realm. What Schleiermacher calls 'God-consciousness' develops out of an awareness of the feeling of absolute dependence. God-consciousness is a matter of reflective thought concerning that on which we feel ourselves to be absolutely dependent, i.e. God; and piety is a matter of having God-consciousness, i.e. a matter of being reflectively aware of one's absolute dependence and in some way mindful concerning its source (or more precisely, concerning whatever its source might be). As Schleiermacher puts the point later, "We really have a relationship to God only in our quiescent (*ruhend*) self-consciousness, as it holds itself fast in reflective thought, and only insofar as God-consciousness is co-posited within it" (1999 vol. 2, §107.1, 150).

The feeling of absolute dependence, then, is not an experience or a kind of experience. It is a component of experience—not just 'religious experience,' but in fact all experience.[4] What distinguishes 'pious life-moments' or 'pious states of mind' from their non-pious counterparts is not they are grounded in a specific kind of experience, but that they are characterized by a distinct kind of awareness or mindfulness regarding a conceptually distinguishable component of experience as such—regarding, that is, the feeling of absolute dependence.

This conclusion notwithstanding, Schleiermacher does have a robust place for appeals to experience in his dogmatics, as can be seen from his clear statement, at the beginning of the second doctrinal section of the *Glaubenslehre*, that "in our presentation all proper doctrines must be taken from Christian pious self-consciousness, or from the inner experience (*innere Erfahrung*) of Christians" (1999 §64.1, 348). I proceed now to my positive claim: that Schleiermacher describes an

[4] In §33 Schleiermacher argues that one cannot understand the feeling of absolute dependence in the manner he has described it and also maintain that "it may or may not emerge in a man's existence (*Dasein*) according to whether, in the course of his life, he encounters this or that. For its appearance does not depend at all upon the fact that something specific is outwardly given to a partially developed subject, but only on the fact that the sensory self-consciousness is somehow stimulated from without" (1999, §33.1, 175).

"experience of redemption by Jesus," and that it is this that deserves to be regarded as the 'religious experience' on offer in the *Glaubenslehre*.

I will structure my exposition of Schleiermacher's 'experience of redemption by Jesus' as responses to three questions. First: what does the term 'redemption' mean in the context of Schleiermacher's dogmatic system? Second: what is the phenomenal content of the experience of redemption by Jesus, as far as we can gather this from Schleiermacher's description? And third: what does this experience owe to the environments in which it occurs?

1. Schleiermacher introduces 'redemption' in §11 as a term accepted by all Christians to describe the central task accomplished by Jesus. He accepts an initial understanding of the term as referring to "a passage from an evil condition, which is represented as a state of captivity or constraint, into a better condition—this is the passive side of it. But it also signifies the help that is given in that process by some other person, and this is the active side of it" (1989, §11.2, 54). His detailed discussion of redemption involves offering accounts, in turn, of the 'evil condition' at issue and of the activity of Jesus in delivering Christians from this condition. The evil condition—what Schleiermacher eventually identifies with the terms 'sin', 'alienation from God', and 'turning away from God' (1989 §62-3, 259-64)—is in his terminology 'God-forgetfulness.' God-forgetfulness is an "obstruction" of God-consciousness: "we can only designate this as an absence of facility for introducing the God-consciousness into the course of our actual lives and retaining it there" (1989 §11.2, 45). In the course of his discussion of the "consciousness of sin" in the second doctrinal section Schleiermacher argues that Christians must regard God-forgetfulness as a "derangement of our nature" and that it is a cause of pain and suffering. Thus if the condition of the one who possesses perfect God-consciousness is the state of *Seligkeit* ('blessedness'), the state of the person subject to God-forgetfulness is the state of *Unseligkeit* (rendered 'misery' in the English translation).

Redemption (*Erlösung*), then, is the overcoming of 'God-forgetfulness', or the restoration of the ability to integrate God-consciousness into one's life. The mechanism of redemption is the influence upon the person of Jesus's 'perfect God-consciousness', which influence comes to bear in the course of participation in the life of Christian community: "In this corporate life which goes back to the influence of Jesus, redemption is effected by Him through the communication of His sinless perfection" (1989, §88, 361). Thus "the new life of each individual springs from that of the community, while the life of the community springs from no other individual life than that of the Redeemer" (1989, §113.1, 525).

I will not defend Schleiermacher's account of redemption as a plausible rendering of that notion as it has figured in the life of the Christian traditions. I take Schleiermacher's theology to be, here as elsewhere, radically revisionary. I think it possible to make use of Schleiermacher's conception of distinctively Christian experience without accepting his claim that redemption just is the overcoming of God-forgetfulness; but I have neither the space nor the need to develop that position here.

2. What phenomenal content does Schleiermacher ascribe to the experience of redemption? That is, what is it like to experience redemption? Schleiermacher makes no references to "hearts strangely warmed," disembodied voices, or visions of opening heavens in his various references to this experience. In fact he dramatically under-describes the phenomenal content of the experience, instead offering a higher-level description that, I think, could be realized in a wide variety of ways. On my reading—particularly of Schleiermacher's discussion in §§86-88, where the topic is the "explication of the consciousness of grace," two elements are common to the varieties of this experience. The first (and, I think, core) element is "approximation to blessedness"—or in other words, the experience of particularly powerful God-consciousness in particular moments, in which as a result the *Unseligkeit* of God-forgetfulness is (partially) removed. And the second element is an association of these approximations to blessedness with the influence of religious community in its remembrances of Jesus. The combination of these two elements yields a general description of the phenomenal content of the experience of redemption: it is the experience of *a previously unknown and unavailable degree of mindfulness of God in virtue of one's participation in religious community's remembrances of Jesus.*

The clearest textual support for this reconstruction is found, I think, in §87, the *Grundsatz* or leading proposition of which reads, "We are conscious of all approximations to the state of blessedness which occur in the Christian life as being grounded in a new divinely-effected corporate life, which works in opposition to the corporate life of sin and the *Unseligkeit* which develops in it" (1989, §87, 358). Schleiermacher's initial remarks on this statement refine the claim in the direction of my reconstruction:

> This proposition does not yet appear to be a complete expression of specifically Christian piety, since it does not yet specify that every approximation to the state of blessedness essentially contains a relation to Christ. But it does undeniably express the content of the consciousness of divine grace, insofar as it is opposed to the consciousness of sin. For approximation to the condition of blessedness is the real opposite of *Unseligkeit*, and this approximation is accepted as divine grace in the same sense and degree in which the corporate life in which such moments become ours is posited (*gesetzt*) as divinely effected. Consequently all further development of what is specifically Christian can easily be attached to our proposition. (Schleiermacher 1989, §87.1, 358f.)

I draw three conclusions from these remarks. The first is that Schleiermacher thinks that any moment in which a Christian experiences particularly strong God-consciousness—any 'approximation to blessedness'—will also contain some reference or connection to Jesus; I will return to this topic below. The second is that the state of affairs of the 'new corporate life'—that is, the Christian tradition—being divinely effected is not something that is, as it were, part of the phenomenal content of the experience of grace. Rather, Schleiermacher describes this claim as a

postulate, acceptance of which is a necessary condition for accepting 'approximations to blessedness' as instances of grace (not, *nota bene*, for experiencing these in the first place). And the third is that if the ascription to divine agency is something posited rather than directly experienced, Schleiermacher does seem to want to claim in the leading proposition that *the state of affairs of individual blessedness being caused by participation in religious community* is directly experienced. I admit that I may be wrong about this last claim, as in many cases Schleiermacher ascribes content to *Bewußtsein* that are clearly not derived directly from experience; but this seems to be a case where he associates "consciousness of" with "experience of."

An important question that I have not yet addressed is this: to what extent is the connection to Jesus that Schleiermacher claims is essential to 'pious life-moments' registered in the phenomenal content of the experience of redemption? Or more pointedly, is the state of affairs of *redemption's being due to the activity of Jesus* something that Christians directly experience when they experience redemption by Jesus? I think the correct answer to this question is a negative one. But an argument for this answer will require discussion of the third question of this section of my paper, to which I now turn.

3. The experience of redemption owes a great deal to the context in which it occurs; and it is not difficult to see this. The key to my argument in this section is Schleiermacher's position on the 'work of Christ' and the role played by religious community in this work. And the core of that position is Schleiermacher's claim that Jesus's influence proceeds exclusively through historical (i.e. natural) means. That is, in line with his denial of supernatural intervention in the course of natural events generally ("everything does and can happen only by means of all of the powers distributed and contained in the world, as God originally and has always willed it" (1999, §46 p.s., 232)), Schleiermacher denies that Jesus brings about redemption, or any other effect, in a way that bypasses historical/natural causality.

The medium through which the influence of Jesus is historically transmitted is religious community; and in fact Schleiermacher's identification of Christian religious community as *the* community that 'mediates' the influence of Jesus to successive generations is the basis for his approval of a strong form of the principle of *extra ecclesia nulla salus* (no salvation outside the church). The *Grundsatz* or leading proposition of §87 excludes, Schleiermacher argues, the idea that "a share in redemption and a blessing (*Beseligung*) through Christ could be given outside the corporate life which he instituted, such that a Christian could dispense with the latter and be with Christ, as it were, alone." He continues:

> This separatism, which we must characterize as fanatical because it disregards the fact that anything originally divinely caused can nevertheless be apprehended only in its historical appearance and also can continue to function only as an historical phenomenon, and which can consistently only arise in isolation and so must always disappear again, destroys the essence of Christianity by postulating an activity of Christ without temporal and spatial mediation; and at the

> same time it so isolates itself that what has been achieved in it can have no continuing influence. (1999 vol. 2, §87.3, 17)

It is this principle that Schleiermacher has in mind, I think, when he remarks in §27 that "Christian piety never arises in independently and of itself in an individual, but only out of the communion and in the communion" (1999, §24.4, 141). The claim I extract from these passages is that the experience of redemption, if it is ultimately caused (as is everything else) by the "divine causality," is *proximately caused by the individual's exposure to and participation in religious community*.

Being proximately caused in this way, fairly obviously, opens up the experience of redemption to the influence of environmental factors. Prominent among these will be the concepts and linguistic terms that figure in religious discourse. Schleiermacher is quite clear about the fact that participation in religious community provides the basic set of terms in which Christians understand the experience of redemption; he credits such participation not only with transmitting the influence of Jesus which effects the removal of *Unseligkeit*, but also with awakening the awareness of sin itself (1989, §88.3, 364). In Schleiermacher's description not only the experience of redemption but also the conditions for its occurrence are hardly independent of the contents of the tradition involved. His position, stated plainly, is that the experience of redemption is a *product of religion* in at least two important respects: its ideational parameters are impressed upon the individual by religious tradition, and *qua* event it is caused by participation in religious activities.

On the grounds of this understanding of the 'mediated' nature of the influence of Jesus, Schleiermacher makes a strong claim regarding one aspect of the phenomenal content of the experience of redemption. That claim is this: if the defining experience of Christian religious identity is the experience of redemption by Christ, then the *experienced connection to Christ* that it contains *is itself a proximate product of the influence of the community*. I espy this claim in the following passage:

> our proposition depends upon the presupposition that in the Christian fellowship, outwardly so constituted, there is still that communication of the absolutely potent God-consciousness in Christ as a thing that is inward, and yet, since faith can rest upon nothing except an impression received, capable of being experienced (*erfahrbar*). This experience is made up of two elements, one of which belongs to the personal consciousness, the other to the common consciousness. The former is that the individual even today receives from the depiction (*Bild*) of Christ, which exists in the community as at once a corporate act and a corporate possession, the impression of the sinless perfection of Jesus, which becomes for him at the same time the perfect consciousness of sin and the removal of *Unseligkeit*. (1989, §88.3, 364)

In other words, through participation in religious community the Christian receives a depiction or 'picture' of Christ, and the experience of redemption is *caused by* the impact of this depiction on the individual's psychology—as Schleiermacher says elsewhere, the sort of regret for sin that begets conversion "must always in the end arise out of the impression (*Anschauung*) of the perfection of Christ" (1989, §108.2, 484).[5] I do not take Schleiermacher's position to be that the state of affairs of the community's depiction *being in fact* the historical medium of the perfect God-consciousness of Jesus is phenomenally available to the one who experiences redemption, and I take him to have positioned that claim as a presupposition (*Voraussetzung*) for this reason. In other words, the one who experiences redemption by Christ does not experience the influence of Jesus upon her in so direct and immediate a fashion that she thereby knows Jesus, as it were, by acquaintance. What is available to the Christian is the community's *claim* that its influence is the influence of Christ. Schleiermacher's dogmatics presupposes that this claim is in fact true; but this truth is not something that can be 'read off' of the experience of redemption itself.

This subject returns when Schleiermacher considers the phenomenon of conversion (*Bekehrung*) in §108. Conversion he defines as "the beginning of new life in fellowship with Christ," the components of which are repentance (*Bußе*) and faith (*Glaube*). Much of the discussion is taken up by protestations against the notion that "every Christian must be able to point to the very time and place of his conversion" and in particular with the "most extreme form" of this notion, namely that "every true Christian must be able to allege, as the beginning of his state of grace, a penitential crisis of soul… followed by a feeling of divine grace reaching to the limit of inexpressible felicity" (1989, §108.3, 487). But more importantly for my purposes, Schleiermacher distances himself from the notion that redemption is brought about by the agency of the Holy Spirit. "The essential identity of redemption and of the Christian fellowship would be imperiled," he argues, "if our faith had either another content or another origin—the one implies the other—than it had in the case of the first disciples." In those disciples, conversion and faith

> were effected by the Word in its widest sense, that is, by the whole prophetic activity of Christ. And we must be able to understand this that we have in common with them, if need be without a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, just as the disciples understood their own condition without any such doctrine. The constant factor is above all the divine power of the Word—taking the expression in its widest sense—by which conversion is still effected and faith still arises. The difference is simply that the self-revelation of Christ is now mediated by those who preach him; but they being appropriated by him as his instruments,

[5] It is worth noting that after 1805, with his first revision of *On Religion*, Schleiermacher abandons the usage of the term *Anschauung* on which he relied in the first edition. By 1830, with the second edition of the *Glaubenslehre,* that term has little in the way of a precise technical definition.

> the activity really proceeds from him and is essentially his own. (1989, §108.5, 490)

In commenting on this point Schleiermacher offers two remarks on the possibility and significance of—as I understand it—*phenomenally immediate* experience of Jesus. First:

> if it be allowed that there are divine workings of converting grace in no actual historical relation to the personal efficacy of Christ (even though it is as workings of Christ that they come to consciousness), there would be no security that this inward mystic Christ was identical with the historical Christ.

In speaking of an 'inward mystic Christ,' I take Schleiermacher to have in mind the idea that Jesus might manifest to human awareness through some other channel independent of immersion in tradition—in, say, a vision of the risen Christ had by a non-Christian (such as, for example, Paul on the road to Damascus). Fairly clearly, his position is that to allow that such experiences might be redemptive would be to weaken theology's commitment to the claim that redemption is brought about by the influence of Jesus.[6]

And second:

> The influence of Christ, therefore, consists solely in the human communication of the Word, but only insofar as this carries on (*fortbewegt*) Christ's word and the indwelling divine power of Christ himself; whereby if, for the consciousness of the person in the grip of conversion, any human intermediation (*Zwischenwirkung*) vanishes, and Christ is imagined immediately by him (*Christus sich ihm… unmittelbar vergegenwärtigt*) in his entire activity, from the prophetic through the kingly, which takes possession of him, this is fully in accordance with the truth. (1999 vol. 2, §108.5, 167)

Here Schleiermacher seems to be accepting that in some cases of conversion, Christ is experienced *as immediately present*. His claim about such cases is that the phenomenal characteristic of immediate presence comes about not in virtue of an unmediated causal influence by Christ on the person experiencing conversion, but in virtue of the *disappearance from the awareness of that person* of the causal links through which the redeeming influence of Jesus is transmitted.

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[6] If Schleiermacher's claim is that a person could never have *Sicherheit* of the identity of a person whom they experience directly (in, say, a vision), I find the claim debatable; someone who had known Jesus during his lifetime, for example, might *recognize* an envisioned person as Jesus. I suspect that what he really wants to argue here is that there could be no *Sicherheit* at second hand — thus none for a religious community or a dogmatic theologian —that in such visions it is Jesus who is experienced. And this seems to me to be a reasonable position.

To summarize: in the *Glaubenslehre* Schleiermacher describes an 'experience of redemption by Christ' that is central to his broader understanding of distinctively Christian piety.[7] This experience is the experience of an increase in the power and clarity of one's God-consciousness in virtue of the work of Jesus. This experience is proximately caused by the influence of a religious community's claims regarding the perfect piety of Jesus—its depiction of Jesus—on individuals who encounter these claims through participation in religious community. This experience may or may not take the form of a dramatic 'experience of conversion.' And it may or may not be a component of the experience that Jesus is experienced as 'immediately present' in his redeeming activity.

In developing his typology or 'map' of the overall territory of religious experience, Wesley Wildman classifies such experiences as Confucian self-cultivation and Christian sanctification as "extended ultimacy experiences," or "gradual and chronic experiences of personal change or self-transcendence" (2011, 85). Schleiermacher's "experience of redemption by Jesus" fits well into this category. This sort of experience differs from *Perceiving God*-style religious experience in at least two notable ways. First, Schleiermacher's experience of redemption is, in keeping with his stated working method for dogmatics, first and foremost awareness of the self. The term 'inner experience' is sometimes used to describe non-sensory experience of something other than the self—more precisely, experience of something other than the self that does not come by way of the perceptual experience of anything in one's material environment. But Schleiermacher's experience of redemption is an 'inner experience' in a more straightforward way: it is an experience of one's own mental conditions. And second, Schleiermacher's experience of redemption is temporally complex ("extended"). It comprises subsidiary experiences of the self's own mental conditions, since at the 'top level' it is the experience of change over time in those conditions. While one form the experience can assume is that of a sudden and dramatic change from God-forgetfulness to God-consciousness—an experience confined, as it were, to a single moment—the experienced change can also be gradual. Thus the experience of redemption can in some instances be more like the experience of seeing sunlight for the first time, and in other instances like the experience of becoming an adult. In either case, part of the content of the experience involves awareness of the difference between experiences at different times.

5. Commentary

[7] I do not know whether Schleiermacher should be understood as describing a kind of experience that is peculiar to *Evangelisch* Christians, or whether, in contrast, he should be understood as describing a generically Christian kind of experience. I incline towards the latter reading, largely because I cannot find a way to attach his claim regarding the core distinction of Protestant from Roman Catholic Christianity (see *CF* §24) to his description of the experience of redemption. But I have not thought long about the matter.

In concluding I want to attend to two broad projects to which one might seek to apply a particular conception of religious experience, and to remark on the utility of Schleiermacher's conception of the experience of redemption for these projects. Both projects are theological ones in a Schleiermacherian sense—that is, both are concerned with the business of (as I would put it) managing religion in the contemporary world.

The first task is one to which Schleiermacher spoke explicitly, but which I will describe using different terminology. Schleiermacher's concern to establish an 'eternal covenant' between religion and science is, I think, one variant of the project of positioning religion within a secular environment in a way that will provide for both religious and non-religious flourishing. As indicated by his letters to Lücke, Schleiermacher foresaw a hostile separation between religion and intellectual life; his eternal covenant was a strategy for heading off not only unnecessary hostility among different sectors of society, but also the "intellectual starvation" of religion that would result from such a separation. Schleiermacher also had a concern for the preservation of the freedom of *Wissenschaft* (including, but not limited to, the freedom of what later generations would term *Religionswissenschaft*) against its constriction by fearful religionists; I suspect this concern to have been equally important to him as his concern for the well-being of religion, although I have not done the textual work necessary to document the matter.

It is the naturalness of the experience of redemption by Jesus as understood by Schleiermacher that contributes to this task. By this point the respects in which this experience is natural experience should be clear. The experience is proximately caused by natural entities and circumstances—specifically, the impact of a religious community's depiction of Christ on the psychology of the individual adherent, which depiction is a matter of the continued circulation of the stories, claims, and practices of earlier generations of Christians. The conceptual structure of the experience is also determined by the context that produces it, and this applies as well to the sense of the presence of Jesus that it sometimes involves.

Above I quoted a passage from §46 of the *Glaubenslehre* in which Schleiermacher argues that pious feeling, properly understood, is not threatened "even by the completest confidence with which we accept this or that explanation" of the phenomena that stimulates it, and that explanatory recourse to the supernatural is more of a sign of intellectual laziness than of piety (1989, §46.1, 172). I want to venture a present-day application of this principle. The pyschologist Lee Kirkpatrick specializes in attachment theory and its role in religion, making use of the conceptual apparatus of empirical and evolutionary psychology. In *Attachment, Evolution, and the Psychology of Religion*, Kirkpatrick has advanced a set of conjectures regarding the psychological mechanisms at work in the phenomenon of religious conversion.[8] In broad outline, Kirkpatrick argues that deeply ingrained in the human mind is a set of propensities that dispose individuals to one or the other of two orientations to a host of activities centered around reproduction. One is the 'quantity' orientation, which prioritizes high-risk activities, broad and frequent

[8] This material is drawn in broad outline from (Kirkpatrick 2005, ch. 8).

sexual activity, and low levels of commitment and caregiving. The other is the 'quality' orientation, which prioritizes high investment in caregiving, higher selectivity and lower frequency in sexual activity, and the avoidance of risk. Kirkpatrick argues for the existence of a mechanism that 'tracks' the human mind as it develops into one or another of these orientations in response to cues as to which reproductive strategy is more appropriate, from a "genes' eye view," to the environment. If it is possible for human minds to 'jump' from one track to another—specifically, from the 'quantity' track to the 'quality' track—then we should expect to see cases in which human individuals abandon a thrill-seeking, promiscuous, responsibility-averse lifestyle for a risk-averse, sexually faithful, responsibility-tolerant one. Kirkpatrick hypothesizes that the psychological mechanism underlying some cases of sudden religious conversion is the activation of an "otherwise dormant love mechanism," which effectively rewrites a suite of motivational valuations within the individual; and this activation is the result of an individual's being exposed to persuasive portrayals of God as an "attachment figure," or a person with which one can have a long-term and fulfilling loving relationship. Thus "the Christian metaphor of being 'born again' is apt: the convert in effect really does begin, in many ways, a new life, this time on the 'quality' rather than the 'quantity' track" (Kirkpatrick 2005, 212).

I have no particular interest at present in defending Kirkpatrick's theory of sudden religious conversion, in case you are inclined to be skeptical of it. What I do want to argue is that it was a goal of Schleiermacher's dogmatic project to bring it about that a commitment to a Christian religious identity should by itself generate no reason to object to such a theory. This application of Schleiermacher's commitment (so I claim) to naturalism requires one bit of bridge-building, for which there is textual support. Thus far my discussion of the 'naturalness' of the experience of redemption has attended principally to the role played by factors external to the experiencer. Kirkpatrick's theory, in contrast, attends to factors internal to the one who experiences conversion. Is there textual warrant for thinking that the sort of naturalism that Schleiermacher envisioned would extend to explanations of this kind?

I believe that there is. Schleiermacher used the term "philosophy of religion" to refer to a science that would include both historical and theoretical knowledge of religion "from above" rather than "from within" particular religious traditions; thus the term refers to a non-confessional and comparative "science of religion" (1966, §23, 25). Were such a science to be developed completely, Schleiermacher remarked in §11 of the *Glaubenslehre*,

> … all the principal moments of the pious consciousness would be systematized, and from their interconnection it would be seen which of them were fitted to have all the others related to them and to be themselves a constant concomitant of the others. If it should become evident that that which we describe by the term 'redemption' becomes such [a moment] as soon as into a region where God-consciousness is constrained a fact which liberates this consciousness enters: then Christianity would be made secure as a particular form of

> faith, and in a certain sense understood (*construiert*). However this itself could not be called a proof of Christianity, since even the philosophy of religion could establish no necessity either to acknowledge a particular fact as redemptive (*erlösend*) nor to really grant a central place within one's own consciousness to a moment which can be such. (1989, §11.5, 59)

It seems to me that here Schleiermacher was imagining the possibility that a branch of scientific inquiry outside Christian theology might arrive at a grasp of the interior dynamics of the life of Christian piety, such that the theological claim that the *Bild* of Jesus "liberates the God-consciousness" might receive independent (*wissenschaftlich*) corroboration. I expect that the one who accepts Schleiermacher's understanding of the experience of redemption will suppose that the phrase 'liberation of the God-consciousness' refers to a process involving successive mental states in the mind of an individual. She will also understand that this process, no less than the process of the transmission of the influence of Jesus through history, will be a natural one, and that inasmuch as the process unfolds similarly within the lives of multiple persons, it will be susceptible to generalized description. She will also accept the possibility that a science that can investigate the mental dynamics of human persons will be in a position to discern the existence of this process (if it in fact exists); to describe it using its own conceptual vocabulary, which may of course differ from that of Christian theology; and to investigate the relationship between this process and other phenomena within its purview.

It seems to me that Kirkpatrick's account of sudden religious conversion is an instance of the sort of investigation that Schleiermacher had in mind. Kirkpatrick supposes that sudden religious conversion may well be, in some cases, a case of *falling in love for the first time*: it may well involve the first activation of the love mechanism in a person's life, an activation triggered by the persuasive presentation of the idea of God as an attachment figure. I think it plausible to think that *falling in love with God* and *having one's God-consciousness liberated by the* Bild *of Jesus* can be different descriptions of the same experience. And if Kirkpatrick's account claims that the experience of sudden conversion turns around an evolved psychological mechanism that has nothing to do with God and everything to do with sex,[9] then I think Schleiermacher's position encourages us to think not that this or any other theory of Christian experience is correct, but that supposing it to be correct would pose no threat to Christian piety. In effect, this would allow conversations around the question of whether or not to accept accounts such as Kirkpatrick's to turn around considerations of theory choice rather than around issues of compatibility with religious sensibilities: more precisely, it would allow for both religious adherents and non-religious adherents to take part in the same set of conversations around such questions. I follow Schleiermacher in regarding this as a considerable improvement over cases in which religious adherents carry on separate

[9] This way of putting the matter is, of course, both simplistic and question-begging. I think it polite to notify one's readers of this when one's argument does not depend on such features going unnoticed.

conversations in which they evaluate scientific theories according to their coherence with (formal or informal) doctrine.

To discuss the second project to which Schleiermacher's understanding of the experience of redemption might be applied, let us return to the quotation from John Hick presented above. Hick's claim about generic (that is, non-tradition-specific) religious experience does not, I think, correspond to Schleiermacher's position, for reasons that I hope are clear at this point. But here are the claims by Hick that I think do channel Schleiermacher:

> distinctively *Christian experience…* is the Christian's seeing of Christ as his 'Lord and Saviour,' together with the pervasive recreative effects of this throughout his life, transforming the quality of his experience and determining his responses to other people. Christian faith is thus a distinctive consciousness of the world and of one's existence within it, radiating from and illuminated by a consciousness of God in Christ.

It is the provenance of this remark that captures my attention. Hick wrote prior to the resurgence of Protestant fundamentalism in the United States, during a time when liberal Christians might be excused for feeling assured by the signs of the times that the Scopes trial had proven a momentary distraction and that the Christianity of the future would be, on balance, a force for good. Hick combined in his person theological seriousness and a broad-mindedness that would eventually lead him to an advocacy of religious pluralism that to this day has no rival (1989). If Hick's optimism now looks misplaced, and the mainline Christians of the 1960s now look blissfully unaware of the storm clouds massing to the south, I think there is some point to recalling the reappearance of a formulation of religious experience like Schleiermacher's from *avant le deluge*.

It would, I think, be naïve for anyone now living to expect to witness a widespread *rapprochement* between liberal and conservative variants of Christianity. But here are two historical counterfactuals in which I have a fair amount of confidence, on which I want to premise a worthwhile project of *Kirchenleitung*. Consider the claim that by around the turn of the twentieth century, some variant of "Babylonian captivity" had caused the Christianity of the day to abandon the centrality of personal redemption by Christ and thereby to fall away from authentic Christian identity. My first counterfactual is: if that claim had struck large numbers of relevantly nonpartisan American Protestants as implausible, it would not have been as easy as it seems to have been for a small number of aspiring movement leaders to anathematize such things as historical biblical criticism, higher education, social insurance, market regulation, and other phenomena with considerable currency at the time in the world of Christian letters. And the second is: if established Christianity had preserved through the nineteenth century Schleiermacher's understanding of the 'experience of redemption by Jesus' as the defining feature of Christian religious identity, fundamentalist claims regarding the 'apostasizing' of the (proto-mainline) churches would have gotten less traction in the public sphere.

I certainly do not know whether the political polarization that came to full expression in the last quarter of the twentieth century in both Protestant and Catholic forms of Christianity could have been avoided. But if secularization theory is wrong, it may yet be early days for Christianity, and if so, it is reasonable to suppose that its future will be different from its past. Two current trends suggest a shifting landscape. One of these is the shrinkage of mainline traditions to the point that some are actively seeking evangelical transfusions for the sake of their very survival. And another is some degree of exhaustion with culture-war Christianity on the part of younger Christians across the political spectrum, for whom the stories of second-wave fundamentalism describe their grandparents' battles and not their own. A valuable project of church leadership, it seems to me, would be to try to rebuild Christian identity around some idea that both liberals and conservatives could accept, in hopeful preparation for the day when that simplistic and destructive distinction will be regarded as quaint. And perhaps for that project the name of Schleiermacher will come to stand not for a retreat into mysticism, abandonment to feeling, or an undifferentiated loss of Christian good sense, but rather for a tradition, perhaps amounting to a 'minority report' for the past two centuries, that *begins* but *does not end* both its self-reflection and its broader activity in the world with the transformation of persons in the direction of God-mindedness by the agency of Jesus.[10]

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