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Schleiermacher and Otto on religion

ANDREW DOLE

Department of Religion, Amherst College, 108 Chapin Hall, Box 2252, Amherst, MA 01002

Abstract: Rudolf Otto is often spoken of as continuing the tradition of reflection on the nature of religion inaugurated by Schleiermacher. I argue that, on the contrary, there are important differences between Schleiermacher's and Otto's accounts of religion. Otto opposed naturalistic analyses of religion which threatened Christianity's claims to truth, and saw Schleiermacher as providing insufficient resources for resisting such analyses. Otto's grounding of his own religious epistemology in the work of Jakob Friedrich Fries provided him with an explicitly supernatural 'religious a priori', and thus provided a universal legitimating ground for religion which resists naturalistic analysis. Schleiermacher, in contrast, explicitly ruled out the sort of 'experience of the holy' postulated by Otto by denying both the 'givenness' of God in experience and supernatural intervention in the natural order. Further, Schleiermacher's appreciation of humanity's embeddedness within 'the system of nature' led him to embrace the view that religion, like any natural phenomenon, is an appropriate subject for scientific investigation.

Introduction

In recent discussions of the history of the academic study of religion, two names consistently found in close proximity are those of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Rudolf Otto. Otto is commonly portrayed as a faithful follower and developer of the 'school' established by Schleiermacher. The hallmarks of this 'school' are taken to be a focus on the individual's 'religious experience' and a consequent downplaying of the social dynamics of religion, a strong preference for 'insider' approaches to the study of religion, and a resistance to reductionistic or naturalistic treatments of religion. This close linkage of Schleiermacher and Otto is common to both appreciative readers of these figures and vocal opponents of the school which both purportedly represent.[1]

While it cannot be denied that there are similarities and continuities between Schleiermacher's and Otto's accounts of religion, I will be arguing in this essay that they held very different positions on the extent to which religion can be

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investigated and explained *naturalistically*[2] – a topic which is still of central importance in contemporary discussions of the subject. The perception that they belong to the same 'school of thought' concerning religion not only misrepresents the specific content of their texts, but also ignores almost 100 years' worth of history of the reception of Schleiermacher. Otto inherited from his teacher, Wilhelm Hermann, a rejection of a central thrust of Schleiermacher's work: his desire to 'mediate', or establish an 'eternal covenant', between religious faith and the various branches of the non-theological sciences.[3] Like Hermann, Otto sought to ground religion in an area of human life 'off-limits' to scientific analysis as a way of warding off naturalistic treatments of religion. Religion, he claimed, has its origins and justifying ground in the encounter with the 'numinous' or the holy, which Otto understood as an explicitly supernatural reality. Attempts to explain religion with reference only to natural causes thus mischaracterize religion, which relative to other areas of mundane life is a purely *sui generis* phenomenon (a term which Otto employs). In contrast, as we will see, Schleiermacher, far from opposing the 'scientific' investigation of religion, in fact voiced appreciation for the endeavour. Moreover, he eschewed appeals to the supernatural in general, and embraced a set of philosophical commitments which granted natural causes a place of pre-eminence in his understanding of religion.

It is, in the main, his anti-naturalism for which Otto is known, and without a doubt it is this which sets him at odds with many contemporary theorists of religion. It may fairly be said that resistance to the naturalistic analysis of religion formed a large part of the motivation for his writings on the subject. Otto announced an opposition to naturalism in his early book *Naturalistische und religiöse Weltansicht*,[4] and *The Idea of the Holy* exhibits the same anti-naturalism. In both of these books Otto champions the 'insider' view of religion in the face of the incursions of the scientific method;[5] indeed, in a passage regarded as no less than scandalous by some contemporary scholars of religion, Otto asked readers of *The Idea of the Holy* without the requisite kind of 'religious experience' simply to 'read no further'.[6] Those who favour reductive accounts of religion, or more broadly, the propriety of an 'outsider' approach, generally lament Otto's influence as an obstruction to the scientific study of religion.

In such a context, an association of Schleiermacher's name with Otto's is part of a strategy of representing Schleiermacher as a 'protective' theorist of religion, and thus as an historical foe of the 'objective' study of religion.[7] Distinguishing Schleiermacher's account of religion from Otto's on this point is thus aimed at allowing Schleiermacher's account to be appreciated on its own merits. In what follows, I will outline Otto's account of religion, with some discussion of its philosophical roots, and look in some detail at his treatment of Schleiermacher in *The Idea of the Holy*. Then I will contrast Otto's view with a summary of Schleiermacher's understanding of religion, drawing from both his early *Speeches on Religion* and his mature *Glaubenslehre*.

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Otto, Fries, and the religious a priori

Schleiermacher is commonly referred to as the most significant intellectual progenitor of Otto's view of religion. This perception is supported by the commonly known fact that Otto was a Schleiermacher enthusiast early on in his academic career. But Otto indicates in more than one of his texts that the philosophical foundation of his famous theory of religious experience lies not in the work of Schleiermacher but in that of Schleiermacher's contemporary, Jakob Friedrich Fries.

Otto was responsible for republishing the first edition of Schleiermacher's *Speeches on Religion* a century after its initial publication (following a period in which scholars had depended primarily on later editions), contributing to the volume a foreword filled with praise for its author. But a shift of his allegiance from Schleiermacher to Fries is abundantly clear in the texts leading up to *The Idea of the Holy*. The fact that Otto had an appreciation of both figures was evident in *Naturalistische und religiöse Weltansicht* (1904), where he argued that Schleiermacher was 'less incisive in his expression than Fries, but wider in ideas'.[8] Otto explicitly announced a reversal of this judgement, however, in his 1909 book *Kantisch-Fries'sche Religionsphilosophie und ihre Anwendung auf die Theologie*.[9] 'Historians of philosophy of religion … have assumed that Schleiermacher's was the more original and comprehensive intellect', Otto observes on the first page of his Introduction. 'Really, however, in the philosophy of religion, the points of contact between Fries and Schleiermacher are less important than their points of difference; and where their views agree, Fries is quite original, and closer study proves him to be superior in comprehensiveness, thoroughness, and solidity.'[10] And as if to remove any lingering doubts as to the sincerity of his remarks, he appends a footnote: 'I have dealt with the relation of Fries and Schleiermacher in my *Naturalistische und religiöse Weltansicht* … but I am now compelled to withdraw my remarks as to Schleiermacher's superiority to Fries.'[11]

Otto's appreciation of Fries centres around Fries's notion of *Ahnung* (in his own day, *Ahndung*).[12] Difficult to render in English, the term has the approximate meaning of a pre-vision or presentiment of something out of our cognitive reach. In Fries's usage, the term refers to a mode of apprehension, through 'feeling' [*Gefühl*], of noumenal reality: a mode of apprehension which, while lacking in clarity, transgresses the 'bounds of cognition' asserted by Kant. Indeed (the lack of clarity and somewhat problematic relation to language and concepts notwithstanding), both Fries and Otto use the Kantian term for 'cognition' [*Erkenntnis*] and its cognates to describe the products of this faculty. As Otto puts it,

> … in an indeterminate, obscure manner, by way of '*Ahnung*' I gain real knowledge of [*ich erkenne*] the universe in a quite particular way, following the supreme laws of its unity and necessity, which are clearly presented in conceptual form in the categories as a whole, and especially in the completed categories of eternity, spirit, freedom, and deity. In the obscure aesthetic knowledge [*Erkenntnis*] I recognize [*erkenne*], dimly and

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> inexpressibly, ideal existence in the world of phenomena as perceived by the senses, ideal existence in general, without any determination of its particular and individual side. But this is not all. For it is precisely this world, actually known to us under categories and ideas, which is the spiritual world in reality, the world subject to the laws of Good and the Supreme Good, the 'best world', the world of objective Final Purpose.[13]

Now Otto is explicit about the fact that he considers Friesian *Ahnung* to be a development of Kant's philosophy, independent of Schleiermacher's use of the term *Gefühl* at the centre of his own religious epistemology. Although Fries had cited the *Speeches* with appreciation, Otto argues that

> There is no sort of dependence of one upon the other. The source of Fries'[s] doctrine of *Ahndung* – so far as it is not just the positive experience of the man himself – is the Kantian Critique of Judgment. In this connection, whoever hears the word with discrimination and compares only utterances of Kant, some quite early ones, is bound to see that this important theory was already present as a companion of [Kant's] theory of ideas.[14]

Indeed, the terms in which Otto expounds Fries's religious epistemology are resolutely Kantian; although Schleiermacher is mentioned in the work and religious concerns are paramount, *Kantisch-Fries'sche Religionsphilosophie* is primarily, as its title suggests, a discussion of the continuation of the Kantian trajectory in philosophy of religion through Fries. Otto in some places describes *Ahnung* as a species of a priori knowledge; but Fries's 'immense improvement' to Kantian philosophy, Otto claims repeatedly, is his option for the 'neglected alternative' in transcendental idealism. That is, Fries (according to Otto) exposed and resisted Kant's 'fallacious inference from the apriority of knowledge to the ideality of the known, the object of knowledge'. '[W]ithout this advance', he argues, 'we should again arrive at a philosophy of religion which can only destroy the object of its speculation'.[15] *Ahnung* thus refers, for Otto, to an a priori and thus universally valid locus of cognitive access, by way of 'feeling', to the realm of the transcendent – to the realm of *spirit*, wherein God dwells. He offers the following as an opening to his detailed discussion of *Ahnung*:

> This positive content [of the Idea of God], which eludes our comprehension and can only be manifested to our conceptual knowledge if the barriers of our own knowledge are again lifted, is revealed to us, however, in individual *Feelings*, capable in themselves of clear differentiation, particular definition, and of being communicated. The general nature of an eternal, holy, omnipotent universal cause is to us utterly incomprehensible … . But in the feeling of devotion we attain by degrees a positive actual knowledge of it, quite solid and stable, if, indeed, utterly incapable of being expressed. Although we cannot *say* what God is, we can feel it, and we need not baulk the inquirer of his answer, for it may well be that we point him to the way in which the feeling can come to life within him.[16]

Ahnung is thus a special ability of the human mind, whereby 'the barriers of our knowledge are lifted' and God comes within reach of our minds. As we will see

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below, Friesian *Ahnung* forms the basis of what Otto terms, in his own system, the 'faculty of divination': the ability to apprehend and cognize the holy object when it impinges upon human existence.

Otto's resistance to naturalism provided a primary motivation for him to appeal to Fries, rather than to Schleiermacher, for an epistemological grounding for his own account of religion. Fries provides Otto with the essential elements of a universal, and thus universally legitimating, foundation for religion which is independent of ordinary reality and which thus distances religion's core from the mundane and contingent. Such a religious a priori keeps religion's truth-claims from being grounded only in the contingencies of history and thus non-confirmable or, worse, falsifiable. In *The Idea of the Holy* the importance of such a principle is stated plainly:

> Every religion which is to be more than mere faith in tradition and authority, which springs rather from persuasion [*Überzeugung*], from one's own personal and inward conviction [*Überführtsein*] (i.e. from one's own inner cognition of its truth), as Christianity does more than other religions, must presuppose principles of the mind according to which it can be independently recognized as true. But these principles must be a priori ones, which no experience and no 'history' can provide. Certainly it sounds edifying when one says that they are inscribed on the heart by the pencil of the Holy Spirit 'in history', but this has little sense. For how does the one who says this know that it was the pencil of the Holy Spirit which wrote, and not that of a lying spirit, or that of 'folk-psychological fantasy'?[17]

In other words, Otto's theory of religion appeals to Fries in order to secure a source of knowledge of the transcendent, spiritual world and of God, which shields religion from historical contingency. The purpose of this religious a priori is to provide a conceptual core to religion, which is not susceptible to challenge from scepticism about particular historical claims. As we will see, even Otto thought that Schleiermacher's account of religion contained no genuine religious a priori – that Schleiermacher bound religion too intimately to the mundane world, the province of the natural sciences.

By the time he wrote *The Idea of the Holy*, then, Otto had explicitly adopted a Friesian epistemological stance; and he himself contrasted this with Schleiermacher's view, which he no longer considered sufficient to ward off naturalism in the treatment of religion. Awareness of this shift of his philosophical allegiance should call into question any easy conflation of Otto's and Schleiermacher's views on the subject of religion.[18]

Schleiermacher in *The Idea of the Holy*

The Idea of the Holy is without a doubt Otto's best-known book, the one in which he most explicitly lays out his theory of religion. Fortunately, it is also the text in which he most explicitly distances himself from Schleiermacher. In fact, throughout *The Idea of the Holy* a repeating motif is found: in order properly to

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appreciate the role which 'religious experience' plays in religion, one must see where Schleiermacher's account comes up short, and modify this account in what amounts to a Friesian direction.[19]

The outlines of Otto's argument in *The Idea of the Holy* are well-known. At the core of religion, according to Otto, is 'numinous experience', in which one encounters that which is absolutely other from the human and the mundane.[20] The encounter with the holy object (or being), made possible by the faculty of 'divination', gives rise to feelings of awe and 'numinous dread', which feelings can range from 'a tranquil mood of deepest worship' to 'an almost grisly horror and shuddering'.[21] Religion involves the pursuit of further experience, or knowledge, of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, and the attempt to develop and implement categories of value – holiness and profanity, cleanliness and uncleanliness, and so on – appropriate to the relationship between the wholly other and the mundane world.[22]

The greatest similarity between the accounts of Otto and Schleiermacher is that both speak of a religion grounded, in some way, in 'feeling'. It may also fairly be said that for both men the 'feeling' at the centre of religion represents a point of human access to the divine. But the precise sense in which this claim can be affirmed differs significantly between the two; and in fact, they disagree on what sort of 'feeling' inhabits the core of religion. Otto critiques Schleiermacher's notion of the 'feeling of absolute dependence' and finally leaves it behind altogether when he locates religion's phenomenological centre in a feeling of an entirely different order.

Otto claims that the 'feeling of dependence' is inadequate in the first instance because, according to Schleiermacher, it differs only in *degree*, not in *kind*, from other human feelings. But the feeling that grounds religion, Otto counters, is a truly unique and primitive factor of human existence: 'Since [this mental state] is completely *sui generis*, it is like any original and fundamental datum not susceptible of definition in the strict sense, but only of discussion.'[23] Schleiermacher's description of the feeling at the core of religion fails to distinguish it from the rest of human cognition sufficiently to ward off the spectre of naturalistic explanation;[24] properly understood, Otto claims, the relation between religious feeling and a natural 'feeling of dependence' is no more than a close analogy.

Otto introduces the term 'creature-feeling' to name the deepest *self-referential* religious feeling; it is, he claims, his analogue to Schleiermacher's 'feeling of absolute dependence'. As regards its content, however, 'creature-feeling' is far richer than a simple (even if 'absolute') feeling of dependence: it involves not merely the feeling of having been *made* [*Geschaffenheit*], but of *being a creature* [*Geshöpflichkeit*], which incorporates feelings of 'powerlessness over against overwhelming power [*Übermacht*], of one's own nothingness'.[25]

This counterpart to Schleiermacher's feeling of absolute dependence is not, however, the 'core of religion' for Otto. The central role given to the feeling of

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absolute dependence by Schleiermacher is handed off to something completely different in Otto's theory. Because the *self* is the object of the feeling of absolute dependence, Otto argues, its content is restricted to the natural world; and for this reason it fails to secure unambiguously a reference to a transcendent world or being. But religion must have this reference:

> [Schleiermacher] discovers only one category of religious self-valuation (namely, devaluation) and wishes to determine the particular content of religious feeling through it. According to him religious feeling, immediately and in the primary respects, is a feeling of the self, a feeling of a particular determination of myself, namely of my dependence. Only through a deduction, namely inasmuch as I also think of a cause outside myself, does one hit upon the divine itself, according to Schleiermacher. But this is completely contrary to the psychological fact of the matter [*dem seelischen Tatbestand*]. Rather, 'creature-feeling' is itself a first subjective accompanying moment and effect, is as it were the shadow of another moment of feeling, which itself indubitably primarily and immediately refers [*geht auf*] to an object outside myself. That, however, is precisely the *Numinous*.[26]

Prior to 'creature-feeling' in the order of explanation of religion, Otto places 'another moment of feeling', which serves for him as religion's experiential core. This prior moment of feeling is the *feeling of the numinous*: the feeling of that which escapes all mundane categories and presents itself as *mysterious*, as *holy*, and as overwhelmingly *powerful*. Creature-feeling is only a *reflection* of this more original feeling:

> That 'creature-feeling' refers particularly to this moment of absolute power, this 'majesty', as its shadow and subjective reflex; which makes itself plain as a contrast to the objectively felt power, as the feeling of one's own descent into nothingness, one's being earth, ashes and nothing; and is, so to speak, the numinous raw material for the feeling of religious 'lowliness'.[27]

Thus, whatever self-referring feelings may be involved in religion, these are less important than – and subsequent in the order of explanation to – those feelings whereby the character of the 'holy object' is apprehended.

The experiential core of religion, for Otto, is thus not a version of Schleiermacher's 'feeling of absolute dependence', but a categorically different feeling. 'Numinous feeling' is a matter of 'objectively felt power': that is, it builds reference to transcendent reality, in the form of a quasi-perceptual access to the supernatural, into the content of religious feeling.[28] It is important to note that Otto himself takes such access to be missing from Schleiermacher's theory of religion, and takes himself to be improving upon Schleiermacher in adding this stipulation to his own account.

It is also important to note that, while 'numinous feeling' is for Otto the deepest religious *feeling*, something else stands prior to this feeling in the order of the explanation of religion. This 'something else' is the *encounter* of the individual with the transcendent Other, the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.

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> Only where the numen is experienced as present, as in the case of Abraham, or where a Something with a numinous character is felt, or where the mind turns outwards from itself to it, and therefore only in consequence of an application of the category of the numinous, can the creature-feeling arise as its accompaniment.[29]

The notion of an 'encounter' with the transcendent marks another point of Otto's resistance to naturalism: considering Humean objections to the very notion of 'supernatural' occurrences, he argues that '[r]eligious feeling itself rises against this ossification and materialization of the most tender [element] in religion, the encounter with and discovery of God himself'.[30] To speak plainly, then, the true 'source of religion' according to Otto is a discrete *encounter* between human being and God. As we will see below, nothing analogous to this is found in Schleiermacher's system; and in fact Otto's account suggests a very different view of God than the one Schleiermacher outlines in his dogmatic theology.[31]

Otto's discussion of the human ability to apprehend the religious object marks a further point of departure from Schleiermacher. The faculty of '*genuinely* cognizing and recognizing [*echt erkennen und anerkennen*] the holy in its appearances' Otto refers to as the faculty of divination.[32] According to him, both Fries and Schleiermacher made use of this idea – the one in general in his doctrine of *Ahnung*, the other at least implicitly in the first edition of the *Speeches on Religion*. Otto sees Schleiermacher's view, however, as insufficiently robust in its claim to divinatory truth, since in this account the *rational* element of that which is 'divined' 'is embedded in a basis of eternal mystery, of the irrationality of the foundation of the world'.[33] In other words, Schleiermacher's account makes any attempts to speak in positive terms about the transcendent matters of theological interpretation at best, and non-religious 'speculation' at worst; in contrast to this, Otto sees the need to insist that through 'divination' the character of transcendent reality is *accurately* apprehended.

Further, where Schleiermacher takes the ability to 'intuit the universe' (his terms) to be a universal human capacity (although one subject to varying degrees of development), Otto claims that the sort of cognitive access to the holy which lies at the heart of religion is not available to all, but only to certain 'divinatory natures'.

> [Schleiermacher] indiscriminately and naively presupposes this faculty of divination to be a general one. It is certainly not at all general in the sense that it could necessarily be presupposed in each person of a religious persuasion. Now Schleiermacher is entirely correct to count it among the faculties of reasonable spirit in general … . But what is generally human is in actuality not at all possessed in general and by each person, but comes to light very often only in the form of unusual aptitude and endowment of gifted individuals … . Only divinatory natures possess this faculty in actuality, and not human beings in general, as rationalism holds; nor are the indifferent masses of subjects of the same kind in reciprocal interaction, as modern social psychology imagines, receivers and vehicles of the impressions of the transcendent.[34]

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'Divination', as described by Otto, is something of which only specially endowed individuals are capable; and this is in direct contrast to religious apprehension (whatever its degree of access to the transcendent) distributed more or less evenly throughout the population. Schleiermacher's view, once again, approaches the terrain of naturalistic analysis of religion too closely for comfort. In Otto's account, the phenomenon of 'experience of the holy', which both gives rise to and legitimates religion, is doubly insulated from empirical challenge: first because only certain gifted individuals are capable of having this experience in the first place, and second because the *presence* of the holy object is required for the encounter which gives rise to 'numinous feelings'.

Otto's treatment of Schleiermacher's claim, in the first edition of the *Speeches on Religion*, to be a 'mediator' of religion reveals something of the distance between their accounts. Otto understands this, in his terms, as a claim on Schleiermacher's part to be a 'divinatory nature': that is, to have a special kind of access to the transcendent, which qualifies him to speak on behalf of religion. In fact, however, Otto doubts that Schleiermacher was actually such a divinatory nature.[35] That is, he believes that, although Schleiermacher's account of religion involves the postulation of a faculty of 'divination', Schleiermacher's description of his own relationship to religion reveals a personal *lack* of such a 'divinatory capacity'. For a description of the sort of sensitivity to the supernatural at the centre of *The Idea of the Holy*, Otto prefers Goethe's treatment of the 'daemonic' as presented in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. I think it is accurate to say that Schleiermacher was not one of Otto's special 'divinatory natures', but not to say that Schleiermacher ever claimed to be such, or to say that is it a defect of his account of religion that it lacks a place for Ottonian divination. To claim that Schleiermacher's account of religion is based on any such divinatory capacity is, in my view, to distort this account.

At least one text from Otto suggests that he saw a central difficulty in appropriating Schleiermacher's account of religion. In an essay written as a supplement to *The Idea of the Holy*, entitled 'Der Neue Aufbruch des Sensus Numinis bei Schleiermacher', Otto articulates what serves him as a basic rule of interpretation for Schleiermacher's theory of religion. Attributed by Otto to Hermann, the rule states: 'Schleiermacher in fact means, with his ''feeling of the universe'', the feeling of the *supernatural*.'[36] The reference, obviously, is to the first edition of the *Speeches on Religion*; and following this interpretive principle does turn this text into something like a precursor of Otto's own. Reliance upon this principle thus serves to legitimate Otto's appropriation of Schleiermacher's work. It should be apparent that this is a very powerful interpretive principle; and it should also be apparent that if Schleiermacher did *not* mean to identify 'the universe' as the object of religious perception with 'the supernatural', then this interpretive principle considerably distorts Schleiermacher's actual view. It is to that view we now turn.

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Schleiermacher on religion and the natural order

Schleiermacher's account of religion was subject to considerable development over the thirty-two years between the first edition of the *Speeches on Religion* and the second edition of *The Christian Faith*. What remains fairly consistent throughout its various articulations, however, is his reluctance to appeal to the supernatural in order to describe or explain the phenomenon of religion. The struggle to articulate an account of religion which eschews claims of 'experience of the divine' or supernatural intervention in the natural order but nevertheless provides a basis for the practice of religion and, later in his career, of dogmatics, comprises much of the development of Schleiermacher's thought on the subject, culminating in the position set out in the *Glaubenslehre*.

The religious naturalism of the *Speeches on Religion* is the most pronounced in the first edition, where religion has its essence in 'intuitions and feelings' of the *universe* and the *infinite*. Schleiermacher discusses the question of the supernatural (understood, roughly, as that which transcends the natural order) at several points in the *Speeches*, and his references are generally not favourable. 'Miracles, inspirations, revelations, supernatural sensations [*übernatürliche Empfindungen*]', he wrote in the famous second speech, 'one can have much religion without coming into contact with any of these concepts'.[37] The claim that Schleiermacher's 'infinite' and 'universe' denote *supernatural* realities is complicated (at best) by several passages in which Schleiermacher explicitly disavows such a position. 'With great attentiveness I can observe the longing of young minds for the miraculous and supernatural', he remarked in the third speech,

> Of course, it is an illusion to seek the infinite precisely outside the finite, to seek the opposite outside that to which it is opposed; but is it not highly natural for those who do not yet know the finite itself? Is it not the illusion of whole peoples and whole schools of wisdom?[38]

Longing for the 'miraculous' and the 'supernatural' Schleiermacher thus relegates to the early stages of human and religious development and to *mistaken* 'schools of wisdom'; his own theory posits a form of striving at the heart of religion which does not seek an *escape* from the ordinary world in order to locate its proper object.

The object of religious apprehension in the first edition of the *Speeches* is simply the relationship of everything finite and limited to the 'universe'. 'Religious intuitions' are 'views' [*Anschauungen*] of this relationship; out of a particularly strong religious intuition grows a positive religion, an organized set of such views developed within a religious community and circulated by means of determinate communicative (linguistic and liturgical) practices. Schleiermacher emphasizes that God and the supernatural, if these terms are found within religion, are explicitly matters of interpretation of 'religious intuitions': whether God figures into the religion of a particular individual depends on the 'direction of his

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imagination [*Fantasie*]'.[39] Schleiermacher thus does *not* claim that religion has its origin in 'experience of the transcendent'; what gives rise to religion is simply apprehension of the 'action of the universe' upon the individual. There is, in other words, considerable textual evidence against Otto's identification of the 'universe' with the 'supernatural'. Claims regarding God or gods are made *within* the religions described by Schleiermacher's account, which itself avoids making any such claims.

It is an indication of the degree to which Schleiermacher avoided appeals to the divine in the first edition of the *Speeches* that he received considerable criticism on just this point. He was in fact accused of pantheism – more precisely, of Spinozism, and the particular criticism which seems to have affected him the most was the charge that the position he outlined was incompatible with the attitude a Christian preacher should hold towards religion.[40] It was partly in response to these criticisms, it seems, that Schleiermacher substantially revised parts of the *Speeches* for the second edition, published during his first years of university professorship and relatively high-profile preaching. In addition to changing the basic terminology of his account of religion (elevating 'feeling' to a position above the first edition's 'intuition') his revisions involved inserting references to 'God' and 'divinity' at various points in the text, particularly in the second speech on religion's essence. Schleiermacher did not, however, integrate these new terms into the general epistemology of the *Speeches*. The result is a considerable tension in the second and later editions between two possible readings of his view of religion. For example, 'Your feeling is piety, insofar as it expresses … the being and life common to you and to the All. Your feeling is piety insofar as it is the result of the operation of God in you by means of the operation of the world upon you.'[41] This passage adds a new and discordant note to the language of the first edition: to talk of religious feeling (piety) as concerned with the 'All' or the infinite, it adds the claim that this feeling is *caused by God*, a sort of claim carefully avoided in the original text. Passages like these have provided grist for those who see Schleiermacher as a 'mystic' or as a 'protective' theorist of religion à la Otto.[42]

My own view is that the later editions of the *Speeches* simply do not present a coherent picture of Schleiermacher's view of religion.[43] The second edition revisions introduce a tension between a naturalistic and supernaturalistic understanding of religion, a tension which cannot be resolved on the basis of the *Speeches* text alone. But Schleiermacher does carefully address the relationship between the natural and the supernatural in *The Christian Faith*, articulating his view of the relationship between these two far more clearly than he had in the *Speeches*. The later editions of the *Speeches on Religion* thus represent an intermediate and unpolished stage of Schleiermacher's thinking on this subject, and for this reason should not be the primary texts from which an understanding of his view of religion is to be drawn, as they have been for the most part in the English-speaking world.[44] For an understanding of Schleiermacher's mature

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thought on the naturalism of religion and the supernatural, we must turn to his *Glaubenslehre*.

The general outlines of Schleiermacher's account of religion as articulated in *The Christian Faith* are fairly well known. Schleiermacher posits a universal 'feeling of absolute dependence', a feeling that we are not self-creating or self-sustaining beings or that 'the whole of our self-activity comes to us from elsewhere', as a concomitant to human experience.[45] This feeling of absolute dependence, in cases where it comes to consciousness clearly and is taken to be veridical,[46] gives rise to what Schleiermacher terms the 'God-consciousness', when reflection on this feeling is oriented towards the 'whence' of absolute dependence. The feeling of absolute dependence is the essential component of what he terms the 'pious self-consciousness', or those parts of self-consciousness which are bought into relationship with this feeling. A ('positive') religion comes into existence when a particular form of pious self-consciousness becomes the organizing centre of a community, becoming its 'basis and object',[47] giving rise to a process of historical transmission through communication utilizing the full range of expressive media (linguistic, plastic, musical, and so on). Christianity is one such positive religion, which traces its historical origins to the God-consciousness of Jesus of Nazareth and is sustained by communal possession and transmission of this God-consciousness through a body of traditional doctrinal claims, ritual practices and works of religious art and architecture.

Schleiermacher's feeling of absolute dependence, taken in isolation from the pious self-consciousness, stands in considerable contrast to Otto's far richer 'creature-feeling'. The feeling of absolute dependence is the feeling that we are not the autonomous creators of either ourselves or of the reality which we experience. But, Schleiermacher claims, 'this [feeling] can in no way proceed from the effect of an object which is somehow to be given to us; for upon such a counter-influence would always have a place, and even a voluntary renunciation of this would always involve a feeling of freedom'.[48] Thus he explicitly states that the feeling of absolute dependence is *not* the result of an encounter with an object or entity, contrasting sharply with Otto's 'creature-feeling', which is 'cast like a shadow' by the feeling of a 'numinous object' which is *experienced as present*. It follows from this, claims Schleiermacher, that '[a feeling of absolute dependence], strictly speaking, cannot exist in a single moment as such, because this is always determined, as regards its total content, by what is given, and thus by such as that towards which we have a feeling of freedom'.[49] The feeling of absolute dependence thus never occurs in isolation, but rather 'accompanies our whole existence' as a sort of background component of ordinary experience.

And yet this phenomenologically extremely 'thin' feeling is the primary datum for the theological part of the *Glaubenslehre*, and serves as a central criterion against which doctrines inherited from the Christian tradition are evaluated. The central theological problematic of the *Glaubenslehre*, then, could be described in

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this way: to what extent can we affirm inherited theological claims both about the world and anything outside the world (i.e. God or other transcendent realities), given the fact that the central religious datum gives us information *only* about ourselves; that is, given that *no* transcendent or supernatural realities are 'given' in our experience?[50]

In his initial discussion of the feeling of absolute dependence, Schleiermacher also equates this feeling with the awareness of being dependent *upon God*.[51] On an initial reading, this would seem to bring Schleiermacher's view more in line with Otto's. But in both editions of the *Glaubenslehre* (although more fully in the second), Schleiermacher carefully lays out, immediately after making this claim, the sense in which this identification can be maintained. The identification turns out to be *stipulative*, defining 'God' as a term referring to the 'other party' in the relationship of absolute dependence. This identification 'is to be understood in the sense that the *Whence* of our receptive and active existence, as implied in this self-consciousness, is to be designated by the word "God", and that this is for us the really original signification of that word'.[52] Prior to the introduction of properly theological claims about God's nature (claims delivered by the Christian tradition, which Schleiermacher understands as originally expressions not of the feeling of absolute dependence alone, but of the specifically Christian pious self-consciousness), the content of the term 'God' is purely formal.[53] 'In this sense it can indeed be said that God is given to us in feeling in an original way', Schleiermacher claims; although the only phenomenological content of the feeling of absolute dependence concerns ourselves, this feeling gives us (some degree of) awareness of a *relationship* in which we stand. The feeling of absolute dependence thus represents, for Schleiermacher, a 'point of access to the divine', but it should be clear that the character of this 'point of access' is quite different from that of Otto's version.

Otto's diagnosis is thus correct in at least one respect: Schleiermacher describes no 'feeling of the divine', of the holy, or the numinous, nor does the feeling of absolute dependence unambiguously secure reference to a transcendent being suitable for religious veneration; rather, the content of the feeling of absolute dependence is 'a particular determination of myself'. If one were interested in a 'powerful protective strategy' against empirical or metaphysical challenge to Christianity, as Otto was, one would do well to hold Schleiermacher's account at arms' length – as Otto, when correctly understood, did.

Beyond this difference at the core of their accounts of the phenomenon of religion, Schleiermacher and Otto were at opposite poles on the question of the 'scientific' investigation of religion. One of Otto's aims in *The Idea of the Holy* was to block the possibility of explanations of religion in terms of natural causes and to assert that religion could only be explained in terms of a supernatural origin. Schleiermacher's work, in contrast, was premised on the possibility of the completion of scientific knowledge about the natural world, if not during his own

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lifetime, then at some point in the future; and he espoused a strong view of the causal interrelatedness of all finite phenomena which ruled out the possibility of supernatural intervention in the natural order. Thus, one of the aims of the *Glaubenslehre* was to re-describe religion in general, and Christianity in particular, in a manner compatible with the advance of scientific knowledge and without dependence on appeals to the supernatural.

Schleiermacher articulated this aspect of his project most clearly in his open letters to Lücke prefatory to the publication of the second edition of *The Christian Faith*. In the second of these letters, he confesses that he believes that the future holds a monumental conflict between Christianity and the sciences as the latter develop towards offering 'comprehensive knowledge of the world'. 'I will not live to see that day, but can peacefully lay down to sleep', he remarks, but he anticipates that, as the sciences challenge Christianity's traditional claims, later generations will need to 'learn to do without what many are still accustomed to regard as inseparably bound to the essence of Christianity'.[54] Schleiermacher wishes to distinguish himself from those who would respond by 'barricading themselves behind dogmatic fortifications and cutting themselves off from science'. His own proposed solution aims at the coexistence of science and religion as the only state of affairs appropriate to the modern age.

> Unless the Reformation from which our church first emerged endeavours to establish an eternal covenant between the living Christian faith and completely free, independent scientific inquiry, so that faith does not hinder science and science does not exclude faith, it fails to meet adequately the needs of our time and we need another one, no matter what it takes to establish it … . Precisely this position, my dear friend, represents that of my *Glaubenslehre*.[55]

Schleiermacher's primary worry thus appears to have been not scientific researchers overstepping their bounds, but practitioners of religion under the impression that faith cannot survive the loss of traditional claims discredited by the advance of scientific knowledge. The tone of his remarks to Lücke indicates that he felt it incumbent upon the *religious* to forestall a hostile separation between religion and science.[56] His proposed solution to this problematic, as articulated in the *Glaubenslehre*, involved – much to the chagrin of many a reader since his day, including Otto himself – embracing the view of the natural world which he thought the natural sciences prescribed, and *surrendering in advance* of the 'completion' of scientific knowledge those religious claims (in particular, those which assert divine intervention in the natural order) which he thought that this 'completion' would discredit. One aspect of this strategy which has not been sufficiently appreciated is its effect on the enterprise of 'explaining religion' itself.

The key to understanding this point is Schleiermacher's description of the relationship between divine activity and the 'nature-system'. 'The pious self-consciousness, by means of which we place all that moves or influences us in

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absolute dependence on God', he remarks in the *Glaubenslehre*, 'coincides entirely with the view that all such things are conditioned and determined by the interdependence of nature'.[57] 'Finite' entities – entities in the world – are intimately bound up with each other in an all-encompassing causal nexus.[58] Schleiermacher distinguishes the 'individual causes' which operate within the natural order from the 'universal cause', which he terms the 'divine causality', equivalent in compass to the natural causal nexus but never entering discretely into it.[59] Schleiermacher thus affirms God's role as creator and sustainer of the entire nature-system – as the 'ordainer' of all that occurs – but denies that God ever intervenes in the natural order.[60] Free human actions are equally subject to God's 'ordination': 'Whether or not that which arouses our self-consciousness and consequently influences us is to be traced back to any part of the so-called nature-mechanism or to the activity of free causes – the one is as completely ordained by God as the other.'[61]

Schleiermacher thus rules out any events occurring within history caused directly by God through the abrogation or suspension of natural laws – in his terminology, 'absolutely supernatural' finite events. He holds that the entire natural causal order is grounded in and sustained by the divine causality but, on the other hand, his denial of supernatural intervention entails that *only* finite causes operate *within* the natural order. This implies fairly directly that the causal history of any finite entity or event will contain *only* finite causes – that is, *natural* causes – up to the point where one asks about the cause or ground of the entire natural causal order in which it is embedded. The discrete causes of all finite events are all *natural causes*, and all finite beings taken together are causally grounded in and sustained by the divine causality.

It is entirely in keeping with his appreciation of the integrity of the natural order that Schleiermacher acknowledges the propriety of searching for a 'scientific' understanding of religion. At the beginning of the *Glaubenslehre*, Schleiermacher describes his project as one sort of examination of the 'piety' at the heart of one particular religious association, the Christian church. But, he adds,

> … we have no desire to prevent the [the leaders of science] from investigating and evaluating, from their standpoint, both piety itself and the community which pertains to it, and determining their proper place in the common realm of human life; for piety and church are also material for knowledge [*Wissen*]; indeed, we ourselves are entering upon such an investigation.[62]

Schleiermacher thus intends his account to leave the field open for the study of religion by 'the leaders of science', with reference to both its public or social aspects (i.e. the 'communion relating to piety') and its 'private' aspects (i.e. piety itself).

A passage in which Schleiermacher sums up his discussion on miracles makes it explicit that he, in fact, embraces the search for 'scientific explanations'

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of religious phenomena – that is, explanations which appeal only to natural causes:

> … overall, as regards the miraculous, the general interests of science, more particularly of natural science [*Naturforschung*], and the interests of piety seem to meet at the same point: namely, that we should let go the idea of the absolutely supernatural because no single instance of it can be known by us, and we are not at all required to recognize it … . In this way, everything, even the most wonderful, that happens or has happened, remains a problem [*Aufgabe*] for scientific research; but, at the same time, where the same, by its purpose or otherwise, stirs up pious feeling, this is in no way impaired by representing the possibility of a future understanding [*Erkenntnis*].[63]

In other words, Schleiermacher's position is that it is appropriate neither for scientists nor for the pious to appeal to the supernatural to explain discrete events in the world. In contrast to Otto, Schleiermacher offers no resistance to the possibility of natural explanations of phenomena which 'stimulate religious feeling'. He remarks that

> … it is obviously incorrect to claim, as if on the basis of a general experience, that that which is uncomprehended as such always stimulates pious feeling more than that which is understood … even the greatest confidence with which we accept any particular hypothetical explanation of these phenomena does not nullify that feeling.[64]

Appeal to God as the direct cause of some individual event, according to Schleiermacher, is made only where ignorance of the natural causes of things is combined with intellectual sloth: 'It is certainly, however, an expedient often adopted by human indolence to attribute what is not understood to the supernatural immediately; but this does not at all belong to the tendency to piety'.[65] The tendency to explain any particular event by appeal to direct divine activity

> … naturally has its roots, not in Christian piety, but in a confused world-view which in ordinary life is only too common, which makes use of dependence on God only as a ground of explanation of the course of the world where natural connections are hidden, and thus mostly where something severed [*abgerissen*] from what went before and from its context appears either as a beginning or as something isolated.[66]

In contrast to a religion premised on supernatural intervention in the natural order, Schleiermacher advocates an ideal of religious feeling in which the feeling of absolute dependence upon God and the feeling of being completely of a piece with the natural order exist side by side.

> For that feeling [of absolute dependence] is most complete when we identify ourselves in our self-consciousness with the whole world and feel ourselves in the same way not less dependent … then these two will completely coincide: the most complete conviction that everything is grounded and conditioned in the whole of the nature-system, and the inner certainty of the absolute dependence of everything finite upon God.[67]

Willingness to see the self and all that occurs within it as fully a part of the system of nature is deeply ingrained in Schleiermacher's conception of proper religiosity. He also rejects appeals to supernatural beings (angelic or demonic) to explain

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occurrences in the human soul: 'for [the one who so appeals] inhibits the effort to explain all the phenomena, even the strangest, of the individual soul by its own particular qualities and by the influences of common life, which indeed cannot be encouraged enough, in the interests of blessedness [*Gottseligkeit*]'.[68] Thus no exception is made for 'even the strangest' phenomena of the human soul: they too are to be understood as products of the nature-system (in this case referring to roughly psychological and sociological factors) in which the self is embedded.

This 'natural explicability' of religion is called into question at only one point in Schleiermacher's account.[69] Schleiermacher argues in §32.2 that the feeling of absolute dependence can only be properly explained as a 'co-positing of God within self-consciousness',[70] because to explain it as a 'co-positing of the world' is simply to mistake its content. Since we are not only affected by the world, but also act upon it, the world is simply not an appropriate candidate for the 'whence' of absolute dependence. If the feeling of absolute dependence is veridical, then it points towards that which stands outside the nature-system; thus the 'God' of §32.2 should be understood as the 'whence' of absolute dependence first introduced in §4.

Just how 'thin' an exemption from explanation by natural causes is afforded by Schleiermacher's claim about the feeling of absolute dependence can be appreciated if we recall that this feeling never occurs in isolation, but only in combination with the sensibly determined self-consciousness. It follows from Schleiermacher's account of the divine causality, however, that anything 'downstream' from the feeling of absolute dependence can only be explained in terms of natural causes; and thus to explain, for example, how a particular individual interprets the feeling of absolute dependence, or even to explain the circumstances under which the feeling of absolute dependence comes to consciousness as an object of reflection or is taken to be veridical (necessary developments for the emergence of religion), only natural causes will be available. Unlike in Otto's account, the 'point of access to the divine' does not function to shield specific religious phenomena or claims from naturalistic explanation.

The 'supernatural' and Jesus of Nazareth

For all his denial of divine intervention in the natural order, Schleiermacher retained the term 'supernatural' within the context of *The Christian Faith*, and applied it to the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. It will be important, in order to round out the present discussion, to examine Schleiermacher's claim that his account attempts to show how 'something natural can at the same time be something supernatural'.[71]

In §13.1 of the *Glaubenslehre*, Schleiermacher argues against the idea that the appearance of Jesus as the Redeemer is an 'absolutely supernatural' event. Rather, Christians should hold the view that the event of Jesus' possession of 'perfect

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God-consciousness' is 'a natural fact' – which, in the context of his discussion, means that it is the result of a natural process or natural processes extended through history and governed by 'laws of divine arrangement', or 'an action of human nature, grounded in its original constitution and prepared for by everything prior'.[72] It is to this passage that Schleiermacher refers back when he discusses the 'consciousness of grace' in §88:

> In the corporate life of sinfulness sin propagates itself naturally, so that an unhindered potency of the God-consciousness in Jesus cannot be understood simply as a product of that life. This God-consciousness, manifesting itself in this potency, can have come into existence only outside the sinful corporate life. And since the whole human race is included in this sinful corporate life, we must believe that this God-consciousness had a supernatural origin, though only in the sense postulated above (cf. §13.1).[73]

The reference to §13 makes it clear that 'supernatural' here cannot involve intervention in the nature-system. This passage indicates that here 'supernatural' is a contextual term. Jesus' perfect God-consciousness is, Schleiermacher tells us, something that could never have come about solely on the basis of the ordinary 'corporate life of sinfulness'. This perfect God-consciousness thus represents something 'supernatural' *relative to that ordinary life*: something that could never have come about apart from the introduction of a *new element* into that life.[74]

This understanding receives confirmation from the remainder of the paragraph, where Schleiermacher notes that relative to a different and broader context, a 'supernatural' event would not count as supernatural if its occurrence represents simply the ordinary unfolding of the nature-system.

> So, too, the new common life, in relation to the Redeemer himself, is certainly no miracle, but rather, the supernatural becoming natural ethically [*das sittlich Naturwerden des Ubernatürlichen*] … but in relation to the common life of sinfulness which until that point had encompassed everything and had dominated every formation, the new is something which has come about supernaturally. The same applies to the passage of each individual from the old common life into the new. For in relation to the new itself, such a passage is not supernatural, for such effects follow by the nature of the case; but it is something which has come about supernaturally in relation to the earlier life of the individual himself.[75]

On the strength of this passage, we can say that in this particular sort of usage the term 'supernatural' can be applied to different sorts of phenomena, but one can only call a thing 'supernatural' in relation to a specific set of preceding conditions. The phenomenon in question will count as supernatural *relative to those conditions* only if its occurrence could never have come about solely on the basis of those conditions, but requires the contribution of a new element from outside. Thus, the same phenomenon will count as *natural* relative to some sets of conditions and *supernatural* with respect to others. It is in this sense, then, that 'something natural can at the same time be something supernatural': relative to

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different contexts. And to speak of 'the supernatural becoming natural' refers to the fact that, once a 'supernatural' element has been introduced into a particular process (say, the introduction of perfect God-consciousness into the history of the human race), this element will then become part of the ordinary natural unfolding of that process. If one were, like God, to have a complete grasp of the causal history of the world, it would be apparent that no event (besides the creation of the natural order itself) would count as 'absolutely supernatural', not even the perfect God-consciousness of Jesus. Even this can be regarded as a 'natural fact':

> … in this whole context, the appearance of the Redeemer in the midst of this natural development is no longer a supernatural emergence of a new stage of development, but simply one conditioned by that which precedes – although certainly its connection with the former is to be found only in the unity of the divine thought.[76]

Schleiermacher's discussion of the relationship between the natural and supernatural is thus of a piece with his treatment of much of the traditional language of Christianity. He offers *reinterpretations* of important terms which retain some of their traditional religious functions, but are compatible with the denial of divine intervention in the natural order. Thus, on the significance of the 'supernatural' within religion Schleiermacher and Otto are poles apart – although this cannot be seen without close attention to the nuances of Schleiermacher's texts.

Conclusion

If the above observations are correct, then revisions of some claims about Schleiermacher's and Otto's respective places in the history of the study of religion are overdue. Reproductions of later editions of the *Speeches on Religion* have fostered, and will continue to foster, the perception of an easy compatibility between Schleiermacher and Otto, but if one takes a broader view of Schleiermacher's corpus, a very different picture emerges. What I have argued above suggests that Schleiermacher's account of religion was frankly less a suitable basis for Otto's anti-naturalistic project than a considerable obstacle, not least due to Schleiermacher's status as the 'father of modern Protestant theology'. What Otto accomplished in his treatment of Schleiermacher was twofold: on the one hand, he succeeded in establishing himself in the eyes of his readers as a worker in the tradition of Schleiermacher, but on the other hand, he eschewed Schleiermacher's original philosophical foundations in his account of the nature of religion, and instead adopted Fries's religious epistemology (which he considered 'unhappily too much forgotten'[77]) without emphasizing this in his most famous work. Quite simply, it is Fries rather than Schleiermacher who deserves to be named the intellectual progenitor of Otto's theory of religion; but one consequence of the considerable influence of Otto's work during the twentieth century was the loss, to the broader discipline of the study of religion, of

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the distinctiveness of many aspects of Schleiermacher's understanding of religion.

If my remarks above are accurate, then another change which is long overdue is a shift in the place Schleiermacher is commonly assigned in relation to current debates between two different types of approach to the phenomenon of religion itself, the 'religious' and the naturalistic. Contrary to what is sometimes claimed in the secondary literature, Schleiermacher embraced the ideal of 'scientific' research even into religious phenomena. He cannot, in other words, be assigned to the ranks of those primarily concerned with 'protecting' religion from objective investigation. Schleiermacher did, however, insist throughout his career (in my view, more strongly than he should) on maintaining a strict separation between religion and various kinds of 'science' (particularly, of philosophy) as forms of human activity; the 'purely speculative interest' at the heart of the sciences, he claimed early and late, is completely alien to that which drives the phenomenon of religion. He thus would likely favour the maintenance of fairly strict boundaries between academic fields such as theology and the various kinds of 'scientific' study of religion.

Schleiermacher's work does stand as a challenge, however, to those who would prefer to see a simple incompatibility between naturalistic or 'scientific' approaches to religion on the one hand and theological engagement with religion on the other. An aspect of the 'eternal covenant' which Schleiermacher sought to create which has not been appreciated sufficiently is his desire to render the theological investigation of Christianity compatible with an understanding of religion as a natural human phenomenon. Even while insisting on a separation between religious and scientific activity, Schleiermacher combined in one person a dogmatic theologian (albeit an unconventional one) with a theorist of religion in something like a contemporary sense. Schleiermacher's work thus flies in the face of assertions that a commitment to understanding religion as a natural phenomenon is somehow fundamentally at odds with adherence to it (as Kai Nielsen has put it, 'understanding religion is incompatible with believing it'[78]); rather, his work supports the recent observation by Peter Byrne that accepting the 'general anthropocentrism' which characterizes most contemporary scientific explorations of religion need not lead to a 'reductive naturalism'.[79] For those interested in combining the strengths of 'religious' and scientific views of religion, Schleiermacher's work is worth re-investigating.[80]

Notes

1. For some examples, see Wayne Proudfoot *Religious Experience* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1985), 1, 7f.; Joseph Runzo *Reason, Relativism and God* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), 89; James S. Preus *Explaining Religion: Criticism and Theory from Bodin to Freud* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 200; Russell T. McCutcheon *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 15, 124; and Timothy Fitzgerald *The*

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Ideology of Religious Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 28. This view of Schleiermacher's place in the history of *Religionswissenschaft* is not restricted to opponents of the sorts of approaches advocated by Otto, however; see below, n. 32.

2. I will not be using the term *naturalism* here in the sense in which it is found in contemporary philosophical discussions, as denoting a commitment to a metaphysical position (physicalism or 'materialism'). Rather, I will use the term in the sense in which Otto used it, as referring to a view which, regardless of what else it allows into its ontology, denies the existence of any supernatural beings such as God. I distinguish *naturalism* so understood from a commitment to *naturalistic explanation*, which makes no metaphysical claims but seeks, rather, to explain a particular phenomenon in terms of natural (i.e. non-supernatural) causes. Neither Schleiermacher nor Otto were *naturalists* in the sense in which I'll be using the term; but whereas Otto opposed the endeavour to *explain* religion *naturalistically*, Schleiermacher voiced appreciation for it.
3. This side of Hermann's thought is discussed in Brent Sockness *Against False Apologetics: Wilhelm Hermann and Ernst Troeltsch in Conflict* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), in particular ch. 3.
4. English translation: Rudolf Otto *Naturalism and Religion* William Douglas Morrison (tr.) (New York NY: Williams & Norgate, 1907).
5. 'Our undertaking only becomes defensive and critical because, not from caprice or godlessness, but, as we shall see, from an inherent necessity, the natural sciences, in association with other convictions and aims, tend readily to unite into a distinctive and independent system of world-interpretation, which, if it were valid and sufficient, would drive the religious view into difficulties, or make it impossible. This independent system is Naturalism, and against its attacks the religious conception of the world has to stand on the defensive'; *ibid.*, 5f.
6. 'We ask [the reader] to bring to mind a moment of strong and, so much as is possible, unique religious arousal [*Erregtheit*]. Whoever cannot do this, or has not had such moments, is asked to read no further'; Rudolf Otto *Das Heilige: über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*, 13th edn (Gotha: L. Klotz Verlag, 1925), 8.
7. For examples, see Proudfoot *Religious Experience*, xiiff, and Russell T. McCutcheon *Critics Not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), 4f.
8. Otto *Naturalism and Religion*, 74.
9. Rudolf Otto *Kantisch-Fries'sche Religionsphilosophie und ihre Anwendung auf die Theologie* (Tübigen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1909); English version: Rudolf Otto *The Philosophy of Religion, Based on Kant and Fries*, Ernest Barratt Dicker (tr.) (London: Williams & Norgate Ltd, 1931). Citations will be from the English translation, modified where necessary for closer fidelity to the German.
10. *Ibid.*, 15.
11. *Ibid.*
12. For a more complete discussion of the relationship between Otto and Fries, see David Bastow 'Otto and numinous experience', *Religious Studies*, **12** (1976), 159–176.
13. Otto *The Philosophy of Religion*, 141.
14. *Ibid.*, 23.
15. *Ibid.*, 19.
16. *Ibid.*, 132.
17. Otto *Das Heilige*, 196f.
18. Those who read *The Idea of the Holy* without referring to other works of Otto will not necessarily be aware of this shift. Bastow notes that Otto refers to Fries quite rarely in *The Idea of the Holy*, and sees this as a tacit acknowledgment by Otto that Fries's philosophical system would not truly support Otto's larger project, a thesis for which he argues in some detail. Whether or not this is true, it is certainly the case that in *The Idea of the Holy* Otto discusses the relationship of his thought to Schleiermacher more extensively than his dependence on Fries – thus facilitating the view that his account of religion stands in a direct line of descent (albeit critical descent) from Schleiermacher's. See Bastow 'Otto and numinous experience', 170f.
19. Commentators generally remark on the prominence of Schleiermacher's name in *The Idea of the Holy*; but few call attention to the fact that almost everywhere Otto mentions Schleiermacher's name, it is to distance himself from Schleiermacher's position. See, for example, Melissa Raphael *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 67ff. An exception is Philip C. Almond *Rudolf*

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Otto: An Introduction to His Philosophical Theology (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 109.

20. 'The truly ''mysterious'' object is un-graspable and incomprehensible not only because in relation to it my cognition has certain insurmountable limits, but because here I come upon something ''wholly other'', which in its manner of existing is incommensurable with my being, and before which I therefore recoil in stunned astonishment'; Otto *Das Heilige*, 29.
21. *Ibid.*, 12f.
22. In fact, Otto has little to say about religion in *The Idea of the Holy*, apart from his claims about its foundation in 'numinous experience'. Bastow takes Otto's central claim, that 'all religions involve and rest on experience of the numinous, which affords a positive knowledge of the central object of religion – God' to be equivalent to a 'theory of religion' (Bastow 'Otto and numinous experience', 158). I see this as a *claim* about religion, but something less than a *theory*; it says nothing, for example, about the overall character or development of religion. Otto's texts do, however, clearly develop a way of thinking about religion which would significantly constrain any theories one might try to construct on their basis.
23. Otto *Das Heilige*, 7. See also 9: '[Schleiermacher] overlooks the fact that it is really only a close analogy to the matter itself when we name [this feeling] the ''feeling of absolute dependence'' … . It is an original and fundamental datum, and thus a datum which, the realm of the psyche, can only be understood through itself.' Otto goes on to claim that a primary scriptural example of the 'feeling' which he takes both himself and Schleiermacher to be concerned with is that felt by Abraham when he says, 'Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes' (Genesis 18.27); '[t]hat', Otto claims, 'is a self-confessed ''feeling of dependence'', which is yet at the same time far more than, and something other than, a feeling of dependence.'
24. Indeed, it is precisely the *sui generis* character of Otto's version of 'religious feeling' which is supposed to rule out an 'outsiders'' approach to the study of religion. The passage cited in the text continues, 'One can help the hearer to an understanding of it only by attempting to lead him, through discussion, to the point of his own mind where [this feeling] must stir itself, arise and become conscious in himself'; *ibid.*, 7.
25. *Ibid.*, 21.
26. *Ibid.*, 10.
27. *Ibid.*, 20.
28. Otto reiterates his position in a footnote critical of William James. 'To such a ''reality-feeling'', as a first and immediate datum, to the feeling of an objectively given Numinous [object], the feeling of dependence is then a first consequent effect – that is, a denigration of the subject in his own eyes. The feeling of my ''absolute dependence'' has as a presupposition a feeling of its ''absolute inapproachability'''; *ibid.*, 11.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*, 165.
31. Specifically, Otto's God intervenes in the natural order, whereas Schleiermacher's God is strictly non-interventionist. See below, n. 60.
32. Otto *Das Heilige*, 164; italics in the original.
33. *Ibid.*, 167.
34. *Ibid.*, 169f. Otto writes in a footnote to this passage, 'To derive [primitive feelings of ''religious awe''] from an original, communally operative group- and mass-fantasy is itself fantasy, and this brings about in part results which scarcely distinguish themselves, in respect of drollness and bizarreness, from those primitive fantasies.' Once again, Otto's distancing himself from Schleiermacher appears to be motivated in part by his desire to ward off naturalistic treatments of religious phenomena: if 'man in general' is the organ of religious feeling, then social-psychological explanations of religion cannot be ruled out in principle.
35. 'It is questionable whether Schleiermacher, in spite of his discovery of divination, was truly such a divinatory nature, although he claimed this for himself in the first Speech'; *ibid.*, 170.
36. Rudolf Otto 'Der neue Aufbruch des Sensus numinis bei Schleiermacher', *Sünde und Urschuld und Andere Aufsätze Zur Theologie* (Munich: C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1932), 137. A translation of part of this essay (not including the quote from Hermann) appeared as 'How Schleiermacher

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rediscovered the *sensus numinis*', in *Religious Essays: A Supplement to The Idea of the Holy*, Brian Lunn (tr.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937).

37. Friedrich Schleiermacher *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, Richard Crouter (tr.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 132. The 2nd edn retains this passage, changing it only to read 'without any of these concepts being necessary'. Cf. Friedrich Schleiermacher *Über Die Religion* (*2.-*) *4. Auflage, Monologen* (*2.-*) *4. Auflage*, Günter Meckenstock (ed.) *Schleiermacher Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 1.12 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995), 112.
38. Schleiermacher *On Religion*, 146.
39. *Ibid.*, 138.
40. Schleiermacher refers to such criticisms in his foreword to the third edition of the *Speeches*. See Friedrich Schleiermacher *On Religion: Addresses in Response to Its Cultured Critics*, Terrence Tice (tr.) (Richmond VA: John Knox Press, 1969), 37f.
41. Friedrich Schleiermacher *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, John Oman (tr.) (Louisville KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 45.
42. See, for example, Proudfoot *Religious Experience*, 14f.
43. For a similar judgment of the later editions of the Speeches as a 'transitional' stage of Schleiermacher's understanding of religion, see Friedrich Wilhelm Graf 'Ursprüngliches Gefühl unmittelbarer Koinzidenz des Differenten', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, **75** (1978), esp. 180ff.
44. Until Richard Crouter produced a translation of the first edition in 1988, the only versions of the *Speeches on Religion* available in English were translations of the third edition by John Oman, originally published in 1893 (and still commonly used as an introduction to Schleiermacher) and by Terrence Tice, published in 1969.
45. Friedrich Schleiermacher *The Christian Faith*, H. R. Mackintosh *et al.* (tr.) (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), §4.3, 16 (22). Page numbers in parenthesis will be references to the original pagination of the German 1830/1831 edition. Unless otherwise noted, translations will be those of Mackintosh *et al.*, on occasion slightly modified. The German edition used is Schleiermacher *Der Christliche Glaube* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999).
46. As Robert Adams has put it: 'Schleiermacher gives plenty of indication that he regards a full religious acceptance of this feeling as carrying with it commitment to the reality of the relation and of the Whence'; Robert Merrihew Adams 'Schleiermacher on evil', *Faith and Philosophy*, **13** (1996), 564. It is worth noting the point implicit in this remark by Adams: Schleiermacher assumes the existence of the 'Whence' of absolute dependence, that is, of God, within the *Glaubenslehre*; but he does *not* suggest that the feeling of absolute dependence is a 'self-authenticating' testament to God's existence. Rather, the veridicality of the feeling of absolute dependence seems to be a theological premise. See also below, n. 69.
47. The reference is to the first edition of the *Glaubenslehre*, where Schleiermacher states that 'our chief concern here is with piety only, insofar as it is the basis [*Grundlage*] and the object [*Gegenstand*] of a community'; Friedrich Schleiermacher *Der Christliche Glaube 1821/22*, *Schleiermacher Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 1.7 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1980), §8.1, 26.
48. Schleiermacher *The Christian Faith*, §4.3, 16 (21), my translation.
49. *Ibid.*
50. In fact, Schleiermacher frequently assigns the desire to make claims about the world, or about God, to 'a purely speculative interest'; and he consistently distinguishes between religious and speculative motivations in both the *Speeches on Religion* and in the *Glaubenslehre*.
51. '[T]he consciousness of being absolutely dependent, or, which is the same thing, of being in relation to God'; Schleiermacher *The Christian Faith*, §4, 12 (16).
52. *Ibid.*, §4.4, 16 (22).
53. '[I]n the first instance God signifies for us simply that which is the co-determinant of this feeling and to which we trace our being in this state [*unser Sosein*]; and any further content of the idea must be evolved out of this fundamental import assigned to it … thus far one can indeed say that God is given to us in feeling in an original way; and if one speaks 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 adheres to all finite existence no less than to him, there is given to man also the immediate self-consciousness of it, which becomes a consciousness of God … . But any givenness of God, in any way, is entirely excluded, because anything that is outwardly given must always also be given as an object for our counter-influence, be it ever so slight'; *ibid.*, §4.4, 17f. (23f.), my translation.

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54. Friedrich Schleiermacher *On the Glaubenslehre: Two Letters to Dr. Lücke* Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (tr.) (Chico CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 61, 60.
55. *Ibid.*, 64.
56. 'Shall the tangle of history so unravel that Christianity becomes identified with barbarism and science with unbelief? To be sure, many will make it so. Preparations are already well underway, and already the ground heaves under our feet, as those gloomy creatures who regard as satanic all research beyond the confines of ancient literalism seek to creep forth from their religious enclaves. These cannot, however, be destined to be the guardians of the Holy Sepulcher'; *ibid.*, 61.
57. Schleiermacher *The Christian Faith* §46, 170 (223); also, '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 universal interconnection, are neither different from each other nor bounded by each other, but are both are the same, only seen from different points of view'; *ibid.*, §46.2, 174f. (249f.).
58. There is a dispute about whether the 'nature-system' of the *Glaubenslehre* should be understood as governed by determinism or whether Schleiermacher held an incompatibilist view of human freedom at this point. What is at stake in this question is how strongly natural phenomena can be held to be 'explicable' on Schleiermacher's view. Robert Adams, for one, sees Schleiermacher as committed to determinism in the *Glaubenslehre* (see Adams 'Schleiermacher on evil,' 568f.), as did Otto himself (see Otto *Das Heilige*, 101), and this seems to me to be the correct view. But Jacqueline Mariña has recently argued that Schleiermacher's interest in determinism fades after his early period and that the 'freedom' of the *Glaubenslehre* must be understood incompatibilistically (see Jacqueline Mariña 'A critical-interpretive analysis of some early writings by Schleiermacher on Kant's views of human nature and freedom', *Neues Athenaeum*, **5** (1998); and *idem* 'Schleiermacher's Christology revisited: a reply to his critics', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, **49** (1996).
59. 'One ought, if only in order not to confuse himself in this way, to observe more carefully the difference between a universal and an individual cause. For in the totality of finite being only a particular and partial causality is given to each individual, since each is dependent not on one other but on all the others; the universal causality attaches only to that on which the totality of this partial causality is itself dependent'; Schleiermacher *The Christian Faith*, §46.2, 174f. (250).
60. 'It can never be necessary in the interest of religion so to interpret a fact that its dependence upon God absolutely excludes its being conditioned by the system of Nature'; *ibid.*, §47, 178 (256); also, 'we do not accept any individual and temporal divine acts'; *ibid.*, §122.3, 569 (II, 319f.).
61. *Ibid.*, §49, 189 (272). It should be apparent that the most straightforward way to make sense of the activity of 'free causes' as 'ordained by God' is to see Schleiermacher as a compatibilist about freedom in the *Glaubenslehre*.
62. *Ibid.*, §3.1, 6 (7), my translation.
63. *Ibid.*, §47.3, 183f. (263f.). Schleiermacher refers to understanding all such events naturalistically in the future tense in the sense that, although natural science cannot yet explain all apparent 'miracles', we have no right to imagine that there are some events that science will never be able to explain.
64. *Ibid.*, §46.1, 172 (246).
65. *Ibid.*
66. *Ibid.*, §38.2, 148 (208).
67. *Ibid.*, §46.2, 173 (248f.).
68. *Ibid.*, §45.2, 168 (241).
69. It is not entirely clear to what extent this claim about the proper explanation of the feeling of absolute dependence compromises the natural explicability of religion. The veridicality of the feeling is taken for granted in §32.2, as throughout the *Glaubenslehre*. But the argument here succeeds only on the assumption of veridicality: if the feeling of absolute dependence is regarded as *illusory* (even if there is no disagreement concerning its phenomenological *content*), then it can properly be explained as something other than a 'co-positing of God in self-consciousness'. The question of whether religion can be explained naturalistically 'all the way down' thus seems to require a ruling on the veridicality of the feeling of absolute dependence. It is significant that the argument of §32.2 occurs not within the prolegomena to the *Glaubenslehre*, but in the 'first part of the system of doctrine', which is explicitly concerned with unpacking distinctively Christian pious self-consciousness. It is surely appropriate to take the feeling of absolute dependence to be veridical in such a context; but if Schleiermacher's claim

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about the proper explanation of the feeling of absolute dependence is part of his phenomenological description of distinctively Christian existence, it is simply not clear to what extent this claim should be seen as part of his account of *religion in general* (which is a separate question from that of whether Schleiermacher himself took the feeling to be veridical, which he obviously did). To adopt the view that it not part of his account of religion in general would be to hold that this account need not take a position on the veridicality of the feeling of absolute dependence (leaving that to the believer, the atheist, or others who eschew methodological neutrality) but need only acknowledge that this feeling will be taken as veridical by religious individuals.

70. Schleiermacher *The Christian Faith*, §32.2, 132 (185). The German term is '*ein Mitgesetzsein*', literally, a 'being co-posited'.
71. Schleiermacher describes his account in this way in his second letter to Lücke; see Schleiermacher *On the Glaubenslehre*, 88f.
72. Schleiermacher *The Christian Faith*, §13.1, 64 (90).
73. *Ibid*., §88.4, 365 (II, 15f.).
74. See *ibid*., §93 for additional material along these same lines.
75. *Ibid*., §88.4, 365 (II, 16), my translation.
76. *Ibid*.
77. The reference is to Fries's treatise, *Wissen, Glaube und Ahndung*; Otto *Naturalism and Religion*, 74.
78. Kai Nielsen 'Naturalistic explanations of religion', *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, **26** (1997), 441.
79. See Peter Byrne *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism* (London: Routledge, 1989), 242.
80. I am grateful to Robert Merrihew Adams, Corey Beals, Todd Buras, Samuel Newlands, participants in Harvard Divinity School's 2002–2003 graduate theology colloquium, and two anonymous readers for *Religious Studies* for comments on earlier versions of this essay.

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