

# ‘A tragic destiny overtook him’<sup>1</sup>: Misunderstanding the Introduction to Schleiermacher’s *The Christian Faith* and his *Letters to Lücke*

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**Abstract:** In this article I address some important related criticisms of the Introduction to Schleiermacher’s *The Christian Faith* and his *Letters to Lücke* which have persisted from Schleiermacher’s day to the present: namely, the supposed a priori determination of dogmatic content by the Introduction, the role of philosophy in Christian dogmatics, and Schleiermacher’s call for an ‘eternal covenant’ between theology and science. I use examples to illustrate a single overall point: that the Introduction to *The Christian Faith* and the *Letters to Lücke* can only be adequately understood in light of the concrete dogmatic claims found in the body of *The Christian Faith*.

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The Introduction to Friedrich Schleiermacher’s dogmatics (§§1–31), *The Christian Faith* (or *Glaubenslehre*), is a strong contender for the most controversial one hundred or so pages in the history of doctrine.<sup>1</sup> Many, perhaps most, objections to Schleiermacher’s theology point to the Introduction, or some part of it, as the main source of offense. It is, after all, in the Introduction that we find almost all the most infamous talk – of religion, feeling, absolute dependence, the sources and norms of Christian theology, Christianity compared to other religions and so on. Vast controversies swirl around how to understand even small sections of it. By abstracting the Introduction, or some part thereof, from the whole of *The Christian Faith*, ‘religion’ or ‘religious

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- 1 Friedrich D.E. Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt*, 2nd edn (1830/31), ed. Rolf Schäfer (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008); *The Christian Faith*, ed. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart, trans. D.M. Baillie, et al. (Berkeley: Apocryphile, [1928] 2011). Hereafter *GL* for the German in paragraphs, and *CF* for the English translation in page numbers.

experience' has been lent support as a distinct academic subject.<sup>2</sup> And, in parallel, entire movements in Christian theology have been either founded upon, or billed against, what is supposed to be Schleiermacher's theology, largely on the basis of a reading of these sections.<sup>3</sup>

Many of the most damning and persistent accusations against Schleiermacher's theology date from his own day.<sup>4</sup> And, again, many, if not most, of these were lodged against the claims found in the Introduction to *The Christian Faith*. In two public letters addressed to his friend, Dr Lücke, Schleiermacher sought to address what he regarded mostly as misunderstandings – though often artless, uncharitable, negligent or violent misunderstandings – and not genuine disagreements, by explaining or clarifying his position on the whole and on this or that particular matter.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, it is considered best practice to read the Introduction according to the *Letters to Lücke*.

However, as the perdurance of these various controversies shows, the *Letters to Lücke* alone seem to be insufficient to see misunderstanding of the Introduction dispelled. Because the *Letters to Lücke* are considered to be the best key to understanding the Introduction, and the Introduction is often deemed the key to understanding *The Christian Faith* as a whole, deep misunderstandings of that entire work also still persist.

Two important strands of Schleiermacher scholarship have, each in their own way, attempted to address the criticisms following from these misunderstandings. On the one hand, there is a line of scholarship focused specifically on the Introduction and its central concepts, terms like 'feeling',

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- 2 For important criticisms of this assumption in two different veins, see Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 'On Mistranslated Book Titles', *Religious Studies* 20 (1984), pp. 27–42.
  - 3 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/1*, trans. G.T. Thomson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936), especially pp. 39–41, 219; Emil Brunner, *Die Mystik und das Wort* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1924); Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology: Schleiermacher to Barth* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), pp. 60–100; Ernst Troeltsch, *The Christian Faith*, ed. Gertrud von le Fort, trans. Garret E. Paul (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, [1912–13] 1991).
  - 4 Several of these are raised below, but see also and particularly Hegel's treatment of 'feeling' and 'consciousness', largely directed against Schleiermacher, in G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 1, ed. Peter Hodgson, trans. R.F. Brown, P.C. Hodgson and J.M. Stewart (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 268–88.
  - 5 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre: Two Letters to Dr. Lücke*, trans. James Duke and Francis Fiorenza (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981). Hereafter *OG*.

‘religion’ and connected notions, largely in a philosophical register.<sup>6</sup> This trajectory of scholarship has sought to explain or emend Schleiermacher’s philosophical-sounding claims in the Introduction to make them more philosophically plausible. On the other hand, there is a line of scholarship which de-emphasizes the Introduction and instead seeks to exhibit the recognizable dogmatic content of *The Christian Faith* to its critics.<sup>7</sup> This trajectory of scholarship has sought less to explicitly address criticisms of the Introduction, and more to shift the focus of conversation, and thus do so implicitly.

While both of these approaches are welcome, and while both offer clarification of contested matters, they are each alone incomplete in a central respect. From his own day, Schleiermacher’s theological critics have largely pursued a line of criticism against what they saw as the non-theological (i.e. philosophical and so on), or improperly theological, Introduction. Consequently, the bulk of criticism historically leveled against *The Christian Faith* has been leveled against the Introduction, and only against the subsequent dogmatic content insofar as it exemplifies the pernicious consequences of decisions made in the Introduction. Karl Barth’s criticisms will serve, throughout this article, as a paradigmatic example of this approach. But the replies to concerns specifically directed at the Introduction have tended to be more philosophical in emphasis. And, at the same time, most theological rebuttals have tended to avoid using Schleiermacher’s dogmatic claims to interpret the Introduction. Therefore, while fine-grained

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- 6 See Robert Merrihew Adams, ‘Faith and Religious Knowledge’, in Jacqueline Mariña, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Kevin W. Hector, *Theology Without Metaphysics: God, Language, and the Spirit of Recognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and, among a number of other relevant essays, Wayne Proudfoot, ‘Immediacy and Intentionality in the Feeling of Absolute Dependence’, in Brent W. Sockness and Wilhelm Gräß, eds., *Schleiermacher, The Study of Religion, and the Future of Theology: A Transatlantic Dialogue* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), pp. 27–37.
- 7 See, for example, Brian Gerrish, ‘Nature and the Theater of Redemption’, in *Continuing the Reformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 196–216; Catherine L. Kelsey, *Schleiermacher’s Preaching, Dogmatics, and Biblical Criticism: The Interpretation of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of John* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2007); Bruce L. McCormack, ‘What Has Basel to Do with Berlin? Continuities in the Theologies of Barth and Schleiermacher’, in *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), pp. 63–88; Paul T. Nimmo, ‘Schleiermacher on Scripture and the Work of Jesus Christ’, *Modern Theology* 31 (2015), pp. 60–90; Daniel J. Pedersen, ‘Schleiermacher and Reformed Scholastics on the Divine Attributes’, *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 17 (2015), pp. 413–31; Shelli M. Poe, *Essential Trinitarianism: Schleiermacher as Trinitarian Theologian* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017); Robert Sherman, *The Shift to Modernity: Christ and the Doctrine of Creation in the Theologies of Schleiermacher and Barth* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005); and Linn Marie Tonstad, *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

philosophical readings of the Introduction are a boon, and while a focus on the theological content of Schleiermacher's dogmatics is crucial, both, in their own ways, fail to address the most important criticism head on, because they fail to show not only that the basis of the Introduction is theological, but how the content of the Introduction naturally follows from Schleiermacher's theological commitments (as Schleiermacher claims it does in the *Letters*<sup>8</sup>) and not the other way around.

In this article I aim to address some of the most important theological objections to the Introduction to *The Christian Faith* and to Schleiermacher's explanation of the Introduction in the *Letters to Lücke* with an eye to exhibiting the Introduction's dependence on theological content. I do so by reading both the Introduction and the *Letters to Lücke* together with Schleiermacher's concrete claims, necessary inferences and implicit premises that are actually found within the heart of his Christian dogmatics. That is to say, I proceed on the basis that meaning is best revealed through examination of use.

The number and extent of the controversies surrounding the Introduction precludes even mentioning them all individually, let alone addressing them all well. Therefore, I will restrict my case to three representative examples of crucial topics in the Introduction and in the *Letters to Lücke* and show how reading Schleiermacher's claims there in light of the concrete claims and content of the dogmatic sections of *The Christian Faith* yields not only greater accuracy but allows for a more theologically defensible interpretation of the Introduction.

The three topics on which I will focus in turn are: first, the relation of the Introduction to the body of *The Christian Faith* through the contents and significance of the God-consciousness; second, the relation of philosophy to theology in *The Christian Faith*; and third, Schleiermacher's proposal for an 'eternal covenant' between theology and science. I aim to convince any reader of the Introduction, and any reader of the *Letters to Lücke*, that these are only vague beginnings for understanding what Schleiermacher is doing, and that no one can actually understand either text unless they are prepared to read both as illuminated by the whole of *The Christian Faith* and its determinate theological content.

## The Introduction and dogmatic content

One of the most commonly repeated criticisms against *The Christian Faith* is that the whole content of that work is decided a priori in the Introduction. The fault of this approach, according to Schleiermacher's critics, consists in at least two things: first, that it begs the question with respect to central dogmatic

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8 Schleiermacher, *OG*, pp. 58–9, 76–7.

matters by smuggling in later decisions under the guise of the Introduction; and second, that, in what Karl Barth calls a ‘*suspiciously brilliant fashion*’,<sup>9</sup> Schleiermacher’s subsequent theological content ‘is forced into a mold’.<sup>10</sup> Barth explains:

Schleiermacher has no reason to complain if we inquisitively focus especially on these first thirty one sections [the Introduction to *The Christian Faith*]. Ethics and the philosophy of religion these may be, but it is obviously here that the cat we are later to buy is put into the bag, and the meal we are later to eat is cooked.<sup>11</sup>

Barth’s claim here is perhaps put more clearly and forcefully than by other authors, but the complaint itself goes back to the publication of the first edition of *The Christian Faith* and is explicitly addressed in the *Letters to Lücke*.<sup>12</sup>

In those *Letters*, Schleiermacher says very plainly that readings like Barth’s are false. Instead, he claims that, although ‘the Introduction has been regarded as the main subject and core of the book’, it was actually meant to be merely ‘a preliminary orientation’,<sup>13</sup> containing content which is ‘only propaedeutic and exoteric’,<sup>14</sup> ‘which, strictly speaking, lies outside of dogmatics itself’.<sup>15</sup> The Introduction, Schleiermacher emphatically claims, is not an attempt ‘to demonstrate Christianity a priori’,<sup>16</sup> let alone any particular dogmatic content.

Barth knows this material as well, but he simply does not trust Schleiermacher’s assurances. And in this he is representative of many in Schleiermacher’s own day and since. As Barth writes:

It is quite impossible to accept Schleiermacher’s assurances that these [Introductory] sections are to be regarded only as entrance steps that have nothing to do with the real content of dogmatics. On the contrary, as the whole of the 19<sup>th</sup> century rightly perceived, we have here the true *content* of dogmatics in relation to which all that follows is only an analysis after the fact, as it were, with something new to say only to those who have not noticed or understood what is going on here.<sup>17</sup>

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9 Barth, *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, p. 190.

10 Barth, *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, p. 190.

11 Barth, *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, p. 195.

12 This is a major running theme of Schleiermacher’s *Letters* where he addresses this criticism from, among others, F.C. Baur. See, for example, Schleiermacher, *OG*, pp. 36–7, 56–7, 69–70.

13 Schleiermacher, *OG*, p. 56.

14 Schleiermacher, *OG*, p. 78.

15 Schleiermacher, *OG*, p. 56.

16 Schleiermacher, *OG*, p. 76.

17 Barth, *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, p. 211.

The problem, therefore, is not sufficient acquaintance with Schleiermacher's claims, but sufficient credence in them. Yet as Schleiermacher puts it: 'I believe that [my critics'] suspicion would vanish as soon as they were to read the actual beginning of the work, because it would be evident that the Introduction is not the beginning, but something altogether different'.<sup>18</sup>

But what then is the Introduction if it is not the beginning, and how are the two to be distinguished? The difference, Schleiermacher claims, is one of intent. The proper beginning of *The Christian Faith*, Part I, provides a 'portal and entrance hall'<sup>19</sup> in order to structure the subsequent dogmatic content. It is truly part of dogmatics itself, but incomplete and skeletal. The purpose of the Introduction, on the other hand, is merely to clarify the task of Christian dogmatics so that we do not confuse it with some other endeavor.<sup>20</sup> If the ends and means are clear, we know what it is we are doing, and we know what it is to do it well. But it is worth noting that nothing about this distinction in intent requires the Introduction to be devoid of content. Indeed, the opposite is true: the Introduction presupposes the content it introduces. While Barth is certainly right that the Introduction contains definite Christian content – Schleiermacher's treatment of the 'natural heresies' is a clear case in point<sup>21</sup> – and is right to note that what follows in the body does so naturally and with ease, he is wrong to think that the Introduction dictates what follows, that it is the Introduction that sets the terms. The truth is the reverse. What Barth and others have taken to be the illicit smuggling of dogmatic content into the Introduction is actually the honestly advertised abstraction of content from explicitly Christian theology for use in a specific and limited purpose.

We can test Schleiermacher's claims by examining what he does in the body of *The Christian Faith*. Consider the following example as illustration. In the Introduction we are given a description and characterization of piety. Piety, we are told, is a species of feeling, a kind of immediate self-consciousness, specifically the consciousness of absolute dependence on God as modified by the redemption accomplished in Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>22</sup> Abstracted from the dogmatic content of *The Christian Faith*, this suite of related terms generated and continues to generate energetic debate. But when we see the Introduction as simply an introduction of the determinate content to follow, Schleiermacher's controversial account of Christian piety, that is, the consciousness of God, and the further controversial relation of this piety to non-Christian communions, becomes more intelligible.

Looking at the body of *The Christian Faith*, we see several related claims regarding the consciousness of God mentioned in the Introduction. First, we

18 Schleiermacher, *OG*, p. 58.

19 Schleiermacher, *OG*, p. 57.

20 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §1; *CF*, pp. 1–2.

21 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §22; *CF*, pp. 97–101.

22 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §§3, 4, 11; *CF*, pp. 5–18, 52–60.

read that it is a consciousness of God in exact parallel to our consciousness of the world.<sup>23</sup> In the same way that no one can hold an indeterminate view of the world – of its structure and contents – so no one can have an indeterminate consciousness of God. And this claim alone goes a long way to addressing the concerns of his philosophical and theological critics.<sup>24</sup> Second, we read that the partial possession of this consciousness is concomitant with human being, but that it is a hindered power in all but the redeemed.<sup>25</sup> This hindering is sin and its experience is misery.<sup>26</sup> Third, we read that the quickening of this power in redemption, which is utterly beyond our power,<sup>27</sup> is due entirely to Christ,<sup>28</sup> and that Christ's divinity consists in his uniquely unbroken possession of the absolute power of this blessed consciousness as 'a veritable existence of God in him'.<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, it is in virtue of his absolutely powerful consciousness of God that we can say of Christ that the Word became flesh because, Schleiermacher tells us, "Word" is the activity of God expressed in consciousness'.<sup>30</sup> And we are told and told again that Christ's consciousness of God was an 'active' or 'vital' principle (*thätiges Princip, Lebensprincip*)<sup>31</sup> and that its chief work is to share itself with us, as divine self-communication.<sup>32</sup> Moreover we are told that, although we cannot imagine how this state is to be perfected in us in the final consummation, this perfected state will consist in a beatific vision, 'the completest fulness of the most living God-consciousness'.<sup>33</sup> And, finding ourselves in that state,

we should have an unimpeded knowledge of God in all and along with all; and also, so far as finite nature allows it, . . . we should steadily have knowledge of all that wherein and whereby God makes [Godself] known; and this without conflict arising between this desire in us and any other, or between the steady God-consciousness and consciousness in any other of its aspects. This surely would be pure and assured vision; and it would render us completely at home with God.<sup>34</sup>

23 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §§32, 34, 35; *CF*, pp. 131–3, 137–41; *OG*, p. 46.

24 See, for example, Hegel's criticism of 'Feeling' in Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 390–6; Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology*, p. 66. For Schleiermacher's replies to such concerns, see Schleiermacher, *OG*, pp. 38–9, 44–6.

25 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §66; *CF*, pp. 271–3.

26 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §§76, 86; *CF*, pp. 317–20, 355–8.

27 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §70; *CF*, pp. 282–5.

28 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §§87, 88; *CF*, pp. 358–65.

29 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §§94, 98; *CF*, p. 385.

30 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §96.3; *CF*, p. 397.

31 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §100.2; *CF*, pp. 426–7.

32 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §164; *CF*, pp. 723–6.

33 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §163.2; *CF*, p. 719.

34 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §163.2; *CF*, pp. 719–20.

Indeed, it is an approximation to this heavenly vision with which we find Christ endows his disciples, and by which he forms the church when he communicates his consciousness of God across time and space. It is by this very same ‘pure and assured vision [*reines und sicheres Schauen*]’ that Christ is at once himself at one with God, and that he contains within himself the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>35</sup> And finally it is by virtue of this content, at which Schleiermacher had simply not yet arrived, and for which his readers have for generations been too impatient to wait, that Schleiermacher can intelligibly describe the higher self-consciousness as yielding blessedness, and, indeed, ‘the Blessedness of the finite being as the highest summit of [its] perfection’.<sup>36</sup>

Schleiermacher’s account is not an artifice merely designed around a theory of consciousness. Rather, in this respect Schleiermacher is adamant that he is faithfully echoing the New Testament writings of John and Paul. His account might simply be cast as a way of explaining the injunctions to ‘let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus’<sup>37</sup> and to ‘be transformed by the renewing of your minds’.<sup>38</sup> And Schleiermacher claims that all Christian doctrine begins with the same verse, John 1:14: ‘And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth’.<sup>39</sup>

If this is the content that Schleiermacher has in mind all along, as is revealed when we see to what use the idea of the consciousness of God is put, then we are finally now able to make sense of those paragraphs in the Introduction which have caused so much vexation and yet proved so influential. Piety must be a species of feeling, something we undergo, or else we should lead ourselves, by our own thoughts and deeds, to redemption. And the content of this feeling must, in a narrow but crucial sense, be supra-conceptual, or else its subject-matter, God, would be comprehended (in the technical sense) by a higher concept – which is impossible.<sup>40</sup> The divine essence is the absolute First Principle and, as such, cannot be understood by creatures, only beheld, only seen in blessed intellectual vision which, in its eschatological perfection, comprehends all else.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, Christians can recognize the dim and confused, or

35 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §§87, 94. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (hereafter *ST*), III, Q. 9, a. 2. For an analysis of Aquinas’ account which parallels Schleiermacher’s on these christological points, see Thomas Joseph White, *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2017), pp. 236–74.

36 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §5.4; *CF*, p. 23.

37 Phil. 2:5, NRSV.

38 Rom. 12:2, NRSV.

39 Jn 1:14, NRSV; *OG*, p. 59.

40 That is, God must be known as a truly unhypothetical first principle. See Plato, *Republic*, VI. 510–11, VII.517.

41 This is in accord with, for example, Aquinas, *ST I-II*, Q. 3, a. 8; *Suppl. III*, Q. 92, a. 1–3.

better but still imperfect, thoughts and acts of humans the world over as greater or lesser approximations of true piety only because the truth of the Christian faith and its contents has been presumed. Schleiermacher's is, in this light, a recognizable account of pagan virtue.<sup>42</sup> Even the use of the term 'piety' and the reflection of all of this in Christian terms of whence and whither, beginning and end, idolatry, imperfection, sin, and redemption, and the chief ends of human being are matters to which Schleiermacher is conceptually entitled. And Schleiermacher is able to speak of this all in seemingly generic terms because none of it is in fact generic in the light of the Christian faith. The whole universe is, according to Schleiermacher, ordered to the ends of redemption,<sup>43</sup> and with it, human nature.<sup>44</sup> And, therefore, wherever and whenever humans are found, Christians are always not merely permitted, but also obliged, to regard them as creatures made by and for the love of God – a love that, for Schleiermacher, will be perfected not only in some, but in all<sup>45</sup> – and so as people whom we must recognize as fellow pilgrims along the way, whether they know it or not.

### Philosophy in *The Christian Faith*

A second major theme Schleiermacher addresses in the *Letters to Lücke* is the role of philosophy in *The Christian Faith*. This relates back to Barth's complaints about the Introduction. In the Introduction we find what appear to be significant philosophical claims, alongside the various theological decisions. Many critics in Schleiermacher's own day made similar complaints about the presence of these philosophical positions.<sup>46</sup> If Schleiermacher's critics are right, Schleiermacher has either: (1) begged the question on important philosophical matters; (2) made Christian theology subservient to philosophy in general, or at least to a particular philosophy; or (3) naively included philosophical content despite intending not to – or some combination of all three. Any one of these might be a significant fault in Schleiermacher's theology. The three together might be disastrous.

Happily, many Schleiermacher scholars today are not allergic to the detection of philosophical claims and commitments in *The Christian Faith*. They more or less concede that Schleiermacher used philosophical terms and categories, and endorsed philosophically informed or informing claims and

42 See David Decosimo, *Ethics as a Work of Charity: Thomas Aquinas and Pagan Virtue* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

43 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §168; *CF*, pp. 732–5.

44 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §89; *CF*, pp. 365–9.

45 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §120; *CF*, pp. 551–60.

46 For both criticisms and Schleiermacher's replies, see Schleiermacher, *OG*, pp. 47–9, 80–2, 85–7.

commitments, even if they disagree on the particulars.<sup>47</sup> As we shall see, this should not come as a surprise if the *Letters to Lücke* are read carefully, because Schleiermacher never denies using what could be construed as philosophy in his dogmatic work, only that he takes his starting point in a philosophical system. The only claim that a defender of Schleiermacher must resist is the claim that philosophy in his dogmatics dominates or dilutes theology, overtly or covertly. And Schleiermacher has good reason to deny that charge.

In the *Letters to Lücke* Schleiermacher explicitly acknowledges at least two distinct but related sources which we might, for lack of a better word, call ‘philosophical’. The first is his free borrowing from earlier thinkers whose work, though philosophical in genre or style, was actually Christian in content and, therefore, philosophy which is already really theology in disguise.<sup>48</sup> The second, is a passing reference to ‘Philosophy . . . so far as it presumes to be logic and grammar’.<sup>49</sup> Schleiermacher’s point, in reference to philosophy here, is that it cannot provide anything necessary to understand the Christian faith, except insofar as philosophy is a matter of logic and grammar. The point might be debated in itself, but the assumptions that lie behind the point are what I want to focus on and what I regard as most illuminating at this juncture. What Schleiermacher implies here is that (1) the kind of thing he means by the word ‘philosophy’ is something more determinate than the mere use of concepts and inferences that can be drawn from those concepts, and while theology does not depend on this thing called ‘philosophy’, that (2) theology does, by implication, depend nevertheless on the good use of logic and grammar.

Now, this itself might seem an innocuous point, but one of the things that has been too little noticed by scholars is the extraordinary use Schleiermacher makes of logic and grammar to determine doctrinal content. This point connects back to Schleiermacher’s claims about systematic theological accountability in the Introduction,<sup>50</sup> because it is this systematic accountability which obliges the theologian to draw inferences and sustain a strict coherence between claims made across their work. If we hope to understand the *Letters to Lücke* and the Introduction on these related points,

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47 For example, Brandt detects, among others, the influence of Kant, Lamm the influence of Spinoza, and Mariña sees the influence of Leibniz on the work of Schleiermacher. see Richard Brandt, *The Philosophy of Schleiermacher* (New York: Harper, 1941); Julia A. Lamm, *The Living God: Schleiermacher’s Theological Appropriation of Spinoza* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996); and Jacqueline Mariña, ‘Where Have All the Monads Gone? Substance and Transcendental Freedom in Schleiermacher’, *Journal of Religion* 95 (2015), pp. 477–505.

48 Schleiermacher, *OG*, p. 82.

49 Schleiermacher, *OG*, p. 87.

50 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §§20, 27, 28; *CF*, pp. 94–5, 112–23.

we must look once more to the use to which they are put in *The Christian Faith*.

For an example in this section, we look to a passage in the context of Schleiermacher's denial of a fall of Adam and Eve from paradise, and thus of any consequent change in human nature.<sup>51</sup> This is a small excerpt of a much longer argument which also hinges on important claims and commitments that we might easily regard as philosophical, but this passage is particularly clear in its philosophical content and grammatical mode of argumentation.<sup>52</sup> In this particular step of the argument, Schleiermacher aims only to prove a single sub-point: that 'we cannot say that human nature has been changed as a result of the first sin'.<sup>53</sup> The word 'say' here is key. Schleiermacher's is a linguistic argument, but one with a great deal of content implicit in it. He means to argue that, upon inspection, the claim that 'human nature has been changed as a result of the first sin' is meaningless, a verbal absurdity, and so unthinkable, and so unteachable. This is to say, that the argument here proceeds from a linguistic consideration to a definite doctrinal conclusion – in this case, a denial that the church can teach that human nature has been transformed as a result of a first sin.

Schleiermacher's argument about the transformation of Adam's human nature begins with a consideration of the meaning of the concept of species and its relation to individuals. If humans have a nature, it is a specific nature; and if a given individual is a human, they have that specific nature too. But, Schleiermacher claims that

No one can be asked to believe that in a single individual the nature of the species could be changed and yet that individual remain the same; for the terms 'individual' and 'species' lose their meaning unless everything met with in the individual, whether successively or simultaneously, can be understood from and explained by the nature of the species'.<sup>54</sup>

Let us unpack this dense series of claims in some detail, but in reverse order.

First, recall that what is at stake is the meaning of the terms 'individual' and 'species'. Schleiermacher's claims regard the sustainability of the meaningfulness of those terms. Whatever a species is – and Schleiermacher gives us no more explicit detail than this – the meaning of the word must be what allows us to (1) understand and (2) explain the nature of individuals of a species. So, for example, if an individual can naturally fly, it must be because they belong to a species which is capable of flight. It might be objected that

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51 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §72; *CF*, pp. 291–304.

52 For Schleiermacher's full argument regarding the fall of Adam, see Daniel J. Pedersen, *Schleiermacher's Theology of Sin and Nature: Agency, Value, and Modern Theology* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), pp. 36–58.

53 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §72.3; *CF*, p. 296.

54 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §72.3; *CF*, p. 296.

many individuals do not enjoy powers that are supposedly proper to their species. But this is no objection at all to Schleiermacher's account since he does not claim that every individual must possess every characteristic of a species. And he does not even claim that an individual must possess a single essential characteristic (although, for Schleiermacher, every human person does possess at least a latent consciousness of God). Rather, his claim is asymmetric: if an individual of a species has a particular power or property, then any adequate account of that species must include that power or property because that is what saying something is an individual of a species means: being a member of a species explains why an individual of that species has the characteristics it does. Because that is what the concept 'species' implies, therefore, we cannot meaningfully say the species of an individual changed and yet the individual remains the same.

But there is a further possible objection to Schleiermacher's argument here: namely, that it might seem to require us to have fixed, if not essential, definitions of species. And this is something both modern philosophy and modern natural science have challenged. But Schleiermacher has an account of this as well, and it builds on his overall linguistic case. He continues: 'If an individual belonging to a certain species manifests some attribute incompatible with the definition of the species, then either the definition of the species has been wrong from the start and needs to be corrected, or we were misled as to the identity of the individual'.<sup>55</sup> That is, Schleiermacher's argument does not depend on any particular content of the definition of a species. Definitions of species are fallible and emendable and should be corrected if we think a certain definition does not comprehend the attributes of all the genuine members of a given species.

To see how this might work in practice, consider the following example. Sunny is a seahorse. She has lived underwater her entire life. If she is removed from the water for any significant length of time, she suffocates and dies – just like other animals we call seahorses. Then one day, we describe Sunny the Seahorse doing something different: Sunny is basking on the beach, comfortably resting and enjoying the sunshine well away from the water. But this is a strange situation indeed, for we understood that Sunny was a seahorse and that seahorses were a particular kind of animal, specifically one that could not breathe air. What could explain this strange situation? Schleiermacher thinks we only have a few explanatory options: either (1) Sunny is not and never was a seahorse; (2) Seahorses could breathe air all along, and we were wrong to think they could not; or (3) this thing we are calling 'Sunny' is not one and the same Sunny at all. We have simply misidentified the individual in question.

This last point might slip past, but it is crucial. For Schleiermacher's assertion is that individuals are always of a kind. We can never identify Sunny

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55 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §72.3; *CF*, p. 296.

without thinking that she is some particular creature or other. Furthermore, we can never use kind terms without implying kind-grounded powers. That is, if Sunny is a seahorse, and if seahorses are specific things, once we identify the individual Sunny as a seahorse, we have already implied that Sunny is both able to do some things and not able to do others because she is a seahorse – and that is precisely what it means to identify Sunny as a seahorse in the first place. Finally, Sunny's personal identity always includes her specific identity. The definition of the kind of which Sunny is a member may be altered and corrected, but if Sunny genuinely ceases to be of the kind she is, the individual Sunny ceases to exist. And this can be verified by considering all the examples of individuals undergoing transformation of their kind of which we have experience, because every one of those examples is linked to death. One might even hold that death is nothing but the transformation of the kind of an individual – whether to worms, bacteria or a fish taco.

Schleiermacher's argument does not quite end there, however. He wants to draw one final inference from this basic application of the concepts 'individual' and 'species'. And that is that the 'individual can only act *in accordance with* the nature of the species, but can never act *upon* that nature'.<sup>56</sup> Now this might seem a metaphysically ambitious addendum to an otherwise common-sense claim. But once again, nothing Schleiermacher has said here has not already been implied in our use of the notion of species as natural kinds to understand and explain powers and actions. In fact, if kinds are used to ground powers and actions at all – and this strikes me as exactly how and why we do employ kind terms – then they simply mean whatever it is which explains why a creature can do x. And therefore, to say that a creature cannot change its own nature follows of necessity as soon as we understand the words we are using. To claim the contrary would be to say that a creature can do more than it can do, which is absurd. If, in the context of the Fall, Adam became able to do something he was not able to do before, it was not he, the original Adam in question, who so became able. With new powers we have a new kind, and with a new kind a new individual. And, therefore, Schleiermacher claims, 'it is a mere confusion of speech [*Sprachverwirrung*]'<sup>57</sup> to claim both that human nature was changed in the Fall, and that the identity of the particular individuals who fell persists. That is, Schleiermacher thinks that his entire argument can proceed simply from considerations of logic and grammar, which is to say, simply from our use of words and their entailments.

This argument is perhaps interesting in its own right, and may be open to further analysis or critique. At this point, however, our own interest lies in the question of how it relates to Schleiermacher's claims about philosophical 'systems' as opposed to the simple use of logic and grammar. The first point is that it should be clear from this example how philosophically definite his claims

56 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §72.3; *CF*, p. 296.

57 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §72.3; *CF*, p. 296.

are despite not following deductively from a ‘system’ like that of Schelling or Fichte. In other words, the denial that the content and arguments of *The Christian Faith* do not depend on a philosophical system implies neither that they are contentless nor that they are arrived at without the use of logical inference. On the contrary, we can see the argumentative force of Schleiermacher’s claims plain enough, and much of the content is recognizable to any reader of Aristotle.<sup>58</sup> The second point is that Schleiermacher thinks that arguments like this transcend any given philosophical system because they depend not on any prior subscription to an entire philosophical package but simply follow from the consideration of our ordinary concepts and their use. So long as theologians use words, they will be under pressure to explain their use in both form and content. Schleiermacher’s inclusion of both here is neither dishonest nor naïve. He has understood exactly what he is doing, and has indicated this to us when he claims to proceed on the basis of concepts and their implications. However, we can only see precisely what he means by this claim when we turn from both the Introduction and the *Letters to Lücke* to the concrete content of the body of *The Christian Faith*.

### The eternal covenant

A third and final theme which is prominent in the *Letters to Lücke* is Schleiermacher’s proposal for an ‘eternal covenant’ between the Christian faith and ‘completely free, independent scientific inquiry, so that faith does not hinder science and science does not exclude faith’.<sup>59</sup> Schleiermacher scholars have written about this eternal covenant at length, and I will not attempt to cover the full range of issues that might be considered here.<sup>60</sup> Instead, I will focus on a major claim within a single argument of Schleiermacher’s that is related to themes that bring together considerations from the previous two examples.

What I want to focus on is one argument Schleiermacher gives in support of his account of the God–world relation, his denial that God ever acts in a way that would suspend, emend or surpass the powers and forces intrinsic to created things, which hinges on considerations of possibility and necessity. While no doubt Schleiermacher was interested in the political implications of the eternal covenant, as we see clearly in the *Letters*, the eternal covenant is not premised on

58 See Aristotle, *Physics* II.1., VIII.1, 4.

59 Schleiermacher, *OG*, p. 64.

60 See Brandt, *The Philosophy of Schleiermacher*; Andrew Dole, *Schleiermacher on Religion and the Natural Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Daniel J. Pedersen, *The Eternal Covenant: Schleiermacher on God and Natural Science* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017).

a particular political arrangement or consensus.<sup>61</sup> Rather, the eternal covenant is the result of a particular account of God, the world, and divine action. And in this section, I will explore one plank of that much broader account, a part that makes Schleiermacher's claims and commitments evident: his view that God never acts within the nature system by way of intervention because, even for God, the possible does not extend beyond the actual. It is this concrete account of the world and divine action which in turn explains a claim that vexed Barth perhaps more than others: namely, that the incarnation was, according to Schleiermacher, 'neither an absolutely supernatural nor an absolutely supra-rational thing',<sup>62</sup> a claim which caused Barth to demur that 'Concepts like a *fallen* nature that *needs redemption* and is *not* finally capable of spiritual acts like revelation, or *darkened* reason that cannot finally experience its supreme enhancement in the divine Spirit, seem not to exist at all for our master'.<sup>63</sup> Subscription to the premise that God never acts absolutely supernaturally or supra-rationally, so important for Schleiermacher's eternal covenant, looks to Barth like a strategy for preserving the Christian faith which depends on its self-destruction.

Schleiermacher thinks that God never works what he calls 'absolute miracles'<sup>64</sup> which, following Leibniz, he characterizes as acts which surpass not only the powers of particular things, but nature as a whole.<sup>65</sup> Nature itself is different. It is an inviolable order, which no created power can amend, and so which no act can surpass except the creation of that order itself. It is an unalterable order, for Schleiermacher, because it is a perfect order; and its perfection consists in two distinct but related aspects. In the first place, it is causally complete, a full and therefore perfect expression of divine power, an exhaustively determined world. In the second place, it is the supreme artwork of God, as useful as it is beautiful, and so it attains what it is for both well and without remainder. Because it is perfect in the former sense, it cannot be other. And because it is perfect in the latter sense, it cannot be better. Any divine act over and above the preservation of the world and its contents as they are ordered to its ultimate end would be both metaphysically and morally impossible.<sup>66</sup>

The mention of the possible at last brings us to Schleiermacher's discussion of possibility and necessity in relation to God. Modality is clearly crucial to the aforementioned argument, but I want to take up this particular example to illustrate the broader point, once again, of how Schleiermacher is actually

61 See Schleiermacher, *OG*, pp. 60–4. For more on the context in which Schleiermacher's 'eternal covenant' was proposed, see Dole, *Schleiermacher on Religion and the Natural Order*.

62 Schleiermacher *GL*, §13; *CF*, p. 62.

63 Barth, *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, p. 242.

64 Schleiermacher *GL*, §47; *CF*, pp. 178–84.

65 See Leibniz's Fourth Paper, in *The Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, ed. H.G. Alexander (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1956), p. 43.

66 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §§47, 54–5, 168; *CF*, pp. 178–84, 211–28.

deploying concrete claims and commitments in the body of *The Christian Faith*, and about how the particularity of these claims helps us make sense of the generalities of the Introduction and the *Letters to Lücke*. In his discussion of the actual and the possible for God, Schleiermacher aims to reduce all divine possibility to actuality. This argument to a principle of plenitude, that God does all that is possible, is, once again, a plank in Schleiermacher's account of the God–world relation, which is, in turn, what grounds his eternal covenant between faith and science.

Schleiermacher notes that it might be claimed (and many theologians historically have so claimed<sup>67</sup>) that the true 'all' – the absolute metaphysical totality – which falls under God's power consists of both the actual and the possible 'and [God's] omnipotence must therefore embrace both of these'.<sup>68</sup> An account of what God actually does which neglects what God also potentially does, but does not actually do, might leave out much, perhaps most, of what falls under divine power. 'But', Schleiermacher says, 'how little the difference between actual and potential can exist for God will appear very clearly if we only notice in what cases we ourselves chiefly apply [those terms]'.<sup>69</sup> Consequently, Schleiermacher intends to eliminate any possibility outside the actual for God.

To do this Schleiermacher points to two mutually informing cases where we might distinguish between the actual and the possible. In the first case, we distinguish between the actual and the possible by distinguishing an individual of a species from its other members. It is possible, we might say, for a mallard to have a green head or a brown head. Such things are possible when we consider mallards as a species because nothing about the coloration of the animals in these cases is incompatible with the definition of the species in question. But if there is a green-headed mallard, it cannot also, at the same time, have a brown head. Therefore, for an individual of a species, both determinations are not (simultaneously) possible. And, crucially, this makes the application of this basis for a metaphysical distinction between the actual and possible 'inapplicable'.<sup>70</sup> For, Schleiermacher explains, 'In [God] the species exists originally as the sum-total of its individual existences, and these in turn are given and established together with their place in the species, so that what does not hereby become actual is, so far as God is concerned, not potential'.<sup>71</sup> That is, our general notions of species are useful abstractions. But their concrete contents originally exist, in God's perfect omniscience, as

67 See, for example, Aquinas, *ST Ia*, Q. 14, a. 9. Schleiermacher also explicitly mentions Leibniz, probably referring above all, though not exclusively, to Leibniz's *Theodicy* (1710). See Schleiermacher, *GL*, §59, postscript; *CF*, p. 241.

68 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §54.2; *CF*, p. 213.

69 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §54.2; *CF*, p. 213.

70 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §54.2; *CF*, p. 213.

71 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §54.2; *CF*, p. 213.

the totality of their particulars. If we were to know, as God does know, the identity and relation of every individual to every other individual, and hence to the species of which they are a member, we too would see that to say some different exclusive determination was possible for an individual of a species, simply because some other member of that species was so determined, is false.

The second case follows the same pattern, only in relation to the nature of an individual. Schleiermacher observes:

We say that much is possible by virtue of the nature of a thing (when we take together its determinations by its species and as an individual being), which yet does not become actual because it is hindered by the position of the thing in the sphere of general interaction.<sup>72</sup>

That is, we might say that a rabid dog could potentially have bitten someone were it not for its having been caught. After all, dogs sometimes bite, and rabies causes dogs to bite all the more. If a particular dog gets rabies, we say that it has the natural potential to bite, even if the dog does not end up biting anyone. We can, however, say this, Schleiermacher thinks, only because our limitation prevents us from knowing with exhaustive completeness about all the other conditions of the universe. For if we knew those complete causal conditions, we would know that the dog would be captured; and if we knew that it would be captured before it bit anyone, we could not say in truth that it could possibly have bitten someone. Because God does possess exhaustive omniscience, the ordinary use of the distinction between the actual and the possible to which, because of our ignorance, human beings must have recourse, cannot be applied to God since it is premised on our imperfection. Nothing possible exists outside the actual for God. Therefore, supposed possibles are actually impossible.

This finally leads to the payoff of Schleiermacher's argument: the rejection not only of the potential and the actual as abstractions applicable to creatures, but the rejection of the same distinction between the actual and the possible applied to God. Schleiermacher argues: 'As soon, then, as we express it so, namely, that God knows what would have resulted if at any point the impossible had become real, this knowledge, as a whole, dissolves into nothing, because what rests solely upon the becoming real of the impossible is itself impossible'.<sup>73</sup> And because not only are so-called possibilities impossible, but so also is mediate divine knowledge, we can say that God has no knowledge of either, 'for', Schleiermacher says, 'the self-contradictory is neither a thing nor cognizable'.<sup>74</sup> If a thing is not even thinkable, it cannot exist; and the actuality of the impossible is unthinkable. Because no possibilities exist beyond the actual, there is no

72 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §54.2; *CF*, p. 213.

73 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §55.2; *CF*, p. 225.

74 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §55.2; *CF*, p. 224.

question of God acting in such a way that what would have happened, had God not acted, did not happen. And, therefore, one way of conceiving miracles is denied.

Alone, this is an incomplete argument for Schleiermacher's proposed eternal covenant – although it is an important part of his argument. But it is not my aim here to show that Schleiermacher was right. Instead, my desire is to show how Schleiermacher proceeded, and this argument does a good job of making that clear.

To draw out Schleiermacher's way of proceeding, consider the conclusion he reaches: there is no difference between the possible and the actual in the divine knowledge. As a result, it is meaningless to speak of the possible and the actual in divine action. As Schleiermacher puts it, 'God knows all that is; and all that God knows is, and these two are not two-fold but single; for [God's] knowledge and [God's] almighty will are one and the same'.<sup>75</sup> Which is to say, Schleiermacher concludes to the principle of plenitude: moving from a consideration of the actual and the possible in God's knowledge to a denial that God could do other than God does because everything possible is actual.

Even to a lay reader, this is a conclusion recognizable from Spinoza's *Ethics*, and an argument to that conclusion which also closely tracks Spinoza's own.<sup>76</sup> This is the first point to which I want to draw the reader's attention. Schleiermacher has claimed he can freely borrow covertly Christian truth from philosophers.<sup>77</sup> But to do so licitly need not require the philosopher in question to be recognized as Christian by themselves or others. In the case of this line of argument from Spinoza, we can see Schleiermacher's borrowing at work.

The second point is different but closely related. The way Schleiermacher arrives at Spinoza's conclusions has a distinct flavor and he takes a slightly different path through the 'logic and grammar' discussed above than does Spinoza. Schleiermacher begins with an account of how we commonly use the concepts 'individual' and 'species', 'actual' and 'possible' and proceeds (through an account of Aristotelean universals, no less) to the metaphysically ambitious claim that for God everything possible is actual. Nothing about beginning with humble logic and grammar, we see, limits the subject-matter, scope or strength of the claims that result from it. Schleiermacher might well be defended against subjection to philosophical 'systems' in the meaning of

75 Schleiermacher, *GL*, §55.1; *CF*, p. 222.

76 See Benedict Spinoza, *Ethics*, in Edwin Curley ed. and trans., *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), IP17 and the preceding propositions which support IP17. Spinoza argues, like Schleiermacher, from a consideration of divine aseity to the principle of plenitude, and from that principle to the denial that the possible extends beyond the actual for God regarding either knowledge or power. For more on these arguments and their parallels, see Pedersen, *The Eternal Covenant*, pp. 98–126.

77 Schleiermacher, *OG*, p. 82.

that term as it was used in his own day, but that cannot possibly mean that he excised philosophy from theology altogether, that he was uninterested in the strictest consistency in thought, or that he was shy about making far-reaching metaphysical claims on the basis of such thinking. And we see that when we interpret the Introduction and the *Letters to Lücke* in light of the concrete claims of *The Christian Faith*.

At the same time, that might lead to the opposite error: of thinking Schleiermacher's theology was secretly dictated by his philosophy in general, and his Introduction in particular. It is this third and final point that the example in this section brings to the fore and squarely addresses. Whatever disagreements one might have with his reasoning, one can clearly see the direction of travel from concrete dogmatic claims to the generalized remarks in the Introduction. First, Schleiermacher considers the various ways we might think about the adequacy of the application of certain concepts to God by comparison with our usual meaning of those concepts and by their fit with the content of the consciousness of absolute dependence on God. Then he comes to concrete conclusions about the being of God and, therefore, the propriety of certain descriptions of God's attributes on that basis. Third, having given an account of God's attributes, he can describe divine action, including creation and miracles. It is on the basis of this understanding of God and divine action that he denies a whole class of miracles. Fourth and finally, he generalizes about Christian theology's programmatic and political commitments on the basis of that denial. It is only those abstracted generalizations that we find in the Introduction and the *Letters to Lücke*. And that is exactly what Schleiermacher tells us in the *Letters* that we should expect to find.<sup>78</sup> The Introduction is first in the order of presentation, but not first in the order of thought.

Returning to the criticism with which we began this section, we can see how Barth misunderstood Schleiermacher. Barth was left with the impression – an impression shared not only by many of Schleiermacher's critics, but also by some of his admirers – that Schleiermacher began by laying out a program, or a method and then proceeded to unpack that program in the content which followed. But Schleiermacher's procedure was actually the reverse. It did not consist in an unpacking from generalities to particulars at all, but instead in an abstracting from particulars to generalities in service of a specific purpose.

In this light, Barth's criticisms also take on a new light. While Barth believed that Schleiermacher was abandoning Christian teaching on sin, Christ, redemption and the divine works of love, what Schleiermacher was actually doing was spelling out the generalized consequences of precisely those same theological commitments. For Schleiermacher, the world is from the beginning ordered to the complete redemption and perfection of the entire human race, and indeed the whole universe, through Christ. The world's reason for being is

78 Schleiermacher, *OG*, pp. 56–8.

precisely that blessed end. Its order and contents are made for no other aim. By God's love it must be so. By God's omnipotence it shall be so. God cannot fail in God's purposes and sin cannot expel the divine presence. And human being, since it was formed for just this end, cannot, by the power of Christ, fail to reach it. The eternal purpose of God was this and this alone. And to this end the world, including human being, is perfect means. Therefore, we can see that Barth was mistaken, but in a way which – as he himself later came to suspect<sup>79</sup> – would have made him smile. Schleiermacher's account of the 'eternal covenant' does not follow from a program or method, but is entailed by his christologically grounded, supralapsarian, Reformed universalism.<sup>80</sup>

## Conclusion

The Introduction to *The Christian Faith* has, for nearly two centuries, been a source of confusion, vexation, and, most of all, misunderstanding. Many of the misunderstandings from Schleiermacher's own day have been repeated over the years with only minor modifications. We learn this, in part, through the *Letters to Lücke*, open letters Schleiermacher wrote attempting to address complaints concerning his theology from his own day. But despite the help the *Letters to Lücke* are meant to provide, misunderstandings persist.

My argument in this article, though ultimately in support of the bulk of Schleiermacher's claims, has also been in partial defense of his critics. The Introduction continues to generate misunderstandings because it is not sufficient to avoid them. Even in light of the *Letters to Lücke* – letters which Barth read very carefully – too little is resolved, despite Schleiermacher's efforts. Not only is the Introduction to *The Christian Faith* a mere abstraction from the dogmatic content of that work, the *Letters to Lücke* are sufficient neither to avoid misunderstanding the Introduction nor even the *Letters* themselves.

If it is nevertheless possible to read the Introduction and the *Letters to Lücke* in good faith and still to misunderstand both, two conclusions follow. First, it cannot be pretended that those texts provide sufficient internal clarity; and, therefore, it is not responsible to think we can understand them either alone or even in tandem. We must, instead, turn to the concrete theological content of the body of *The Christian Faith* and interpret the Introduction (and the *Letters*) first and foremost in the light of the specific claims and commitments therein. In order to understand Schleiermacher's introductory paragraphs, we must first

79 See Barth, 'Concluding Unscientific Postscript', *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, pp. 275–7.

80 For more on Schleiermacher's supralapsarian account see Edwin Chr. van Driel, 'Schleiermacher's Supralapsarian Christology', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60 (2007), pp. 251–70.

seek to understand the Christian dogmatics they introduce. But all this is just what Schleiermacher told us.<sup>81</sup>

Second and most importantly, when we do turn to that concrete content, we discover a host of meaning demonstrated by use. In the dogmatic substance of *The Christian Faith* we find Schleiermacher's general claims from the Introduction and the *Letters to Lücke* replaced with abundant particulars. Barth was right to sense that everything that came after the Introduction followed from it naturally, but he was wrong to think it was deduced from it or justified by it. The truth is the reverse: that the claims of the Introduction are justified by the particularities of the Christian experience of redemption by Christ. And as grounds for that experience and its description, Schleiermacher has no need to appeal to a generic notion of 'religion', no need for foundational proofs or philosophical systems, but only requires 'the ancient indemonstrable *logos*'.<sup>82</sup>

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81 Again, see Schleiermacher, *OG*, pp. 57–9.

82 Schleiermacher, *OG*, pp. 42–3.