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978-0-521-59848-4 - Friedrich Schleiermacher: Hermeneutics and Criticism, And Other Writings

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HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY



FRIEDRICH SCHLEIERMACHER
Hermeneutics and Criticism

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Hermeneutics and Criticism
And Other Writings

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY

ANDREW BOWIE

Anglia Polytechnic University, Cambridge



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Introduction

Hermeneutics, the ‘art of interpretation’, has moved in recent years in the English-speaking world from being regarded as a subsidiary aspect of European philosophy to being one of the most widely debated topics in contemporary philosophy. Almost every account of the history of modern hermeneutics pays some kind of tribute to the founding role played by the German Protestant theologian and philosopher Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1834). The tribute is, though, usually significantly double-edged: very many of these accounts reiterate the conception of Schleiermacher as the ‘Romantic’ theorist who thinks of interpretation as an ‘intuitive’, ‘empathetic’ identification with the thoughts and feelings of the author of a text. This has often led to his being written off as part of the history of psychologistic textual interpretation that has been discredited by approaches to language and meaning in existential hermeneutics, analytical semantics, and structuralism and post-structuralism. However, as the texts translated here demonstrate, Schleiermacher never in fact saw interpretation in empathetic terms, seeing it rather in terms that now sound surprisingly relevant to contemporary philosophical accounts of language and epistemology.

Understanding Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics is, though, made difficult by the fact that there are hardly any texts by Schleiermacher that exist in a version of which he would finally have approved: the work on hermeneutics in the present volume, for example, dates from as early as 1805 and as late as 1833, although the underlying conceptual framework does not change as much as some commentators have

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suggested.¹ *Hermeneutics and Criticism (HC)* (published posthumously in 1838 and mainly containing work dating from 1819 onwards) appeared in the *theological*, not the philosophical division of the first edition of Schleiermacher's complete works, and is particularly concerned with the interpretation of the New Testament. However, hermeneutics evidently plays a central role in Schleiermacher's philosophy as a whole, which he expressly separates in certain respects from his theology. He also repeatedly insists that there should be no difference in the principles of interpretation for religious and for secular texts.

HC must therefore be seen both in terms of its relation to preceding traditions of Biblical and philological interpretation and in relation to the philosophical challenges to theories of interpretation posed by the new views of culture, history and language which develop in the wake of J.-J. Rousseau, J. G. Hamann, J. G. Herder and others at the end of the eighteenth century.² The status of *HC* is, as such, thoroughly ambiguous. The supposedly new idea of a universal hermeneutics, with which Schleiermacher begins, is, for example, as Jean Grondin suggests, not necessarily new at all: 'in a little-known piece of 1630, *The Idea of the Good Interpreter*, [the Strasbourg theologian Johann Conrad Dannhauer] had already projected a universal hermeneutics under the express title of a hermeneutica generalis';³ on the other hand, some of the key assumptions of *HC* are turning out to be startlingly relevant to contemporary philosophical debate.

Despite the problems over the exact status of *HC*, Schleiermacher's work on hermeneutics clearly remains of major importance for a whole variety of disciplines. One needs, though, to be aware of how the hermeneutics relates to his other work, and to the intellectual contexts of that work if this is to be appreciated. Without this awareness it is easy to gain a false impression of the texts translated here, which can seem at times to be merely manuals for the praxis of interpretation and for textual criticism, rather than properly philosophical texts. The fact is also that the significance of Schleiermacher's philosophical conception only really becomes apparent

¹ The problem in the hermeneutics emerges over the relative weight attached to 'grammatical' interpretation, which relies on systematic knowledge of the language in which the text is written, as opposed to 'technical' and 'psychological' interpretation, which rely on non-systematisable investigation both of the contexts of the text and of other texts and utterances by the author. The simple answer is that Schleiermacher thought both types essential, but tended to change his mind on certain aspects of how each was to be carried out.

² See Andrew Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory. The Philosophy of German Literary Theory*, London 1997.

³ Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Yale 1994, p. 48.

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when it is considered in relation to the increasingly manifest deficiencies of some of the dominant trends in philosophical reflection on language and knowledge in the twentieth century, particularly in the analytical tradition.⁴ These two perspectives might seem to point in opposing directions, but this is not in fact the case. The reasons why the two perspectives converge offer a way of approaching Schleiermacher's thought as a whole that enables his hermeneutics to be seen in an appropriate light. Instead, then, of situating Schleiermacher exclusively within some of the very specific historical contexts in which his ideas developed, or of seeing him predominantly in terms of the theology which formed the main basis of his professional career, this introduction will also locate his thought in relation to some key issues in modern philosophy.

Spontaneity and receptivity

There has been a growing interest in the Anglo-Saxon world in the tradition of Kantian and post-Kantian German philosophy, in which Schleiermacher plays an important but neglected role. John McDowell's *Mind and World*, for example, at times strikingly parallels ideas central to Schleiermacher's philosophy. McDowell suggests, in the light of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, which was also the main point of philosophical orientation for Schleiermacher, that in our cognitive relations to the world 'the deliverances of receptivity already draw on capacities that belong to spontaneity',⁵ so that 'We must not suppose that receptivity makes an even notionally separable contribution to its co-operation with spontaneity' (ibid.). Related locutions are common in Schleiermacher: 'the original being-positing of reason in human nature [in the sense of that part of nature which is human] is its incorporation into the receptivity of this nature as understanding and into the spontaneity of this nature as will'.⁶ 'Spontaneity', the activity of the mind which renders the world intelligible by linking together different phenomena, and 'receptivity', the way the world is given to the subject, therefore cannot be finally separated. In consequence, the link between the subject and the world cannot be conceived of in terms of a dualism which gives rise to all the problems of how the two relate to each other in

⁴ See Beate Rössler, *Die Theorie des Verstehens in Sprachanalyse und Hermeneutik*, Berlin 1990; Andrew Bowie, 'The Meaning of the Hermeneutic Tradition in Contemporary Philosophy', in ed. Anthony O'Hear, *Verstehen and Humane Understanding*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 121–44.

⁵ John McDowell, *Mind and World*, Cambridge, Mass., and London 1994, p. 41.

⁶ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Ethik (1812–13)*, Hamburg 1990, p. 14.

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an intelligible manner that so troubled Kant's successors, including Schleiermacher, with respect to Kant's incoherent separation of knowable 'appearances' and unknowable 'things in themselves'.⁷ Neither can the relationship be seen in terms of how we gain an accurate 're-presentation' of a 'ready-made' world of pre-existing objects: that would require a complete account of the difference between what is passively received from the 'outside' world and what is actively generated by the 'inside' mind. There is, simply, no location which would make such an account possible. We can *neither* wholly isolate the world from what our minds spontaneously contribute to it, *nor* wholly isolate our minds from their receptive involvement with the world. Many of the points of this kind made by contemporary philosophers in relation to the Idealist tradition are also made by Schleiermacher, sometimes in a more convincing manner than they are in either Kant or Hegel.⁸

Attention to the relevance of German Idealist epistemology to contemporary philosophy might seem to leave one at some remove from the specific issue of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics. There is, though, an important way of establishing a link between the two topics, which further opens up the route into Schleiermacher's thought as a whole. Once the role of the 'spontaneity' of the subject in the constitution of an objective world is established the world cannot be said to be reducible to the objective physical laws which govern it. Establishing *objective* laws which could explain why the world becomes *subjectively* intelligible at all, rather than just consisting in the interaction of physical processes, involves the problem of how to objectify that which is inherently subjective, thus of how to come to knowledge of what is already supposed to be the prior *condition* of knowledge. This is the fundamental problem with which, in the wake of Kant, German Idealist and Romantic philosophers try to come to terms. Importantly, the underlying problem here also appears at the level of language, the means by which we can be said to 'objectify' the subjective. It is Schleiermacher who first realises this in a fully elaborated manner.

Natural languages can be treated like law-bound objects, not least because they are physically instantiated. For Schleiermacher this aspect of

⁷ As Schelling, who, along with Leibniz and Spinoza, was the other major philosophical influence on Schleiermacher, would put it in 1833, the thing in itself is 'an impossible hybrid, for to the extent to which it is a *thing* (object) it is not in itself, and if it is in itself it is not a thing' (F. W. J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, Cambridge 1994, p. 102).

⁸ See Andrew Bowie, 'John McDowell's *Mind and World*, and Early Romantic Epistemology', *Revue internationale de philosophie* 1996 197, pp. 515–54.

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language is what can be ‘mechanised’, and he sees it in *HC* in terms of ‘the grammatical’. The vocabulary, syntax, grammar, morphology and phonetics of a language are initially given to those who use that language in an ‘objective’ form, which is evident in the fact that they can now be successfully programmed into a computer. I cannot use a language as a means of communication and at the same time ignore these ‘mechanisable’ aspects. However, my *understanding* of what others say about the world cannot be said to result solely from my knowledge of objective rules of the kind that can be programmed into a computer, because it relies on my *making* sense of an ever-changing world which is not reducible to what can be said about it at any particular time. I can, for example, spontaneously generate intelligible sentences that have never been said before, and I can understand new metaphors which are meaningless in terms of the notional existing rules of a language.⁹

Schleiermacher often points out that this ability is most manifest in the inventive way children acquire language. The initial acquisition of a linguistic rule necessarily entails that the child has already understood something about the way language and the world relate without employing any rule, otherwise the result is a regress of rules for the understanding and acquiring of rules which would render our acquisition of language incomprehensible. As he puts it in the *Ethics*: ‘If language appears to come to [the child] first as receptivity, this only refers to the particular language which surrounds it; spontaneity with regard to being able to speak at all is simultaneous with that language’ (*Ethik* (1812–13) p. 66). The regress these ideas are intended to circumvent will be what leads Schleiermacher in *HC* to his notion of ‘divination’, the ability to arrive at interpretations without definitive rules, and to his terming hermeneutics an ‘art’, because it cannot be fully carried out in terms of rules. We live, then, in a world which is bound by deterministic laws that also apply to our own organism, yet are able to choose between alternative courses of action and generate new ways of understanding. In the same way our understanding and use of language involve a relationship between what Schleiermacher often refers to as ‘bound’ activity, based on the acknowledgement of the rules involved in any natural language, and ‘free’ activity, which allows us to transcend such rules in order both to understand in a new context where it is not

⁹ On this issue, see Manfred Frank, *The Subject and the Text. Essays in Literary Theory and Philosophy*, Cambridge 1997, and *Das Individuelle-Allgemeine. Textstrukturierung und -interpretation nach Schleiermacher*, Frankfurt am Main 1977.

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self-evident from the context that the rule is applicable, and to articulate the world in new and individual ways.¹⁰ A complete philosophical account of language would have to explain how these two aspects relate, just as a complete philosophical account of knowledge would have to explain exactly how the spontaneous and the receptive, the active and the passive, the subjective and the objective relate. The question that recurs in the most important philosophy of the period is whether such accounts are actually possible. Schleiermacher's conviction is that a final account is not possible. It is this which separates him, like his friend Friedrich Schlegel, from Fichte's and Hegel's Idealism (and, at times, from Schelling),¹¹ and which leads him to his most important insights in the hermeneutics.

The philosophical era inaugurated by Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781 is, then, defined by the attempt to understand the relationship between the spontaneous and the receptive aspects of an 'autonomous' subject that is freed both from complete natural determinism and from subjection to a divine authority. Schleiermacher's most notable and influential contributions to the history of philosophy lie in his integration of reflection upon language into the issue of spontaneity and receptivity, but understanding just how he carries out this integration presupposes an adequate account of why hermeneutics plays a role in his wider philosophical project.

'Feeling' and 'intuition'

Schleiermacher's arrival on the intellectual scene was announced in 1799 by the publication of *On Religion*, written at the instigation of his friends from the Romantic circle, such as Friedrich Schlegel, who are the 'cultured despisers' of religion of the book's subtitle. *On Religion*, whose effects on Protestant theology are even now by no means exhausted, is generally seen as a rhapsodic counter to rational theology, which insists, in the wake of Kant's refutation of the philosophical proofs of God's existence that had sustained the tradition of rational theology, on the centrality of individual 'feeling' as the basis of religion. For a period, beginning with the *Sturm und*

¹⁰ This distinction is central to Schleiermacher's *Aesthetics*, perhaps the most unjustly neglected work on aesthetics of the nineteenth century: see Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: from Kant to Nietzsche*, Manchester 1993, Chapter 6.

¹¹ On the critique of Idealism, see Manfred Frank, *Der unendliche Mangel an Sein*, Frankfurt am Main 1975; Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy*, London 1993, and Manfred Frank, 'Philosophische Grundfragen der Frühromantik' in *Athenäum* iv, Paderborn, Munich, Vienna, Zürich 1994.

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Drang movement, in which the centrality of individual feelings epitomised by Werther's assertion in Goethe's *The Sufferings of Young Werther* that 'What I know, everyone can know, my heart is mine alone', has become almost a commonplace, this approach to religion might not seem that surprising. However, if one sees *On Religion* as at least to some extent continuous with Schleiermacher's and his contemporaries' ideas about the philosophy of the time, matters are not that simple.

The key terms in Schleiermacher's contentions are 'intuition', '*Anschauung*', and 'feeling', '*Gefühl*', which seem to suggest that the widespread mistaken image of Schleiermacher the theorist of empathetic interpretation may at least be valid here. But take the following passage, addressed to his imagined philosophical interlocutor, which points to the essential theoretical focus of *On Religion*: 'I ask you, then: what does your . . . transcendental philosophy do? It classifies the universe and divides it into this kind of being and that kind of being, it pursues the bases of what is there and deduces the necessity of the real, it spins from itself the reality of the world and its laws.'¹² In the same year as Schleiermacher published *On Religion* F. H. Jacobi published his letter *Jacobi to Fichte*, which articulates a philosophical tension central to the period that is apparent in the passage just cited.¹³ Jacobi takes up ideas in the letter from his contributions to the 'Pantheism Controversy' which began in 1783 between himself and Moses Mendelssohn, the leader of the Berlin Enlightenment. The controversy arose over whether G. E. Lessing was a Spinozist (and thus, in the view of the time, an atheist), and became the matrix from which many of the major problems of modern philosophy first emerged (see Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory*). The letter contains the famous ironic image, coincidentally echoed in Schleiermacher's remarks on transcendental philosophy's spinning 'from itself the reality of the world and its laws', of Fichte's philosophical system as a sock which has to knit itself. Jacobi's essential insight was into the problem of grounding any philosophical system, and Schleiermacher's remarks on transcendental philosophy relate to his documented awareness of Jacobi's decisive interventions.

Spinoza's key idea in this context, which was part of what led to his being thought an atheist, was that the determination of each thing in the universe is only possible via its not being other things, so that, in Jacobi's

¹² Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern*, Berlin n.d., p. 47.

¹³ Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *Jacobi an Fichte*, Hamburg 1799.

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phrase, the Spinozist universe is a universe of ‘conditioned conditions’, each thing depending upon its determining ‘condition’ within a self-relating whole. What, though – and this was the issue that most concerned Jacobi and Schleiermacher – prevented this just being a universe which consisted of an endless regress of chains of causality, and of things which had no essential identity, because their having an identity depended upon their relations to other things, thus upon what they themselves are not? This would be a universe of what Jacobi termed ‘nihilism’: instead of establishing a ‘ground’, a ‘*Grund*’, the ‘principle of sufficient reason’, the ‘*Satz vom Grunde*’ – which Jacobi reformulates as ‘everything *dependent* is *dependent upon something*’¹⁴ – actually led to an ‘*Abgrund*’, an ‘abyss’. The view based on the ‘principle of sufficient reason’, which can be seen as corresponding to the underlying structure of the scientific world view, failed to come to terms with the contingent fact that things were intelligible at all, with the fact that we live in a world which in many ways *does* evidently already hang together and make sense. Because it leads to a regress, a mere chain of conditions does not explain what makes the world intelligible, and so intelligibility must depend on the ‘unconditioned’, or what the thinkers of the period often termed the ‘Absolute’. For Spinoza God, as that which is cause and ground of itself, has precisely this status. This conception, though, Jacobi shows, poses the problem of how, if all we know has to be known in terms of its conditions, the *unconditioned* could be known at all, without contradicting its very nature by seeking its *condition*. Jacobi himself does not think the unconditioned can be known and thinks it must be presupposed via a ‘*salto mortale*’, a leap of faith which takes the place of a philosophical explanation of why things are intelligible. He therefore calls what he is engaged in ‘*Unphilosophie*’, there being no point in pursuing the *philosophical* task of completely grounding what is held as true.

Although these arguments are vital to the development of his own position, Schleiermacher, for his part, is still happy in *On Religion* to embrace Spinoza as someone for whom the universe was ‘his sole and eternal love’ and for whom ‘the infinite was his beginning and end’, because ‘intuition of the universe’, of the kind he sees in Spinoza, ‘is the hinge of my whole speech’ (*Über die Religion* p. 56). ‘Intuition’ plays this role, Schleiermacher explains, because the aim of *On Religion* is, in a manner analogous to Jacobi, to separate religion from metaphysics and morality: religion’s ‘essence is

¹⁴ In Scholz, Heinrich, ed., *Die Hauptschriften zum Pantheismustreit zwischen Jacobi und Mendelssohn*, Berlin 1916, p. 271.

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neither thought nor action, but intuition and feeling' (ibid. p. 53). The wider context is once again important here if such assertions are not to appear merely vague.

One of the most influential philosophical attempts to shore up the new foundations of knowledge in the subject rather than in objectivity initiated by Kant was Fichte's attempt from the 1794 *Doctrine of Science* onwards to ground both knowledge and ethics in the spontaneity of the I. Fichte's philosophy wished to establish the primacy of the practical I as unconditioned '*Tathandlung*', as the 'deed-action' which was the condition of the world being intelligible rather than remaining a mere chaos of – unknowable – causally linked events. This had led Fichte to the position from which Jacobi distances himself in the letter, and which is the target of Schleiermacher's notion of 'intuition', namely a position in which human subjectivity, as Schleiermacher puts it, is 'condition of all being and cause of all becoming' (ibid. p. 53). As opposed to this 'philosophical', Idealist position, Schleiermacher maintains the following:

the universe is uninterruptedly active and reveals itself to us at every moment. Every form which it produces, every being to which it gives a separate life in accordance with the fullness of life, every occurrence which it pours out of its rich, ever-fruitful womb, is an action of the universe on us; and in this way, to accept everything individual as a part of the whole, everything limited as a presentation of the infinite, is religion. (ibid. p. 57)

Schleiermacher's rhetoric should not conceal the philosophical significance of the point being made. The individual's ability actively to determine the universe in cognition and action, which Fichte's Idealism makes the very ground of being's intelligibility, depends upon the prior 'activity' of the universe itself, which was present before any individual subject was alive. Schleiermacher is influenced by Spinoza's notion of *natura naturans*, and by the development of this notion in Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* of 1797 into the idea of nature as a 'productivity' which comes to 'intuit' itself both in its transient differentiated 'products' – specific natural objects and organisms – and, at a higher level, in our thinking about those products. The controversial issue is how the notion of 'intuition' is conceived, because it is here that the threatened split between mind and world is addressed.

Fichte resolves the split on the subjective side, grounding his philosophy in his version of 'intellectual intuition' – 'that through which I know

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something because I do it'¹⁵ – in which the split between receptivity (intuition) and the spontaneity of the 'intellect' is overcome in terms of the prior activity of the I, which splits *itself* into knowing I and known not-I. The identity of mind and world is therefore guaranteed at the very outset by the primacy of active mind, without which the world would be merely inert and opaque. Epistemology and ontology are equally grounded in a spontaneous activity: this is best understood by the way philosophical reflection can take the I beyond thinking about causal relations between things to consideration of its very ability to reflect upon itself and the world at all. Schleiermacher's version of 'intuition', on the other hand, though in some ways linked – not least via the mutual relation to Kant – to Fichte's, overcomes the split by suggesting that it is only by an acceptance of an inherent link of ourselves to a world which transcends *both* our cognitive and practical activity that we can really comprehend our place in the universe. It is no coincidence that, as Theodore Kisiel has demonstrated,¹⁶ Martin Heidegger arrived at his idea of 'being in the world', which is prior to any epistemological attempt to ground knowledge in an account of the relationship of subject to object, and at his desire to deconstruct previous metaphysics, in part via his reading of *On Religion*.

In Schleiermacher's 'religion', then, as in Jacobi's '*Unphilosophie*', there is an immediate significance inherent in the very fact of being at all: each experience, intuition and feeling is 'a work which stands for itself without connection with others or dependence on others; it knows nothing of deduction and connection . . . everything in it is immediate and true for itself' (*Über die Religion* pp. 58–9). If, for example, the individual's meaningful relationship to the beauty of nature – which in Schleiermacher's terms is already religious – is thought in fact to be ultimately the result of an explicable concatenation of deterministic natural events, its meaningful 'immediacy' would become reduced to a meaningless 'mediation'. Such an explanation would lead, though, Schleiermacher suggests, to an unfulfillable endlessly regressing attempt to come to terms with all the related factors that would need to be explained on both subjective and objective sides in order to complete the 'mediation'. The point about the meaningful 'intuition' is that it does not require this: its 'infinity' lies in its unique individuality, the completely individual, yet immediate feeling of being part of a whole that transcends one. Schleiermacher insists (and this will

¹⁵ J. G. Fichte, *Werke* I, Berlin 1971, p. 463.

¹⁶ Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's 'Being and Time'*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1995.

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be vital for his hermeneutics) that each person can intuit in ways which are incommensurable, without this necessarily damaging the idea that they partake of 'religious' unity. – He also notoriously insists, it should be remembered, that, as such, 'a religion without God can be better than one with God' (ibid. p. 108).

It is no exaggeration to suggest that some of the most significant problems in modern philosophy are inherent in this issue. Soon after the publication of *On Religion* Hegel makes, in his 1802 *Belief and Knowledge*, one of his early attacks on the notion of 'immediacy', precisely in relation to Jacobi and Schleiermacher. Such attacks will become one of the essential sources of Hegel's main philosophical ideas, culminating in the claim of the *Science of Logic* that there is nothing in heaven and earth that is not mediated. Just how virulent Hegel's antipathy to the idea of the immediacy of 'feeling' is becomes apparent in his later attack, in 1822, on its successor notion, in Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith* of 1821, of the 'feeling of radical dependence' ('*Gefühl der schlechthinigen Abhängigkeit*'). Schleiermacher insists on this aspect of self-consciousness in order to come to terms with the fact that for our spontaneous autonomy to escape solipsism it must yet be dependent upon effects of the world on ourselves in receptivity, in a manner over which we have no final control, because these effects begin before the development of reflexive self-consciousness. At the same time, though, the effects of the world on the individual also depend on the spontaneity of that individual, as the differing ways in which individuals respond to the same aspects of the world suggest. As always in Schleiermacher, the total preponderance of one side of any conceptual opposition is relativised by revealing how it cannot ultimately be separated from its opposite. The feeling of dependence is the source of the notion of God in *The Christian Faith*: it reveals a ground of the relationship between mind and world which cannot be 'mediated', which is not available to cognition or articulation in philosophy. It is precisely this inarticulable ground that Hegel attempts to obviate in the *Logic*, by claiming that even immediacy must actually be mediated for it to be intelligible as immediacy at all (see Bowie *Schelling*, Chapter 6). Schleiermacher also refers to the feeling of dependence as a '*Grundton*',¹⁷ a 'tonic', in the musical sense, that is occasioned by the world's evoking a response in the individual, and which must always precede our mediated knowledge as the way in which we are first 'attuned'

¹⁷ Ed. H. Peiter, F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube*, Berlin, New York 1980, p. 253.

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to the world at all. Whether the argument that the ground of our being in the world cannot be articulated in philosophy necessarily leads in a theological direction is, of course, debatable: aspects of the thought of Heidegger, in his insistence on the prior 'disclosure' of the world before any particular scientific articulation, and of certain kinds of pragmatism, which often echo aspects of Schleiermacher's thought, suggest it does not.¹⁸

Hegel maintains against Schleiermacher that 'If religion in man is founded only on a feeling, then it rightly has no other determination than to be the feeling of his dependence, and in this way the dog would be the best Christian, for it carries this most strongly in itself' (cit. in *Der christliche Glaube* p. lvii). What appears as immediate is, then, merely that which has not been subjected to the 'exertion of the concept'. In a sense, therefore, Hegel is quite happy with nihilism, because for him anything particular, including the individual subject, only gains its truth if it becomes part of the universal by being conceptualised, and is thus dissolved into the articulation of its relations to other things. Hegel is aware that we must relate to the world in some immediate sense, of the kind suggested in the notion of 'intellectual intuition', for there not to be a dualism between mind and world. However, he thinks this initial immediacy is merely the kind of consciousness one might attribute to animals, such as dogs, which are unable to 'reflect' and thereby move to the higher stages of properly philosophical thinking which culminate in a complete account of the mind-world relationship, into which everything particular has been '*aufgehoben*'.

This might seem to locate Schleiermacher firmly in the camp of a reactionary 'Romanticism' which is more concerned with a mystical sense of intuitive 'Oneness' than, for example, with the real solutions to human misery that can be provided by the progressing work of the modern sciences. Schleiermacher's work is, though, thoroughly compatible with a positive, if potentially critical, attitude to the scientific and technical advances of modernity: indeed, he was more insistent than either Schelling or Hegel upon the need to avoid philosophical speculation which failed to take the results of the sciences seriously. The main point is that Schleiermacher's separation of theology from philosophy leads him to assign different roles to each, without devaluing either. In certain key respects Schleiermacher and Hegel actually share many of the same post-Kantian assumptions

¹⁸ On the relation to pragmatism, see Christian Berner, *La philosophie de Schleiermacher*, Paris 1995, pp. 168–70.

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about the need not to separate mind and world, and about the need for new kinds of philosophically justified rational accountability in modernity. Where they part company is over the relation of the contingency of the individual subject to the whole in which it is located, and over the possibility of 'absolute knowledge'. This divergence is apparent in the fact that Schleiermacher's central philosophical ideas lead him to hermeneutics, and to very different conceptions of 'dialectic' and 'ethics' from those of Hegel.

Dialectic and hermeneutics

One way of suggesting why a new kind of hermeneutics came to play a central role in Schleiermacher's work is to show, as I shall in a moment, that it follows from the structure of his main philosophical assumptions. Another, intriguing way has been proposed by Stephen Prickett.¹⁹ The usual biographical story is that Schleiermacher's pioneering work on translating and editing Plato and his work on Biblical criticism, along with the demands of an academic post – as late as March 1805 he says in a letter that he will soon have to lecture on hermeneutics while as yet having no real idea about it – led to his working on hermeneutics for the first time in 1805. Prickett, though, points out another element in the story which suggests a further motivation for Schleiermacher's new approach. Around the time of the appearance of *On Religion* Schleiermacher was asked to translate David Collins' *Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, which he decided, of his own accord, to supplement with further research into New Holland (the project was never published). In Collins' text, as Prickett puts it, 'What [Collins] records is a classic encounter with the "other" in its most extreme and uncompromising form', namely with an aboriginal tribe living in great misery whom Collins (implausibly) regarded as being devoid of any kind of religion at all. For Schleiermacher, in the terms of *On Religion*, the tribe could yet have religious consciousness via their particular sense of participation in the universe. How, though, would we be able to understand their apparently wholly alien religious sentiments?

The attempt to demonstrate how this question could be answered helps to establish the relationship in Schleiermacher's thought between 'dialectic' and hermeneutics. The first move would obviously be to learn the

¹⁹ Stephen Prickett, 'Coleridge, Schlegel and Schleiermacher: England, Germany (and Australia) in 1798', forthcoming in 1798, London 1998.

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tribe's language, but here all the now familiar problems arise with regard to translation that have, via the influence of Quine, also played such a role in recent analytical semantics, which Schleiermacher very evidently foresaw. How can one be sure which part of one's own language is the correct translation of a part of another, initially wholly alien language? Even apparently successful translation does not necessarily answer all the problems entailed in understanding the 'other'. How can we be certain that, by being at least able to translate their utterances, we actually understand how the people in question think? – Computers, after all, can now quite often translate with some degree of accuracy in certain contexts. – The crude answer would be that we 'empathise' with the people in an 'intuitive' manner, and this has often been assumed to be Schleiermacher's position. Consideration of Schleiermacher's view of truth and language in his dialectic shows just how mistaken this view is.

Schleiermacher defines hermeneutics as 'the art of understanding . . . the . . . discourse of another person correctly',²⁰ and dialectic as the presentation of 'the principles of the art of philosophising',²¹ or 'the foundations for the artistic (*kunstmäßige*) carrying out of dialogue in the domain of pure thought'.²² The former is concerned with the meaning of utterances, the latter with their truth, which might seem just to repeat the difference between *doxa* and *episteme*. Schleiermacher, though, is a thoroughly post-Kantian thinker, and his development of Kantian themes actually brings him, despite his attachment to Plato, much closer to issues in contemporary philosophy than to Platonic metaphysics, at least as it is traditionally understood.

The notorious problem here, which still vitiates many positions in the analytical philosophy of language – particularly in its regular failure to account for linguistic innovation – is the relationship between what the world gives to the speaker, which includes what is, in one sense at least, an already constituted language, and what the speaker herself contributes to meaning and truth. In naturalistic terms the effects of the world on the speaker are simply causal, the impact of indeterminate numbers of different stimuli on the nerve ends. However, given the further factor of the

²⁰ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutik und Kritik*, Berlin 1838, p. 4.

²¹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Dialektik (1811)*, Hamburg 1986, p. 4.

²² Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Dialektik (1814–15). Einleitung zur Dialektik (1833)*, Hamburg 1988, p. 117. As will be apparent in *HC*, Schleiermacher's use of words based on '*Kunst*' involves both the sense of 'method' or 'technique', which entails the application of rules, and of 'art' as that which cannot be bound by rules.

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irreducibly different physical constitution of each organism, this obviously offers no way of showing how these impacts result in identity of *meaning* between speakers. The aspect of endless difference in the way the world affects each organism in receptivity is what Schleiermacher refers to as the 'organic function'. Meaning and truth, though, rely upon the establishing of identities from what is given as difference in the organic function. The 'formal', in Schleiermacher's terms, is the 'intellectual' 'principle of unity' (*Dialektik* (1811) p. 16), as opposed to the organic, the principle of 'multiplicity', and knowledge is constituted by the intellectual activity underlying the principle of unity. The formal and the organic meet in the judgement.

As is well known, Kant makes a radical distinction between purely formal 'analytic' and 'synthetic' judgements, but Schleiermacher, well before Quine, rejects this distinction: 'The difference between an analytical and a synthetic judgement cannot be held on to, and is not a difference at all, because identical judgements are not judgements but only empty formulae if they are not founded in the complete concept, in which that difference alone is founded' (*Dialektik* (1814–15) p. 33). A (supposedly) analytic judgement like 'all men are mortals' is, then, either an empty, merely formal judgement, like 'a=a', in which case we learn nothing, or it already involves 'intuition' and is contingent on what we know from the world. This knowledge will, though, always remain open to revision, so that the 'organic function' must play a role even in an apparent tautology, because we never in fact arrive at the 'complete concept' and thus cannot get beyond synthetic judgements. Even operations in logic, which come closest to the purely 'intellectual', involve the activity of thinking of real people, and rely on a history of previous acts of thought. Although we may think of 'reason' in the logical sense as the universally valid formal rules of thought, it is, Schleiermacher maintains, never actually available in its pure form: there is always an aspect of the 'organic function' in anything that can count as knowledge. This means that 'No knowledge in two languages can be regarded as completely the same; not even . . . A=A' (ibid. p. 25). The only way we can try to establish such identity of knowledge is pragmatic, via linguistic communication. This raises precisely the issues later associated with the problems for semantics which result, for example, from Frege's Platonic notion of the 'sense' a word is supposed to possess independently of the often contingent, revisable ways it is actually used or understood, and which are suggested by Quine and Donald Davidson in the idea of the

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‘indeterminacy of translation/interpretation’. Reason for Schleiermacher, then, is really the *potential* for using the principle of unity to arrive at true knowledge, a potential which relies on the organic function as well as on the activity of the formal, synthesising capacity of the mind. Both the organic and the formal, of course, are necessary for language, which must be instantiated as object in the physical world that is given in the organic function. This means, therefore, that language blocks the possibility of access to ‘pure reason’: pure reason would entail a ‘purely formal’, ‘general’ language, but how would we ever learn it?²³

The core of Schleiermacher’s view is summarised in the claim, which introduces a key term in his arguments, that ‘the schematism of all true concepts is only innate in reason as a living drive’ (*Dialektik* (1814–15) p. 41): the true concepts do not pre-exist in a ‘Platonic’ manner; they are, rather, the normatively constituted aim of the activity of thought in a community. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant called the ‘universal procedure of the imagination to provide a concept with its image’ the ‘schema’.²⁴ Kant’s schema, which belonged to the ‘productive imagination’, the source of Fichte’s ‘*Tathandlung*’, provided the bridge between spontaneity and receptivity, between what Schleiermacher sees as the never directly accessible chaos of pure receptivity, and never directly accessible pure spontaneity. He regards such limit notions as ‘regulative ideas’, in the Kantian sense that they must be presupposed if reason is to be able to assume there really is a totality within which particular cognitions are located, but, given that they play a necessary *constitutive* role in any attempt to understand the world, this distinction as well is seen as ultimately untenable (See *Dialektik* (1814–15) p. 8, and Berner, *La philosophie de Schleiermacher* pp. 108–9).

A schema for Schleiermacher is a ‘shiftable’ image (*Dialektik* (1814–15) p. 145), thus a flexible framework with no definitive boundaries which enables us to establish identities between differing determinations that a thing can share with something else. The patterns of data we receive at any point in our lives cannot be shown to be absolutely the same at any two moments, but even if they appear to be identical this still would not allow one to understand how knowledge in fact comes about. This is because a single moment of receptivity can be seen in terms of a variety of differing schemata: ‘at different times the same organic affection leads to completely different concepts. The perception of an emerald will at one time be for me

²³ See J. G. Hamann’s critique of Kant in: *Schriften zur Sprache*, Frankfurt am Main 1967, pp. 224–6.

²⁴ Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B pp. 179–80, A pp. 140–1.

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a schema of a certain green, then of a certain crystallisation, finally of a certain stone' (ibid. p. 39). The idea that the notion of the schema might give vital clues to the understanding of language was probably first proposed by Schelling in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* of 1800, a text Schleiermacher certainly knew, but it is Schleiermacher who really works out its implications. Before looking, in the next section, at Schleiermacher's account of schematism and language, which is central both to the ethics and to the hermeneutics, the notion of truth and knowledge in the dialectic requires further investigation.

The mutual influence between Schleiermacher and the early Romantic thinker Friedrich Schlegel (with whom he began to share a flat in 1797 in Berlin) is important here. Both Schleiermacher and Schlegel are suspicious of the correspondence theory of truth, but they are equally suspicious of the kind of scepticism which fails to account for the ways in which we do in fact engage with the world in terms of 'holding as true'. Schlegel asserts that 'One has always regarded it as the greatest difficulty to get from consciousness to reality (*Daseyn*). But in our view this difficulty does not exist. *Consciousness* and *reality* appear here as the connected parts (*Glieder*) of a whole.'²⁵ The real difficulty is that 'the whole' is not something which philosophy can articulate, for example in the manner Hegel wishes to, because consciousness and the object world can only be articulated as predicates of the absolute, unknowable ground which links them. While sometimes appearing to rely upon a correspondence theory, Schleiermacher is well aware of the basic problem it involves: 'One could say that correspondence of thought with being is an empty thought, because of the absolute different nature and incommensurability of each' (*Dialektik* (1814–15) p. 18). If thought is essentially synthesising activity that continually makes things given in receptivity determinate in changing ways – as suggested in the claim that 'the schematism of all true concepts is only innate in reason as a living drive' – and this activity is channelled by the finite number of words we use to articulate determinacy, how can we claim that these words 're-present', or correspond to things, without invoking a location beyond both thought and things from which their identity could be apprehended?

Schleiermacher is quite certain, therefore, that 'The idea of absolute being as the identity of concept and object' is not accessible to our knowledge,

²⁵ Friedrich Schlegel, *Transcendentalphilosophie*, ed. Michael Elsässer, Hamburg 1991, p. 74.

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even though it is the ‘transcendent’ basis of knowledge (*Dialektik* (1814–15) p. 30). In 1800 Schlegel suggests, in a similar vein, that ‘there is no absolute truth . . . this spurs on the spirit and drives it to activity’.²⁶ Hegel seeks to show that spirit *can* ultimately understand its own activity, because it can both affect and be affected by the world, and can also be aware of being both the subject and the object of its own thinking in ‘absolute knowledge’. Schleiermacher and Schlegel think that self-consciousness can only strive to achieve such understanding, with no ultimate guarantee of success, because the being of self-consciousness transcends its ability to know itself:

as thinkers we are only in the single act [of thought]; but as beings we are the unity of all single acts and moments. Progression is only the transition from one moment to the next. This therefore takes place through our being, the living unity of the succession of the acts of thought. The transcendent basis of thought, in which the principles of linkage are contained, is nothing but our own transcendent basis as thinking being . . . *The transcendent basis must now indeed be the same basis of the being which affects us as of the being which is our own activity.*²⁷

Schleiermacher therefore sees an analogy between ‘immediate self-consciousness’, the ground of unity between different moments of thought which is not available to our reflective consciousness (which can only apprehend particular acts of thought), and the ‘transcendent basis’. The latter’s role is ‘transcendental’, albeit in an ontological rather than an epistemological sense, because it is the condition of possibility of the same self-consciousness being both spontaneous and receptive, thus of the ability of the I to move from spontaneity to receptivity while remaining the same self-consciousness.²⁸ Schleiermacher, then, uses ‘transcendental’ interchangeably with ‘transcendent’, which Kant reserved for what was beyond cognition.

Knowledge itself is only possible as the result of a particular intuition of the world in receptivity which is rendered identical with some other

²⁶ Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophische Vorlesungen* (1800–1807) (*Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe* Volume 12), Munich, Paderborn, Vienna 1964, p. 95.

²⁷ *Friedrich Schleiermachers Dialektik*, ed. R. Odebrecht, Leipzig 1942, pp. 274–5.

²⁸ It is also the ground of the ability to recognise oneself, rather than see a mere random object or person in a mirror: without a prior pre-reflexive familiarity with oneself, what criterion could one use to know that what one sees is in fact oneself? For my memories to be in the first person at all the experiences they are based on must initially be immediately and incorrigibly mine if they are to be able to be reflexively (though now fallibly) re-identified as mine. See Manfred Frank, *Selbstbewusstsein und Selbsterkenntnis*, Stuttgart 1991.

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intuition by spontaneity, so there can be no *knowledge* of the principle which creates identity, because knowledge itself depends on a prior differentiation for synthesis to be possible in the first place.²⁹ As Kant saw, in order for temporally differentiated receptivity to be intelligible, there must be a ground that connects its different moments. This ground prevents the moments being merely chaotic for lack of a principle that both retains a trace of them and makes their difference into identity. Kant, though, failed to show what sort of access we have to this grounding principle of our very self. Schleiermacher calls ‘immediate self-consciousness’, which is intended to fill the gap left by Kant, ‘that which links all the moments of both functions, of thinking and willing, [it is] the identity in the linking, it is real being’ (ibid. p. 291). In the same way as the world only manifests itself in differing transient moments, but must exist in a way that transcends these moments, the I can never grasp itself all at once, yet must exist in a way that transcends its access to itself at differing moments. Religious consciousness, as we saw, is the ‘intuition’ of such a totality, which can therefore never be achieved in the form of knowledge, because knowledge is inherently temporal, based on the linking of different aspects of what is given in the organic function: ‘For just this reason Absolute, Highest Unity, identity of the ideal and the real are only schemata. If they are to become living they come again into the domain of the finite and of opposition’ (*Dialektik* (1814–15) p. 67). In Jacobi’s terms, we would be seeking the ‘conditions of the unconditioned’ by trying to know them.

Unlike Schlegel, who, until his conversion to Catholicism in 1807, cannot be said to hold firm religious beliefs, Schleiermacher thinks his position does give a way of talking about God: ‘God’s being is given to us in things to the extent that in each individual thing the totality is posited by dint of being and by being together, and so the transcendent basis is thereby also posited’ (ibid. p. 66), and ‘Just as the idea of the Godhead is the transcendental *terminus a quo*, and the principle of the possibility of knowledge as such, so the idea of the world is the transcendental *terminus ad quem* and the principle of the reality of knowledge in its becoming’ (ibid. p. 70). As such, ‘we can say of the idea of the world that the whole history of our knowledge is an approximation to it’ (ibid.). The approximation, though, can

²⁹ In a text called ‘*Urtheil und Seyn*’ Hölderlin refers to this in 1795, via a probably fictional etymology, as the ‘*Ur-teilung*’, the ‘primary separation’ which gives rise to the need for synthesis, the joining of what is separate in a judgement, an ‘*Urteil*’. See Dieter Henrich, *Der Grund im Bewußtsein. Untersuchungen zu Hölderlins Denken* (1794–5), Stuttgart 1992. Schleiermacher makes the same point in the passage from the *Dialectic* translated in this volume, with reference to the ‘absolute subject’.

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never be said to reach its goal because it depends on a basis that transcends it, rather than on an initial *fundamentum inconcussum* on either the side of things (materialism) or the side of the subject (idealism): ‘the particular is that which is purely given in being but which does not purely resolve into thought, and the universal is what is completely given in thought but which cannot be purely shown in being. So both are asymptotic and their identity can only be completed via relation to the Absolute as their necessary supplement’ (*Dialektik* (1811) p. 41). For Schlegel this transcendence of the Absolute leads to ‘the higher scepticism of Socrates, which, unlike common scepticism, does not consist in the denial of truth and certainty, but rather in the serious search for them’ (*Philosophische Vorlesungen*, p. 202). Both Schleiermacher and Schlegel agree that the consequence of this position is, as far as knowledge is concerned, that ‘Beginning in the middle is unavoidable’ (*Dialektik* (1814–15) p. 105). For Schleiermacher our knowing consists in an ‘oscillation’ between the organic and the intellectual function, neither of which can be purely present as itself. This idea will be vital for the hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics and ethics

Given these anti-foundational arguments, it might seem rather surprising that Schleiermacher and Schlegel share the conviction that the inaccessibility of the Absolute to knowledge is not a reason for abandoning the pursuit of truth. Hilary Putnam comes very close to Schleiermacher when he maintains that ‘The very fact that we speak of our different conceptions as different conceptions of *rationality* posits a *Grenzbegriff*, a limit-concept of the ideal truth’ (Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, Cambridge 1981, p. 216). In the light of the post-modern desire to say good-bye to such notions, talk of the Absolute as the ‘limit-concept of the ideal truth’ might seem merely a pious attempt to defend the no longer defensible. Schleiermacher is interesting not least because his approach to truth and understanding already opposes, in the name of a rationality that aims to be universal, the kind of arguments against universalism that have become familiar again from Lyotard, Rorty and others, while still sustaining a sense of the potential for irreducible alterity which he regards as inherent in the way any individual relates to the world.³⁰

³⁰ See Manfred Frank, *Grenzen der Verständigung*, Frankfurt am Main 1988, and *Das Individuelle-Allgemeine*.

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Donald Davidson has maintained in his account of interpretation, which shares several features with Schleiermacher's, that 'The method is not designed to eliminate disagreement, nor can it; its purpose is to make meaningful disagreement possible, and this depends on a foundation – some foundation – in agreement'.³¹ In the 1833 *Introduction to the Dialectic* Schleiermacher already makes Davidson's point when he argues that 'Disagreement of any kind presupposes the acknowledgement of the sameness of an object, as well as the necessity of the relationship of thought to being . . . For if we take away this relationship of thought to being there is no disagreement, rather, as long as thought only remains purely within itself, there is only difference (*Verschiedenheit*)' (*Dialektik* (1814–15) pp. 132–4). Against idealism Schleiermacher insists that our thinking be of something that is not itself reducible to determinate thought, in order for the dialectical process via which knowledge develops to begin. However, this does not give a foundational point from which to proceed, such as the 'self-certainty' of the subject, 'observation reports', 'stimulus meanings', or whatever, so 'we must be satisfied with arbitrary beginnings in all areas of knowledge' (*ibid.* p. 149). Despite this, the process of knowledge acquisition itself is not merely arbitrary because there must always be some ground of agreement, rather than mere random difference, among those who seek the truth. In the extreme case, instead of conflicting judgements about the same thing – which Schleiermacher puts in the form 'A is b', 'A is not b', such as 'This substance is phlogiston', 'This substance is not phlogiston' – we might have 'A is' and 'A is not' (*ibid.* p. 135), such as 'Phlogiston exists', 'Phlogiston does not exist'. The only presupposition in this latter case is the fact of being itself, as that which can be differentiated in judgements, and 'this would no longer be a disagreement within our area, but a disagreement about the area itself' (*ibid.* p. 136). What remain, therefore, are the conflicting orientations towards the truth that are seen as already inherent in language, and this takes one back to the issue of schematism and its relation to hermeneutics.

The section of *Friedrich Schleiermachers Dialektik* translated in this volume gives the most condensed account of Schleiermacher's fundamental assumptions about language. These should now make it clear why hermeneutics plays such an important role in his thought. Even though we 'cannot know whether the other person hears or sees as we do' (*Friedrich*

³¹ Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford 1984, pp. 196–7.

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Schleiermachers Dialektik p. 371), we assume that knowledge is constituted in the same way in everyone for there to be knowledge at all. The key difference is between the organic function, which we can never prove to be the same in others and which involves different ‘input’ for each individual and each culture, and the intellectual function, which is assumed to structure the organic in the same way despite these differences. Whether what the intellectual function produces is in fact the same must be established by ‘exchange of consciousness . . . this presupposes a mediating term, a universal and shared system of designation’ (ibid. p. 372), namely language, which is made possible by schematism, the establishing of relative identities (ibid. p. 373).

In the *Ethics* Schleiermacher claims:

Every person is a completed/closed-off (*abgeschlossen*) unity of consciousness. As far as reason produces cognition in a person it is, qua consciousness, only produced for this person. What is produced with the character of schematism is, though, posited as valid for everyone, and therefore being in one [*‘Sein in Einem’* – by which he means individualised self-consciousness] does not correspond to its character [as schematism]. (*Ethik (1812–13)* p. 64)

Schleiermacher defines language as the ‘system of organic movements which are simultaneously the expression and the sign of the acts of consciousness as cognitive faculty, seen in terms of the identity of schematism’ (ibid. p. 65). The identity of knowledge articulated in language is, though, only a postulate which must be continually confirmed in real processes of communication. These processes take place in natural languages, so we cannot even maintain that all languages ‘construct’ in the same way, because we lack a ‘universal language’ (*Friedrich Schleiermachers Dialektik* p. 374). At the same time we must presuppose a universal ‘innate’ capacity for reason that is ultimately identical in all language users, for if this were not so, ‘there would be no truth at all’ (ibid. p. 375). This may sound ‘Platonic’, but what is being sought is an answer to how it is that we can translate between languages and cultures, and come to understand and agree with the ‘discourse of the other’. A pure form of reason is, as we saw, never directly available, precisely because of the difference of languages. As such, ‘pure reason’ functions as a regulative idea, which has an *ethical* basis in the demand to acknowledge the other. In reality we continually seek the general truth via the particular, in an ‘*oscillation between the determinacy of*

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the particular and the indeterminacy of the general image' (ibid. p. 372), where the identity of the universal (which is unstable because of the role of the organic) is fixed by the sign that comes repeatedly to stand for it. The sign can, of course, be revealed as inadequate and change its sense or be replaced by another sign. For Schleiermacher the main source of such changes is the fact that we will each, because of the organic function, schematise in different ways, some of which may become universally accepted. The awareness of the different ways in which individuals schematise 'coincides with the attempt to resolve conflicting ideas. We must come to know the individual difference itself and thus remain with our task, namely the task of wishing to know' (ibid. p. 378). Schleiermacher does not, however, think 'knowing the individual' is 'intuitive' or 'empathetic', as many commentators suggest. Instead, access to individuality requires a *method* which will enable it to become accessible. It is the inherent generality of language resulting from the fact that any language involves only a finite number of elements for the articulation of a non-finitely differentiated world which makes such a method necessary.

These arguments should make it clear that Schleiermacher's underlying conception is primarily ethical, in a way which is echoed in those areas of contemporary philosophy which have abandoned the analytical project of a theory of meaning based on the kind of 'regulist' explanation used in the natural sciences.³² The desire for agreement is founded both in the need to take account of the possibility of the individual being right against the collective, and in the need to transcend the individual which results from the realisation that truth cannot be merely individual. The locus of the ethical is therefore the relationship between language and the individual: 'thought is only ethical to the extent to which it is inscribed in language, from which teaching and learning develop', but, crucially, 'the common possession of language is only ethical to the extent to which individual consciousness develops by it' (*Ethik (1812–13)* p. 264).

The relationship between dialectic and hermeneutics is, therefore, based on the relationship between the universal aspect of language and the fact that individuals can imbue the same universally employed words with different senses. As such: 'Language only exists via thought, and vice versa; each can only complete itself via the other. The art of explication and translation [hermeneutics] dissolves language into thought; dialectic dissolves

³² See, e.g., Robert Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, Cambridge, Mass., and London 1994.

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thought into language.³³ Hermeneutics moves towards the specific intentions of the individual in the contexts of their utterances, which are not exhausted by the possible general validity of those utterances; dialectic moves towards general validity, in the name of universal agreement:

Looked at from the side of language the technical discipline of hermeneutics arises from the fact that every utterance can only be counted as an objective representation (*Darstellung*) to the extent to which it is taken from language and is to be grasped via language, but that on the other side the utterance can only arise as the action of an individual, and, as such, even if it is analytical in terms of its content, it still, in terms of its less essential elements, bears free synthesis [in the sense of individual judgement] within itself. The reconciliation (*Ausgleichung*) of both moments makes understanding and explication into an art [in the sense of that whose 'application is not also given with the rules']. (*Ethik (1812–13)* p. 116)

It is, then, 'clear that both [hermeneutics and dialectic] can only develop together with each other' (*Dialektik* (Jonas) p. 261), so that the division between apprehension of the individual and of the universal must be continually re-examined. The ongoing obligation to attend to the conflict between these two aspects of thought is the foundation not only of hermeneutics but also of dialectic, which both result from the inaccessibility of absolute knowledge.

The methodological divisions in the hermeneutics follow from this basic opposition: 'grammatical' interpretation, in which 'the person . . . disappears and only appears as organ of language', is distinguished from 'technical interpretation', in which 'language with its determining power disappears and only appears as the organ of the person, in the service of their individuality'.³⁴ The crucial point is that successful understanding requires the completion of both kinds of interpretation. This is, though, necessarily an 'infinite task', for the kind of reasons which precluded absolute knowledge in the dialectic: the two sides cannot be reduced to each other from a finite perspective. There is, therefore, an ethical obligation to come to terms with the fact that we can never claim fully to understand the other, even though we always must understand in some measure if we can engage in dialogue or attempt to translate.

³³ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Dialektik*, ed. L. Jonas, Berlin 1839, p. 261.

³⁴ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutik und Kritik*, ed. Manfred Frank, Frankfurt am Main 1977, p. 171.

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This position contrasts sharply with some still dominant contemporary approaches to meaning. Analytical conceptions of linguistic meanings as ‘abstract entities’ existing independently of language users, and structuralist descriptions of language as a ‘symbolic order’ (Lacan) or ‘general text’ (Derrida) into which the individual is ‘inserted’ are often simply seen as the definitive counter to individualist intentionalism, in which words are supposed to gain their sense solely by the inner acts of the speaker. In the light of Schleiermacher’s actual ideas about interpretation (rather than the ones attributed to him) both sides of this opposition involve a crucial failure to mediate between methodological extremes and thereby to appreciate the irreducible ethical dimension in all communication. The consequences of this failure are now apparent, for example, in the failure of the semiotic assumptions that underlie structuralism and post-structuralism to account for the functioning of everyday communication, in the failure of the ‘semantic tradition’ to arrive at convincing explanations of meaning,³⁵ and in the bankruptcy of purely intentionalist literary interpretation. Schleiermacher does not give final answers to philosophical questions about meaning: such final answers are, for him, an ethically based regulative idea, not something to be definitively articulated in a theory. His demonstration of the damaging results of concentration on one side of the opposition between the rule-bound and the spontaneous aspects of language is, though, now turning out to be a vital factor in the development of new philosophical approaches to language after the failure of the analytical ‘linguistic turn’.

³⁵ As Putnam remarks in relation to Alfred Tarski’s ‘Convention T’: ‘The problem is not that we don’t understand “Snow is white” . . . the problem is that we don’t understand *what it is to understand* “Snow is white”. This is the philosophical problem’ (Putnam, Hilary, *Realism and Reason. Philosophical Papers Vol 3*, Cambridge 1983, p. 83). See also Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, Cambridge 1985, Chapters 9 and 10.