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# The Unity of Religious Experience: An Analytic Reading of Friedrich Schleiermacher's Second Speech *On Religion*

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**Abstract:** In this paper, I present a conception of individual religiousness in terms of religious experience. Using ideas of the early Friedrich Schleiermacher, I will claim that religious experiences are contemplative experiences of the totality of being. This understanding of religious experiences presents an alternative to how religious experience is often epistemologically thought about in the more contemporary analytic philosophy of religion. Furthermore, it has systematic advantages: It can construe religious plurality in terms of different ways to experience the totality of being, it stays neutral to metaphysical and moral debates such as whether there is a God whose laws we should obey, and it allows for an explanation of how religious intuitions and religious emotions relate to one another as well as of why religiousness and art often go hand in hand. Even though understanding religiousness in terms of contemplative experience also bears revisionary potential, I will discuss how more doxastic elements of religious people's lives can be reintegrated into this picture.

**Keywords:** religiousness; religious experience; Friedrich Schleiermacher; religious plurality; religious emotions; philosophy of religion

## 1 Intro

Many people are clearly and without a doubt *religious* in their acting and cognizing. However, it is not completely clear what this feature of religiousness in their action and cognition philosophically speaking amounts to. Confronted with the theoretical task of answering questions like »What is religion?« that might result from this conceptual unclarity, it is an established and old philosophical strategy to search for necessary and sufficient conditions that have to be fulfilled by certain phenomena to count as instances of religiousness.

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For example, following this line, it might be initially tempting to define religiousness in terms of specific beliefs or other doxastic representations about spiritual beings like God or some other supernatural or transcendent entities that are suitable to guide people's actions in various contexts or to serve certain social functions for the respective religious communities that hold them, as scholars of religion like Tylor (1871, 1: 383) or Lincoln (2003, 5–7) have suggested. But while some religious people might indeed worship a monotheistic God of a particular sort or even a plurality of Gods, others may merely believe in the existence of immortal souls, ancestral spirits, or some form of reincarnation, while others again will perhaps just worship nature in itself or some kind of impersonal cosmic order as sources of normativity or spiritual sense without making any reference to transcendent or supernatural forces at all.

Against the backdrop of this problem of content plurality of supposedly religious beliefs, there are several strategies available to move on. One could, for instance, side with authors like Geertz (1966, 90–91) who try to give a broader and more flexible account of religiousness in doxastic terms that merely affords commitment to some conception about the order of existence in general, may it be transcendent or supernatural or not. Yet, this would probably come at the cost of including some doxastic systems that one might not really want to call *religious* systems of thinking the same time. Then again, one could, with regard to the concept of religiousness, also agree with thinkers similar to Wittgenstein (1953, § 66–67) who generally denied that we are in need of a single and clear-cut definition for concepts such as ›game‹ or ›language‹. However, this again would probably happen at the cost of not being able to make definite decisions over whether something is a religious phenomenon in each and every case any longer. But, just as well, there are other options in between.

Yet another strategy to tackle the question of what being religious essentially amounts to and that I want to take a closer look at in this paper could be expressed by reference to the unique *experiences* that religious people seem to be involved in. However, since those experiences appear to be no less diverse in their content than the various beliefs religious people often seem to possess, this experiential approach would have to be developed in a unifying way that avoids starting difficulties similar to those of a primarily doxastic understanding of religiousness as mentioned above when trying to explain what all instances of religiousness as such have in common.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> With that said, it might be helpful to note as well that the tradition of doubt over whether something like this can be successfully done at all seems to be a long one. To give another prominent example, difficulties similar to the ones sketched above seem to drive James (1902) into treating both religion and religious experience as phenomena whose instances do not share a common nature but rather include a *variety* of different things more or less similar to each other in one aspect or another. A way to understand the gist of my project in this paper is to see it as a challenge to this kind of pessimism when it comes to philosophically explaining the unity of religious phenomena and of

In the following sections, I will argue that a unifying way to philosophically make sense of the apparent plurality of experiences that religious people seem to make during their religious engagement with the world is to formally construe it as a plurality of ways to structure the content of a specific kind of experience that we can call *religious* experience in a clear-cut sense. Starting out from a number of remarks made by the early Schleiermacher (1799) in the second of his five speeches *On Religion*, I will show first of all how the common feature of religious experiences, regardless of their apparent plurality in content, can be explained, roughly speaking, in broader terms of a specific way to experience the universe as an entirety or totality in a purely contemplative manner. That is, I will use Schleiermacher's thoughts to firstly and mostly bring forward an experiential understanding of *individual* religiousness. Yet, as authors like Dole (2010) and Vial (2016) have recently argued, this general understanding of what it means to be religious for individuals bears manifold connections to social and historical factors of religiousness already. Likewise, I will suggest later, that it can thus be used as a basis for making sense of the plurality of other religious practices and more collective ways of religious experiencing as well.

In addition to this, I will show that this way of defining religiousness in terms of contemplative religious experience also has a number of interesting systematic implications and benefits for the field of philosophy of religion. First and foremost, in contrast to a definition of religion or religiousness in terms of specific beliefs, a definition of religiousness in experiential terms of contemplation remains, as such, neutral to much-debated moral and metaphysical theses typically associated with religious or non-religious thinking. In this sense, it especially remains neutral to contemporary debates concerning the truth or falsity of naturalism or theism and does not give an account of religious experience that is centered around their justificatory status with regard to certain beliefs like the belief in God. Furthermore, it supplies a fruitful perspective for the study of the phenomenon of religious emotions, since it will give us the opportunity to construe exteroceptive religious intuitions and interoceptive religious emotions as two related forms of having religious experiences. And through stressing similarities between religious and aesthetic experiences it also allows for a systematic account of why aesthetic practices and religious practices often appear to be so very closely interconnected.

However, if we follow this Schleiermacherian line of thought for the sake of such theoretical benefits, there will also be some revisionary potential coming with it: For certain morally or metaphysically characterized doxastic aspects of religious people's lives, which are often thought to be essential for religion or religiousness, might

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religious experience in particular while at the same time refraining from a doxastic understanding of religion.

not count as bearing an essential connection to religion or religiousness any longer. Nonetheless, I will argue that those aspects can still be sufficiently integrated into this approach as ways to morally or metaphysically elaborate or reflect the contents that religious experiences as such comprise and bring forth and that can thus often coincide with a religious way of life.

## 2 Schleiermacher's Speeches *On Religion* and the Experiential Account of Religiousness

Schleiermacher's speeches *On Religion* were published for the first time in 1799. With this date of publication, Schleiermacher's speeches fall directly into a time that, on the one hand, is intellectually characterized by the 18th-century tradition of thought that the era of enlightenment brought forth, while it is, on the other hand, already influenced by the growth of different lines of thought that the emerging 19th-century romanticist movement discussed. In particular, this holds for the way in which religion was philosophically thought about in this span of time.

While famous philosophers associated with the enlightenment era had not completely dismissed the topic of religion or religious thinking, they nonetheless helped to put the relevance and warrant of social institutions and traditions like the church and naïve everyday forms of metaphysically or morally shaped religious belief and practice into question by pointing out that the theoretical foundations of those institutions, traditions, and forms of belief or practice appear to be epistemically unstable.

Perhaps most influentially, Kant (1781, 1788) argued that religious belief in God and the immortality of the soul cannot be theoretically proven, even though it has to be practically assumed in our moral engagement with the world. This shift from situating religion in the realm of metaphysics to situating it in the realm of morals was then prominently taken up in more radical forms by thinkers like Fichte (1798) and Forberg (1798), who not just claimed that God and immortality are postulates of practical reason but rather that religion or God itself could be *identified* with the moral world-order or that religion consists in nothing else but moral behavior, subsequently leading to allegations of atheism that fueled the so-called *Atheismusstreit*. At the same time and presumably in reaction to this situation, early romanticists like Schlegel (1798), who was a close friend, philosophical peer, and even roommate of Schleiermacher for some time in the late 1790s, discussed the relation of religion to morals as well but also stressed its connection to other phenomena that largely affect and shape human life and experience such as feeling, fantasy, arts, and nature.

As the detailed discussions of scholars such as Grove (2004) have shown, the exact lines of influence on Schleiermacher's philosophy of religion that stem from those and other developments in the philosophical discourse of his time are socially and philosophically complex and sometimes difficult to trace and reconstruct, so that it would be well beyond the scope of this paper to discuss them more closely. Nonetheless, it seems at least plausible to say that the intellectual situation sketched above is reflected in and sheds some light on Schleiermacher's speeches, who, against this background, seems to agree with enlightenment thinkers like Kant that the traditional ways of theoretically thinking about religion and God in metaphysical terms face some serious problems of justification. However, he also seems unconvinced by the idea that religion simply reduces to morality or is merely an appendix of the moral consciousness of human subjects. Rather, he aims to defend the relevance and legitimacy of religiousness *independent* of both metaphysics and morals by establishing it as a subject-centered phenomenon that »has its own province in the mind in which it reigns sovereign« (Schleiermacher 1799, 17).

To motivate his project, Schleiermacher already seems to hint at this point of relocating religion apart from metaphysics and morals in the first of his five speeches. For example, he addresses his readers there as follows:

»Without doubt, you are familiar with the history of human follies and have perused the different edifices of religion, from the meaningless fables [...] to the most refined deism, from the crude superstition of our people to the poorly stitched together fragments of metaphysics and morals that are called rational Christianity, and you have found them all without rhyme or reason. I am far from wishing to contradict you in that.« (Schleiermacher 1799, 12)

Correspondingly, Schleiermacher's further line of argument in the second of his speeches consists of a treatment of religion or religiousness, not in metaphysical or moral terms but rather in terms of a specific form of experiential *contemplation* similar to the mere contemplation of works of art. As he puts it there:

It does not wish to determine and explain the universe according to its nature as does metaphysics; it does not desire to continue the universe's development and perfect it [...] as does morals. Religion's essence is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling. [...] Thus, religion is opposed to these two in everything that makes up its essence and in everything that characterizes its effects. (Schleiermacher 1799, 22–23)

Of course, Schleiermacher is well aware of the fact that this reference to intuition and feeling needs further specification to account for a specifically *religious* way of contemplative experience as opposed to possible other forms of contemplation like the aesthetic contemplation of works of art or objects of nature. This is why Schleiermacher quickly goes on to claim that the kind of intuition which is essential to having religion is an intuition that focuses on »the infinite, its imprint and its

manifestation, in humanity no less than in all other individual and finite forms« (Schleiermacher 1799, 23). Shortly after that, he restates this claim by talking about an »intuition of the universe« as the essence and center of all forms of religion or religiousness (Schleiermacher 1799, 24).

Now, this talk of an intuition of the universe which Schleiermacher links to a talk about feeling could easily lead to the assumption that Schleiermacher wants to present an experiential account of religiousness that is *non-conceptual* insofar as it seems primarily concerned with the direct exteroceptive or interoceptive sensations that we feel when we get affected by certain objects around us. For instance, Webb (2022) solely mentions Schleiermacher's speeches in his *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article on religious experience in the context of stating that religious experiences should not be equated to subjective religious feelings alone. According to Webb, they should for instance not be equated to feelings of absolute dependence, a well-known characterization of piety that Schleiermacher (1821/22, 1830/31) prominently put forward in his later work *The Christian Faith* and that was taken up by Otto (1923) in his considerations regarding what is characteristic for experiences of holiness or numinousness.

However, following the lines that Vial (2016, 55–92) has recently drawn, I want to suggest that such exclusively feeling-oriented and non-conceptualistic readings exegetically fail to grasp the complete scope of Schleiermacher's suggestions about what religious experiences are. For, as Vial has argued, such readings of Schleiermacher seem to ignore that his use of »intuition« and »feeling« is rooted in a Kantian understanding of those terms. In accordance with this, although Schleiermacher indeed starts to sketch out his idea of intuition by pointing out that such intuitions start off with passive affections and subjective feelings, he also clarifies at several points that his idea of a religious intuition of the universe is the idea of a more complex experience that besides passively received perceptual sensations also involves interpretational efforts and thus, as one could conclude, conceptual and intentional aspects as well. As he writes for example:

All intuition proceeds from an influence of the intuited on the one who intuits, from an original and independent action of the former, which is then grasped, apprehended, and conceived by the latter according to one's own nature. (Schleiermacher 1799, 25)

But regardless of the question of its exegetical adequacy or inadequacy, a non-conceptualist reading might furthermore not even be the most promising way to *systematically* make use of Schleiermacher's suggestions in contemporary philosophy. For, as McDowell (1996) has pointed out, there may also be good epistemological reasons to assume that there is no such thing as a purely non-conceptual level of intuition or perception and that the functioning of our receptive sensual capacities is

rather always interconnected to the functioning of our productive conceptual capacities.<sup>2</sup>

Still, if we want to adopt a more complex reading of Schleiermacher's account of religious intuition in terms of those intuitions as instances of a certain kind of experience, more has to be said of the specific experiential structure that makes such religious experiences differ from other, non-religious experiences. I will address this topic in the following section in more detail while claiming that the outwardly-directed experiential structure of religious experiences in the sense of religious intuitions in Schleiermacher's account as discussed above mirrors the inwardly-directed experiential structure of religious emotions, thus allowing for an easy explanation of why religious intuitions and religious emotions often seem to occur together.

### 3 Religious Experiences and Religious Emotions

To get a better grip on the specific form that Schleiermacher attributes to religious experiences to separate them from more common experiences, we have to continue to take a closer look at the structure that religious experiences possess. For this goal, it will be helpful to examine more closely what exactly Schleiermacher's explication of what characterizes religious intuitions *as* intuitions of the universe experientially amounts to.

We have already seen that intuitions of the universe start out with exteroceptive stimulations of our senses by external objects that are then conceptually interpreted or structured by the subjects that got affected by them.<sup>3</sup> Schleiermacher now goes on to describe the form of this interpretational part of religious intuition as follows:

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2 If there *are* any pure feelings in the sense of phenomenally characterized but completely non-conceptual mental states, those might still be regarded as religious mental states as long as they can establish the directedness of the subject to the totality of the whole world that religious experiences establish by means of conceptual interpretations solely by means of phenomenal content. However, I will neither discuss the question of whether such mental states exist nor the question of whether some of them would in this case count as religious mental states in this paper.

3 I take it that such cases are the simplest cases of making experiences: In those cases, tableaux of phenomenal impressions get conceptually structured in a way that turns them into a comprehensible unity. This, however, should not imply that there cannot be more complex levels of experience. For example, one could conceptually structure a sequence of such simpler experiences as stages of a diachronic process and thus make a more complex experience in this sense. For instance, making the experience of watching a movie unfold on a theatre screen could be a paradigmatic case of such more complex experiences.

The universe exists in uninterrupted activity and reveals itself to us every moment. Every form that it brings forth, every being to which it gives separate existence [...], every occurrence that spills forth [...], is an action of the same upon us. Thus to accept everything individual as a part of the whole and everything limited as a representation of the infinite is religion. But whatever would go beyond that and penetrate deeper into the nature and substance of the whole is no longer religion and will, if it still wants to be regarded as such, inevitably sink back into empty mythology. (Schleiermacher 1799, 25)

As scholars such as Arndt (2020, 71) and Grove (2004, 295) have highlighted as well, judging from such explications, it seems clear that religious intuitions have a certain interpretational structure in Schleiermacher's eyes: a structure of experiencing an object of perception *as* an individual part of the totality of all being. In other words, religious experiences like those can thus be understood as experiences of the *totality* of the world or the entirety of being by the experience of single *parts* of this totality or entirety that are phenomenally given through exteroceptive sensual perception and interpreted *under the aspect* that they as such belong to it. In this respect of interpretative aspectuality, then, Schleiermacher's conception of religious experience as a form of experiencing-as is also similar to the one Hick (1968) has brought forth when discussing the phenomenon of religious faith.<sup>4</sup>

This way of characterizing religious experiences as experiences of totality gives us a unified and abstract way of describing the content and structure of religious experiences. Still, to understand how this rather broad and homogenous formal characterization allows us to really apply it to the apparently vast variety of different concrete religious experiences people in different cultures and contexts seem to make, it is important to note that those experiences can nonetheless take very different concrete guises when it comes to their individual contents. As Schleiermacher writes:

Individual persons may have their own arrangement and their own rubrics; the particular can thereby neither win nor lose. Those who truly know about their religion and its essence will utterly subordinate to the particular every apparent connection and will not sacrifice the smallest part of the particular to it. [...]

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<sup>4</sup> Yet, compared to Schleiermacher, Hick seems to have a different opinion on the epistemological status of religious experiences. While Schleiermacher, as we will see later, seems to discard the idea that religious experiences are cognitively treated as veridical and inferentially significant in the same way that garden variety experiences like ordinary perceptions are usually taken to be, Hick seems more sympathetic to this idea when claiming that having faith means to live in accordance to the contents our religious experiences reveal to us as true. In a Schleiermacherian picture, religious faith, understood in such notions of taking the contents of religious experiences at face value, would require a further decisional step, namely, taking those contents at face value *even though* the experience that made us acquainted with it is essentially *not* of the kind that we usually treat as veridical or warranted in the first place. However, this decision could then be seen as the fundamental risk-taking that authors like Buchak (2012) associate with the notion of having faith.



This feeling must accompany everyone who really has religion. Each person must be conscious that his religion is only part of the whole, that regarding the same objects that affect him religiously there are views just as pious and, nevertheless, completely different from his own, and that from other elements of religion intuitions and feelings flow, the sense for which he may be completely lacking. (Schleiermacher 1799, 27)

In this sense, relative to the concepts that an individual subject applies in its interpretational efforts while making a religious experience, the concrete contents of those experiences can differ significantly. What is crucial, however, is to see that, if we talk about religious experiences, those ways of interpretatively structuring a certain experience will, nevertheless, always be ways to structure the experience in a way that makes its object appear as a part of an entirety of being, whatever concrete conceptual means are used to establish this way of experiencing it in each particular case.<sup>5</sup>

Further, to understand how religious intuitions do not collapse into simple forms of metaphysical or moral perceptual judgments, it is important to note that Schleiermacher stresses in his speeches that religious experiences are cognitively handled in a way that normally includes a refrainment from epistemically using those experiences as if it were garden variety perceptions apt to justify descriptive or normative beliefs about the world. As, for example, Millikan (1984, 201–202) would say with reference to inner terms representing fictional characters or sentences tokened during forms of pretend play, they are in a sense epistemically *disengaged* from our doxastic engagement with the world. In the recent research literature on Schleiermacher's speeches, a similar reading is brought forth by Grove (2004, 298–299), who stresses that Schleiermacher's idea of interpretation in religious intuitions is not yet a full-blown predicative one but rather one of individual thinking in which concepts are not applied in the way they normally are in acts of abstract and general thinking that aims at claiming over-individual generality.

In the second speech, Schleiermacher also illustrates this point by comparing the conceptually structured contents of religious intuitions like those of viewing the shape the world is in as the product of godly actions to those of intuitions of stars as astronomical figures in the night skies:

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5 This claim is compatible with the idea of authors like James (1902, 380) that there are religious experiences that are mystical or ineffable in the sense that we cannot articulate their contents in a way that would appear to us to be adequate. For there could be religious experiences that make use of conceptual structuring for which we lack the right vocabulary to explicate it. Also, we might simply fail to apply this vocabulary even if it is accessible to us in principle. Nonetheless, a possible upshot of this relation between religious experiences and their explication could be that religious communities may sometimes be joined or switched precisely because they supply their members with certain practices and descriptions to express the contents of their religious experiences in a way that appears them as adequate.

To present all events in the world as the actions of a god is religion; it expresses its connection to an infinite totality; but while brooding over the existence of this god before the world and outside the world may be good and necessary in metaphysics, in religion even that becomes only empty mythology, a further development of that which is only the means of portrayal as if it was the essential itself, a complete departure from its characteristic ground. [...]

Elevate yourselves at once [...] to that infinite dimension of sensible intuition, to the wondrous and celebrated starry sky. [...] When you have persuaded another person to join you in drawing the image of the Big Dipper onto the blue background of the worlds, does he not nevertheless remain free to conceive the adjacent worlds in contours that are completely different from yours? This infinite chaos, where of course every point represents a world, is as such actually the most suitable and highest symbol of religion. [...] Everything universal under which the particular is supposed to be treated, each collection and combination of this sort, either exists in a different territory, if it is to be referred to the inner and essential realm, or is only the work of playful imagination and freest caprice. (Schleiermacher 1799, 25–27)

This maneuver of how religious experiences get disconnected from epistemic questions regarding the possibility of perceptual justification of certain metaphysical or moral beliefs as true or adequate in Schleiermacher's speeches differs sharply from the way religious experiences are typically thought of in the works of more contemporary analytic philosophers of religion like Alston (1982, 1991), Plantinga (1981, 2000), or Swinburne (1979, 1996, 2005). These authors all discuss religious experiences primarily under the aspect of whether they can plausibly be understood as experiences of supernatural beings or facts and thus be apt to justify our beliefs that those beings exist or that those facts are the case. Therefore, compared to those epistemically dedicated accounts of religious experiences, Schleiermacher's account of this topic in the second speech offers a genuinely alternative view of such experiences that fundamentally avoids problems like having to epistemologically account for how religious experiences can be reliable or trustworthy in the first place.

Furthermore, since Schleiermacher's account in the speeches of what being religious essentially consists of, is ultimately derived from his account of what religious experience is, he also offers an account of religiousness there that stays neutral to questions regarding the reasonability of such metaphysical or moral beliefs as are typically discussed in the philosophy of religion, for example, whether or not there is a God or whether or not there are some universal moral laws that this God has revealed to us and that we are thus obligated to follow. In consequence, if we understand religious practices as practices that are centered around the function of arousing, expressing, and cultivating epistemically disengaged religious experiences, the legitimacy of such religious practices, may they be individual or collective, in Schleiermacher's account of religion, as it is given in the second speech, does not depend on affirmative answers to questions like those regarding the truth or falsity of theism, as opposed to atheism or naturalism, either.

For example, such things as singing church songs together or participating in religious ceremonies of sacrifice could then be understood as practices that serve the purpose of getting in the right mood for collectively experiencing oneself as being part of the world in a certain way that is characteristic for the religion in question rather than praising some supernatural being or order that gets doxastically affirmed. But also acts like marriages could then be understood basically as collective ways to express and cultivate certain religious experiences like those of mutually being in this world together with one's partner in a caring and loving relationship without any further supernatural metaphysical or moral implications following from these experiences directly. Considering such examples, then, it is not surprising at all that Schleiermacher himself, as Dole (2010, 101–135) has sketched out, had a sophisticated idea of how religiousness should be intersubjectively cultivated freely of external influences, may they stem from politics and other parts of society or from morally or metaphysically shaped sources elsewhere.

In the last section of this paper, I will turn to the revisionary potential that this account of religion or religiousness suggests in some more detail. But for now, I want to point out another philosophical advantage of Schleiermacher's suggestions in the speeches. That is, Schleiermacher's account of religion in the second speech allows for an easy systematic answer of why religious experiences in the sense of religious intuitions and religious experiences in the sense of religious emotions normally seem to occur together.

In modern discussions of what the nature of being emotionally engaged with certain objects, in general, might be, it is typically assumed that emotions are complex mental phenomena that include interoceptive phenomenal aspects as well as interpretational aspects regarding the way these phenomenal aspects are conceived of in relation to evaluative judgments about and perceptual experiences of external objects. For example, Alston (1972) has argued that having an emotion can be explained in terms of feeling certain schemes of bodily arousal caused by evaluative judgments of previously perceived objects. Meanwhile, authors like Perkins (1966) have stressed that the sense of »feeling« that is relevant when we talk of emotions being felt is a sense that, in contrast to mere phenomenal affection, rather denotes a form of complex experiencing of bodily sensations under certain descriptions that connect them to external objects of perception and evaluative judgments. A similar idea also seems to have been proposed more recently by Goldie (2000) who claims that many of the bodily feelings involved in our emotional episodes are themselves interpreted as directed towards the evaluative objects of those emotional episodes.

Compared to this more contemporary way of talking about feelings being felt, one could again suspect at this point that Schleiermacher's own talk of feelings is much more basic. In a certain way, this is true, since Schleiermacher's initial characterization of feeling in general is that of the mere subjective sensations that

accompany or follow an intuition. In this sense, whenever we have intuitions, we »must necessarily be seized by various feelings« (Schleiermacher 1799, 29). Later on, however, Schleiermacher also seems to talk about religious feelings in a more complex way that includes reference to interpretational aspects under which our feelings – in the more basic sense of »feeling« that Schleiermacher uses beforehand – get described and comprehended. And exactly this more advanced way of talking about feelings thus seems to mirror the way to talk about feelings that authors like Perkins and Goldie have in mind.

For instance, Schleiermacher seems to talk about feelings in this more complex way when he discusses a number of examples of religious feelings that, intuitively speaking, one could call *emotional* in nature. Those include religiously invoked humility, love, or gratitude. He writes:

When the world spirit has majestically revealed itself to us, when we have overheard its action guided by such magnificently conceived and excellent laws, what is more natural than to be permeated by a heartfelt reverence in the face of the eternal and invisible? And when we have intuited the universe and, looking back from that perspective upon our self, see how, in comparison with the universe, it disappears into infinite smallness, what can then be more appropriate for mortals than true unaffected humility? When we also perceive our fellow creatures in the intuition of the world and it is clear to us how each of them without distinction is his own representation of humanity just as we are, and how we would have to dispense with intuiting this humanity without the existence of each other, what is more natural than to embrace them all with heartfelt love and affection without any distinction of disposition and spiritual power? And when we look back from their connection with the whole to their influence on what happens to us, and then consider those who have diminished their own transient nature and the drive to enlarge and to isolate it in order to maintain ours, how can we refrain from feeling a special kinship with those whose actions once defended our existence and happily guided it through its dangers? How can we refrain from that feeling of gratitude that prompts us to honor them as people who have already united themselves with the whole and are conscious of the same in their lives? (Schleiermacher 1799, 45)

With examples like these in view, it seems, therefore, as Dietz (2011) has also claimed, generally promising to combine contemporary ideas about the nature of emotions with a Schleiermacherian approach to the essence of religiousness. And one way to do so, as I want to contend here, is to think of religious emotional engagement as a specific form of religious experience that normally succeeds religious intuition.

Following this line, we could then contend that religious emotions are religious experiences that do not or at least do not only interpret certain exteroceptively given objects as components of a totality of all that exists, as religious intuitions do, but that rather also interoceptively evaluate our *own* relation to such objects or to the totality of being that they are represented to stand for in religious intuitions. But since those experiences are nonetheless normally connected causally and interpretatively to previous religious intuitions and their contents and objects, this still allows for an

explanation of the relationship that typically holds between religious intuitions and religious emotions and why they, for this very reason, normally jointly appear: They do so because religious intuitions are interpretationally structured in a way that implicitly or explicitly raises the question of how *we ourselves* fit into and relate to the totality of being that is intuited via experiencing this or that external object as a part of that totality in a certain manner and because this normally brings about experiential episodes of emotional self-situating according to the preceding intuitions.<sup>6</sup>

As Schleiermacher would put it:

All these feelings are religion, and likewise all others in which the universe is one pole and your own self is somehow the other pole between which consciousness hovers. The ancients certainly knew this. They called all these feelings »piety« and referred them immediately to religion, considering them its noblest part. (Schleiermacher 1799, 46)

Thus, for instance, to be angry about the incredible amount of pain that one can witness in certain instances in this world, could in this sense be seen as a type of religious experience that evaluates our relation to the world as such and to the condition that it appears us to be in. And, again, this kind of emotional experience could vary in concrete content depending on the particular concepts used to make it intelligible or to experience the respective objects of a previous religious intuition that caused or content-wise inspired it: One may make an emotional experience like this by structuring the pain he or she witnesses through using the concept of an almighty and all-loving Christian God that, despite those attributes, permits all of this evil and pain. But just as well, one may make a similar experience by structuring the pain he or she witnesses qua using the concept of an empty, meaningless, shattered, cold, and unjust world that each and every individual has to painfully endure on its own.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The talk of normality at this point is supposed to account for the fact there seems to be a stable connection between the occurrence of religious intuitions and religious emotions despite the possibility that not *every* occurring religious intuition might lead to a religious emotion, even though it might necessarily lead to certain subjective feelings in the more basic sense of merely uninterpreted subjective sensations that was mentioned above. Of course, it could still be the case that an adequate understanding of religious experience ultimately has to further elaborate on this claim of normal occurrence. One accessible way to give an explication of this claim of normality besides the option of simply treating it as a statistical claim would be to understand it as the thesis that religious intuitions have the *function* of causing religious emotions so that the intuitive oddity of certain cases in which religious intuitions do not lead to religious emotions could be explained by reference to the failure of the respective religious intuitions to carry out this very function. Likewise, some cases of intuitions of totality like scientific intuitions of cosmic or biological order could then be treated as not having this function even if they lead to certain emotions that might seem religious.

<sup>7</sup> A question raised by such different ways of religious experiencing is whether the part-whole-conceptualizations that structure religious experiences have to be *teleological*. Examples like the one

As Proudfoot (2011) has highlighted with regard to religious intuitions, the possibility of such diverging religious interpretations can be explained in a plausible way by noting that Schleiermacher stresses that the conceptual understanding via which we religiously intuit the universe or emotionally experience its relation to us accordingly is also a matter of varying personal preferences or capabilities in imagination. Schleiermacher himself writes about different religious intuitions in this sense:

Which of these intuitions of the universe we appropriate depends on our sense of the universe. This is the proper measure of our religiousness; whether we have a God as a part of our intuition depends on the direction of our imagination. In religion the universe is intuited; it is posited as originally acting on us. Now if your imagination clings to the consciousness of our freedom in such fashion that it cannot come to terms with what it construes as originally active other than in the form of a free being, then imagination will probably personify the spirit of the universe and you will have a God. If your imagination clings to understanding in such fashion that you always clearly see that freedom only has meaning in the particular and for the particular instance, then you will have a world and no God. (Schleiermacher 1799, 52–53)

However, as we have seen, it is important to keep in mind that for Schleiermacher such diverging ways of structuring the mentioned experience are merely ways of experientially *depicting* our evaluative relation to the world and the seemingly terrible condition this very world appears to us to be in, not a way of metaphysically or morally *theorizing* further about this relation or its concrete objects. This very fact, as I will discuss in the next section, sheds some light on the experiential similarities that hold between religious engagement with the world and aesthetic engagement with works of art.

## 4 Religious Experiences and Aesthetic Experiences

A way to sum up the insights of the previous section would be to say that our epistemically disengaged experiential engagement with the world or certain parts of it when making religious experiences rather seems to be similar to our aesthetic engagement while experiencing works of art or contemplating objects of nature than to our epistemically engaged experiential engagement with the various objects of scientific study or to our practically engaged interactions with the world in everyday life. We have seen in the last section that Schleiermacher treats religious experiences as non-epistemic and disinterested with regard to the practical purposes and projects

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given above suggest that not *all* religious experiences also have to construe the totality of being as a teleologically organized unity. Yet, at least many of the members of major religions often have religious experiences that are somewhat teleological in content.

we go after in the world around us. Rather, to make a religious experience has to do with experiencing the totality of being by interpreting the sensory feelings and bodily sensations that certain parts of this totality cause in us in a manner that is imaginative and individual as well as purely contemplative. And this perspective on religious experiences, of course, shares some striking similarities with the perspective that philosophers in the tradition of Kant had on *aesthetic* experiences as well.

For instance, Kant (1790, § 1) explicitly starts his inquiries in the *Critique of Judgment* with the remark that during the experiences that inform our aesthetic judgments of something as beautiful our representations of the objects experienced do not get related »by means of understanding to the object for cognition, but rather [...] by means of the imagination (perhaps combined with the understanding) to the subject and its feeling of pleasure or displeasure.« Shortly on, he adds that aesthetic judgments of this kind do not entail any practical interest in its objects that go beyond the act of contemplation in the sense that »one does not want to know whether there is anything that is or that could be at stake, for us or for someone else, in the existence of the thing, but rather how we judge it in mere contemplation (intuition or reflection).« Solely, »what matters is what I make of this representation in myself, not how I depend on the existence of the object« (Kant (1790, § 2)). For, according to him, during aesthetic experiences our individual receptive and productive mental capacities are in a special kind of »free play« in which »no determinate concept restricts them to a particular rule of cognition« (Kant (1790, § 9)).

Those lines of thought go well with some of the further thoughts on the relationship of art and religion that the later Schleiermacher (1812/13, 1816/17) made in his *Lectures on Philosophical Ethics*. There, Schleiermacher offers a typology of human activities in terms of such that represent or symbolize the world and such that practically shape or organize it. Both types of activities either can be communal or universal in the sense that the forms they take are identical in all human beings or can be individual or particular in the sense that the forms they take depend on the unique character and creativity of the individual that exerts them. And, underlining the similarities sketched above, Schleiermacher in fact groups together both artistic and religious activities under the category of individual activities of symbolizing, thus setting them apart from communal symbolizing activities like epistemically driven scientific inquiry as well as from organizing activities of both sorts.

Of course, to highlight those points of convergence is not to say that there are no important differences between Kant's and Schleiermacher's approaches to art and aesthetics and especially to its relation to religion. To give an example that Käfer (2004) discusses, even though both thinkers, in fact, believe that we can contemplate and admire the world as an artwork of God, the reasons why they think that this is so vary for both thinkers respectively. In line with what we have seen before, for Kant,

this way of contemplating the world stems to a large extent from moral ideas and principles that enter into Kant's aesthetics. For Schleiermacher, however, contemplating the world as an artwork of God results more autonomously from a religious stance of experience towards being as a whole as soon as it gets connected with ideas about the nature of artworks and artistic endeavors. In contrast to Kant's approaches on the topic, then, Schleiermacher's aesthetic thought seems to rather follow other thinkers of early romanticism like Friedrich Schlegel in promoting the intimate affinities between religion and art with regard to the totality of being and its relation to the subject's experiences and feelings more directly, as, for example, the comparative analyses of Käfer (2006) examine.

But even despite such differences, the overall similarities that can be drawn in terms of interpretative freedom and epistemic as well as practical disinterestedness between aesthetic experiences in a Kantian sense and religious experiences as understood by the early Schleiermacher in his second speech might still give rise to the systematic question of how these types of experiences can be successfully distinguished from one another without turning out to be one and the same kind of experience in the end.

A first step to react to this question, then, could be to admit that during religious experiences our receptive and productive mental capacities are indeed in a kind of free play that is similar to the one Kant mentions when talking about experiences that lead to aesthetic pleasure: While our receptive sensual and productive conceptual capacities are used in common epistemically engaged perceptual experiences with the purpose of producing true judgments about the states of affairs that are the case in the world around us, when making aesthetic or religious experiences it seems that no such restrictions apply for the interpretations that enter into it. Rather, like in the case of watching some of the ambiguous images that Wittgenstein (1953) alludes to when discussing the notion of seeing-as in the second part of the *Philosophical Investigations*, there seem to be multiple interpretations via which they can be brought into play to make us religiously or aesthetically experience or see something in one way or another, without epistemically forcing us to conclude at the same time that these things actually *are* this or that way for a matter of fact. Nevertheless, to admit this kind of similarity does not mean to give up on the distinction between religious and aesthetic experiences at once: For the conditions of success for religious experiences and aesthetic experiences still seem to differ sufficiently from each other to separate both types of experiences on this basis.

As we have seen, to make a religious experience in Schleiermacher's sense of the term it is crucial to interpret the direct object of the experience as a part of the bigger unity of being that the universe consists in. Put roughly, then, what makes the experience a religious one is that its object is interpreted in such a way that it can function as a *stand-in* for another object, namely the universe of all that exists, via the



property of being a part of this bigger unity and thus being related to it. In contrast, when it comes to making an aesthetic experience a certain notion of unity is required as well, but at a different level of the experience in question. Here, the object of experience is not required to function *pars pro toto* as a stand-in for the bigger unity of being to which it belongs. Rather, the object of an aesthetic experience has to be interpreted in such a way that it presents *itself* as a comprehensible unity of its own.

To illustrate this distinction, take as an example work of art like a painting that depicts a certain scene: When we try to aesthetically experience the painting, we have to understand how its various parts, the brushstrokes over there, the dots over here, and so on, relate to each other and come together so that the artwork can be seen in a unified way as a scene of this or that sort. In this case, then, we do not have to care for the further fact that the artwork is also a part of the bigger unity of all being as a whole or that it could thus be religiously experienced in this respect as well. However, this, of course, does not exclude that we could also experience the artwork religiously. For we could also see it as a painting that belongs to the universe just as everything else that exists does. But to do so would mean to focus on a certain relational aspect of the painting that connects it to the rest of the universe rather than to attend to the various different properties and internal relations that make up the artwork's own unique structure. In this sense, following a distinction made by Nanay (2015, 105–110) in terms of attention or directedness to objects and their properties, we could also describe this difference between experiencing the artwork religiously and experiencing it aesthetically by saying that religious experiences are focused in their directedness towards a certain relevant property of the direct object of the experience, whereas aesthetic experiences are more distributed in their directedness when it comes to the properties of the very object of experience that stands in its focus.

Thus, to sum up, even though aesthetic and religious experiences have a number of features in common, there seems to be no philosophical trouble in conceptually keeping them apart. Religious experiences attend to the experienced object's property of belonging to a bigger unity which is the unity of all being that Schleiermacher terms »the universe«. Contrarily, aesthetic experiences attend to various properties and structural aspects of the experienced object to comprehend it as a unified whole of its own. Regardless of this differentiation, however, a Schleiermacherian account of religious experience, as it was presented in this paper, is also in no need to deny that religious experiences and aesthetic experiences can occur together or influence each other or even that some aesthetic experiences might be religious experiences and vice versa. Quite on the contrary, Schleiermacher's account of religious experience even helps us to get a better grasp of why religion and art often seem to go hand in hand. For it is not only possible to make religious experiences and aesthetic experiences with the same objects. Moreover, it seems also very likely that religious

experiences can be fueled by experiences of works of art, just as aesthetic experiences can conversely be inspired by religious experiences. As Klemm (2005) has pointed out, it seems even far from surprising on a Schleiermacherian background like this that certain works of art might have been made specifically to express and cultivate religious experiences intersubjectively, thus explaining the vast number of works of art found in churches or other places of religious conduct.

## 5 Religiousness and Its Accompanists: How Revisionary is Schleiermacher's Account of Having Religion?

In the previous sections, I presented a contemplative understanding of the nature of religious experiences and religiousness by reconstructing some central ideas and remarks of the early Friedrich Schleiermacher. This understanding, as I have tried to show, not only supplies us with a way to philosophically think about religious experiences that gives us a unifying formal description of the great variety of religious experiences that different people seem to make. It also allows us to disconnect the question of what religiousness amounts to from other difficult epistemological or metaphysical topics like the question of whether belief in supernatural entities like God can be justified. Additionally, it helps to explain the relation between religious intuitions and religious emotions and, as was argued in the last section, the relation between religious experiences and aesthetic experiences alike.

In this section, I want to conclude by discussing an objection that could be raised against the gist of those suggestions: As was sketched out in the previous sections, Schleiermacher disconnects religious experiences from our epistemic engagement with the world. According to him, they have nothing to do with justifying certain metaphysical or moral beliefs or actions. In consequence, religiousness, when explained in terms of making such experiences, has nothing to do with doxastic attitudes either. But even though this line of thought might come with some philosophical advantages, it also seems to ignore the more doxastic aspects that appear to be coinciding with a religious way of life.

For instance, it simply seems *false* that being a Christian has nothing to do with holding certain beliefs. In fact, for many Christians being a Christian seems to quite essentially include a doxastic agreement to certain metaphysical or moral contents like the ones expressed in the apostolic creed. Therefore, a purely contemplative account of having religion or religious experiences is endangered to be unbearably revisionary for at least many people who would call themselves religious in this more doxastic sense of the term.

As far as I see it, this objection gets the situation right insofar as it is true that a contemplative account of religiousness as presented in this paper has some revisionary potential in claiming that religiousness as such has not essentially anything to do with doxastic attitudes, may they be metaphysical or moral, and that neither religious experiences have. Therefore, it is plausible to think that even doing theology is not essentially metaphysical or moral for Schleiermacher. Rather, he expresses the opinion at several points in the speeches that, in its intersubjective aspects, religion itself is solely concerned with finding suitable expressions for communicating one's own religious intuitions to others so that they can make similar experiences of their own at best. For example, at the beginning of the third speech, he states the following remark in this respect:

When religion stirs with all its own power, when in the flow of this movement it sweeps along with it every faculty of one's mind into service, it thus also expects to penetrate to the innermost being of every individual who breathes its atmosphere. [...] Only in this way, through the natural expressions of its own life, does religion wish to arouse what is similar. Where this is not successful, it proudly disdains every external attraction, every violent procedure, calmed in the conviction that the hour is not yet present in which something congenial to itself could stir. (Schleiermacher 1799, 55)

Now, naturally, if this is the case, then no epistemically engaged truth claims infect this domain of religious expression. From the poetic language of preaching and praying up to even the most explicit and non-metaphorical levels of speech in theological discourse, then, all that is invested here is the mere articulation of the contemplative religious experiences and feelings in which religiousness consists.

Thus, the most direct way to react to the objection above from a Schleiermacherian perspective seems to be to just bite the bullet and claim that despite the fact that it appears counter-intuitive at first glance not to define religiousness primarily in doxastic, but in contemplative terms, it is still right to do so. Schleiermacher seems to hint at a similar point when he claims that it is simply a common misunderstanding to essentially locate topics of morals or metaphysics in the domain of religion and to go on to criticize religion on exactly that basis for having terrible effects. As he writes:

How wrongly, therefore, do you turn on religion with your reproaches that it is bent on persecution and spitefulness, that it wrecks society and makes blood flow like water. Indict those who corrupt religion, who want to inundate it with philosophy and fetter it to a system. What is it in religion over which men have argued, taken sides, and ignited wars? Sometimes over morals and always over metaphysics, and neither of these belongs to it. (Schleiermacher 1799, 27–28)

Yet, even though Schleiermacher does not get tired of emphasizing in such statements that metaphysical or moral affairs do not belong in the realm of what is

essentially religious, this does not seem to mean that metaphysical or moral issues cannot *accompany* religion on the fringes of its own domain. For, as Schleiermacher (1799, 19) puts it, morals, metaphysics, and religion still share the same object, even if they differ in regard to their stances towards it. Therefore, it is not excluded from Schleiermacher's picture of religion that engaging with the universe and its parts religiously might contingently go together with engaging with it in certain metaphysical or moral respects, too.

Why this might be the case gets even clearer if we keep in mind, as Grove (2004, 343–345) has noted, that even though no epistemic claims about how the universe is or ought to be are made while experiencing the universe in this or that way religiously there will be at least some kind of implicit conception of the universe and its components involved in the experience nonetheless. For, as Grove argues, this is the only condition under which a particular object of experience could be religiously interpreted *as a part* of this very universe in the respective way it is seen at all. Then, however, it also seems possible that this implicit conception of the universe and its components cannot only be further explicated in more refined religious ways but also that it can become a topic of thought in epistemically engaged metaphysical ways. And in a similar way, this maneuver could lead to certain morally relevant conclusions and actions regarding the universe and its respective parts as well.

Therefore, even if we agree with Schleiermacher that religiousness does not essentially include metaphysical or moral endeavors and that religious experiences are not the kind of experiences that perceptually *justify* normative or descriptive beliefs of a certain sort, we can nonetheless acknowledge that certain religious experiences may still coincide with or contingently lead to certain kinds of metaphysical or moral beliefs or actions. Along those lines, then, we will still be able to say that, even though moral and metaphysical forms of engagement with the world are not themselves aspects of religiousness essentially, they are phenomena that may nonetheless be closely related to the institutions of many religions as well as to many people's individual ways of religiously living their lives.

For instance, one might develop an interest to further metaphysically or morally examine the thought that the world was created by an intelligent designer after making a religious intuition that presented certain parts of this world *as if* they were parts of a teleological whole created by such an intelligent designer, even though this experience on its own should not and would not at the same time be considered apt to make such a thought theoretically rational or practically binding in any sense in a Schleiermacherian picture of religious experience. And in just a similar spirit, too, as Schleiermacher has put it himself, we can then say the other way around that, solely and merely, »religious feelings should accompany every human deed like a holy music; we should do everything with religion, nothing because of religion« (Schleiermacher 1799, 30).

With all of this said, however, we can see clearly once more that a Schleiermacherian approach to religion and religious experience at the same time simply leaves open whether or not some of the diverse metaphysical or moral worldviews that religious people may come to hold turn out to be true and justified or rather false and ungrounded. Thus, for example, neither for theists nor for naturalists or atheists is anything, in this respect, lost merely by accepting a Schleiermacherian understanding of religion. And exactly this fact seems to be a major benefit of Schleiermacher's approach to this topic, as long as we are interested in retaining that religious engagement with the world *can be* a perfectly fine and legitimate part of our lives: For there might be good arguments for the existence of God just as there might be good arguments against God's existence. But whether we should be religious or not does not directly depend on the quality of any such arguments if we adopt a Schleiermacherian account of what religiousness essentially is.

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