

"We Live Deeper than We Think":¹ The Genius of Schleiermacher's Earliest Ethics

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TOWARD A PROPER ASSESSMENT

It is not only successful products which have their "logo." So do "major thinkers." Sometimes they have several. Among these are frequently negative labels that other "major thinkers" have attributed to them, sometimes in retrospect. It is the fate of a number of thinkers that such caricatures accompany them, even pursue them, like a shadow. Schleiermacher's work and history of effects has stood in the shadow of at least two such caricatures. The philosopher Hegel depicted Schleiermacher as a thinker lacking philosophical seriousness, because Schleiermacher concentrated on "the feeling of absolute dependence." According to Hegel, if the feeling of absolute dependence is indeed central to religion, then a dog whimpering before its master is "the best Christian." The theologian Karl Barth reproached Schleiermacher with "starting from the human being," and for that reason Barth considered Schleiermacher incapable of developing a serious theology.² Anthropology instead of theology, mixed up ideas dominated by feeling, individualism, mysticism--the most significant theologian of the nineteenth century has gathered around himself an entire palette of polemical images.

These negative labels and polemical images have not, however, prevented Schleiermacher's thought from having a great effect. Perhaps no one contributed as much as he did to the consolidation of bourgeois piety in the nineteenth century. However, this history of effects is highly ambiguous. It went hand in hand with a powerful, systematic depletion of Christian faith and Christian piety.³ Schleiermacher integrated an astonishingly reductionistic theology into an extremely subtle theory of culture, which he called "ethics." One can expect that Schleiermacher's history of effects as a cultural theorist will hold richer blessings than his history of effects as a theologian. For the most part that history still lies before us, but it has already dawned in the constructive reception his hermeneutical proposals have received from

1 Thus William Schweiker has reformulated the quote from Bernard Meland: "We live more profoundly than we can think." *Fallible Forms and Symbols*, 82.

2 The late Barth, however, modified this judgment. Cf. his afterword to the Schleiermacher selection edited by Heinz Bolli, *Schleiermacher-Auswahl* (Siebenstern TB 419), 3d ed. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1983) Concluding Unscientific Postscript on Schleiermacher, *Studies in Religion* 7 No 2:117-135, 1978.

3 See William Schweiker and Michael Welker, *Integrity, Dignity, Truth: Beyond the Crisis of Christianity in the West* (Valley Forge: Trinity, 1998, forthcoming).

philosophy (at the instigation of Wilhelm Dilthey⁴, Hans-Georg Gadamer⁵, Paul Ricoeur⁶ and Manfred Frank⁷, among others). It has dawned in the fact that Schleiermacher's thought has come to be generally regarded as a turning point in the history of this discipline.⁸ It has also dawned in the fact that his thought is discussed with increasing intensity as an alternative to typically modern philosophies. Finally, it has dawned in the discovery of Schleiermacher as a theorist in search of forms of the "open society" which today we also term "civil society."⁹ But why has Schleiermacher's thought had such a hard time emerging from the shadows of negative logos and of polemical images? Why has Schleiermacher so long remained an "inside tip" for the erudite and the specialist?

I think that the answer must be at least threefold. First, Schleiermacher's theoretical framework, his "ethics," is highly complex. It is a very broadly conceived theory of culture, which he reworked again and again, but which he never brought to the point where it would be ripe for publication. One can readily see the reasons for this. Schleiermacher's program is to grasp the ways in which diverse, concrete individuality and social and cultural forms hang together. The program itself is the product of genius, but it is difficult to carry through. This is neglected or underestimated by those who reduce Schleiermacher to the status of a modern theorist of subjectivity. Second, the positive and negative resonance of Schleiermacher's reductionistic theology obscured the rich context in which this theology is embedded--a context provided by his theory of culture. Unlike Schleiermacher's theology, his theoretical framework can not be readily captured in a logo or in negative images. Third, while a self-

4 Wilhelm Dilthey, "Die Entstehung der Hermeneutik", in idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 5, Erste Hälfte (Leipzig/Berlin: B.G. Teubner, 1924), 317-331; idem, *Leben Schleiermachers*, 2. Bd.: *Schleiermachers System als Philosophie und Theologie*, 2 Halbbände., edited by Martin Redeker (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1966).

5 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1960) *Truth and Method*, Continuum: New York, 1993; idem, "Zur Problematik des Selbstverständnisses", in *Einsichten. FS für Gerhard Krüger*, edited by Klaus Oehler / Richard Schäffler (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1962), pp. 71-85; idem, *Hegels Dialektik. Fünf hermeneutische Studien* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1971). *Hegel's Dialectic. Five Hermeneutical Studies*, Yale University Press 1982

6 Paul Ricoeur, *De l'interprétation: Essai sur Freud* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1965); idem, *Le conflit des interprétations: Essais d'herméneutique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969) *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, Yale University Press, London 1977; *Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, Athlone Press: London 1989.

7 Manfred Frank, *Das individuelle Allgemeine. Textstrukturierung und -interpretation nach Schleiermacher* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1977).

8 Cf., for instance, Stefan Hübsch, *Philosophie und Gewissen. Beiträge zur Rehabilitierung des philosophischen Gewissensbegriffs* (Neue Studien zur Philosophie 10), (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck 1995); idem, "Gewissen bei Schleiermacher," in *Evangelische Theologie* 56 (1996), pp. 446-457.

9 Bernd Oberdorfer, *Geselligkeit und Realisierung von Sittlichkeit. Die Theorieentwicklung Friedrich Schleiermachers bis 1799* (Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann 69), (Berlin / New York: de Gruyter, 1995); idem, "Von der Freundschaft zur Geselligkeit. Leitkonfigurationen der Theorieentwicklung des jungen Schleiermacher bis zu den 'Reden'", in *Evangelische Theologie* 56 (1996), pp. 415-434.

assured modernity could find a good religious-ideological core in Schleiermacher's theology, modernity must lose some of that self-assurance with regard to its own foundations if it is to listen attentively to the rest of Schleiermacher's thought. In his ethics, Schleiermacher's thought systematically requires a movement beyond modernity. Indeed, this is true from the very beginning of that ethics.

In the following presentation I want to cast light on those initial beginnings. I hope that this light makes clear Schleiermacher's independence and genius as a systematician, and the as yet unextracted riches of his thought. My intent is modest in the extreme. With regard to only one text, comprising only a few pages, I want to present to present a rudimentary conception of ethics that I think is the fruit of genius. This conception combines reflections on individual self-relation, reflections on person-to-person communication and interaction, reflections on complex social relations, and, finally, theoretical perspectives on feeling and religion. It thus is necessary to distinguish and to relate several dimensions.

In the various studies that follow the commentary on Aristotle, Schleiermacher develops partial aspects of this overall interconnection, without losing sight of the complex structure of relationships between the various connected dimensions of common life.¹⁰ If we look at the complex structure of Schleiermacher's earliest conception of ethics, we will understand why it was only by means of the major reductionism wrought by Schleiermacher in his "Speeches" that his thought reached the point where it could be published and enjoy public success. But we will also have to ask how we can avoid this reductionism and can find a way for the more profound Schleiermacher, the Schleiermacher who is closer to life, to gain influence and to receive the honor he is due. As was said above, Schleiermacher's conception of ethics challenges modern thought to move beyond itself. Is it possible to develop his conception with the complexity and the true-to-life realism with which the young Schleiermacher conceived it? The following attempt to think through Schleiermacher's earliest conception of ethics and to bring it under intellectual control seeks to take a step in that direction.

10 Cf. *Evangelische Theologie: Schleiermacher: Religion, Schicksal und Gewissen*, no. 5, vol. 56 (1996), esp. the contributions by Dorette Seibert, "Auf dem Weg zum 'Herrnhuter höherer Ordnung'? Schleiermacher und Herrnhut", pp. 395-414; Bernd Oberdorfer (cf. footnote 9) and Evamaria Bohle, "Abhängigkeit und Wechselwirkung. Der Schicksalsbegriff in Schleiermachers Jugendschrift 'Über den Wert des Lebens'", pp. 435-446. Cf. also Michael Welker, "Schleiermacher - Denker über die Moderne hinaus," in *Ruperto Carola, Heidelberg* 1997.

ELEMENTS OF SCHLEIERMACHER'S EARLY ETHICS

The earliest text that has come down to us from Schleiermacher is dated to the year 1788 by the editors. It thus predates the "Speeches" by over a decade. It bears the unprepossessing title "Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics 8-9." It only becomes accessible in English in this issue of *Theology Today*.¹¹ Extensive stretches of this text offer reflections and commentary on Aristotle's ethics in general and on his theory of friendship in particular, which will not be of much interest outside the circle of Schleiermacher specialists. But on the first four or five pages we find the sketch of an ethics which astonishes by its originality and creativity. A twenty-year-old genius is proposing a fruitful structure for ethical reflection, a structure that even to this day we have not really elaborated, with riches that we have yet to mine.

First, Schleiermacher takes as his starting point the fact that we live in cultural and social environments that are shaped by us and by our fellow human beings. He speaks of a "civil society" or of a "civil institution". Those who are strengthened by the socio-cultural environment in which they live ought to help those who are weakened by this same environment.¹² The more strongly some have been favored, the greater is their duty to help. The more strongly some have been disadvantaged, the greater and the more justified are their claims.¹³ It is striking that Schleiermacher does not think in the typically modern direction from the subject to the environment, but instead thinks from the environment to the subject. At the same time he explicitly thematizes subjective moral reflection. It is not pity, but practical reason that suggests this "rule" as a duty of "one's own judgment".¹⁴

Yet this confrontation with one's own "undeserved privilege," as Schleiermacher says, with

11 Friedrich Schleiermacher, "Notes on Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics 8-9," *Theology Today* 56 (1999), 164-8.

12 In Schleiermacher's complicated style of expression: "If we as members of a civil society possess an assemblage of goods and enjoy an assemblage of happinesses in which we never would have come to have a part without that society, there are by contrast others who as citizens enjoy less of what is good and have fewer means to happiness that they would have had simply as human beings. We therefore owe it to them to take a part of the excess with which we have been *favored* and to employ it for the improvement of the condition of these unfortunate persons, who have become the victims of a destiny that could just as easily have been our own." *Ibid.*, 165.

13 The "rule" is "that the person whose misfortune most derives from this civil institution is the one who has the most claims on me, and that this duty is the strongest for those who have been most highly favored with civil goods by this institution." *Ibid.*

14 That is, the persons favored the most by their environment are to help those the most who are most strongly disadvantaged by this environment.

the disadvantage of others and with reason's demands for equalizing compensation is not strong enough to give rise to beneficent actions in a way that can be dependably expected. The binding power of this obligation is insufficient. What help offers itself? Schleiermacher's answer is that sentiment must derive strong satisfaction from beneficent activity in order to be motivated to further actions in accord with the initial ones. But how do strong sentiments of this sort arise? Here Schleiermacher introduces a second complex insight that is a stroke of genius: Individual benevolent actions normally do little to help disadvantaged human beings. By contrast, a multiplicity of actions, both of one's own and of others, in favor of those who are weaker not only helps them more, but also strengthens the intensity of the sentiments of those performing the benevolent actions. The consciousness of the more intensive attention to the affected human beings,¹⁵ the consciousness of the increasing efficiency of the help, and the consciousness of being involved oneself and of others beings involved as well strengthen each other reciprocally. A dimension thereby comes into play that Schleiermacher calls "sociable connections".¹⁶

The good deed and its exemplary power of influence is individually perceived with strong sentiments when this deed is strengthened by analogous deeds of others or gives rise to analogous deeds by others. The theory of sentiment thus proceeds from, on the one hand, the context of person-to-person relationships and, on the other hand, complex social relations, which Schleiermacher calls "sociable." Complex and strengthening sentiments arise in me when my action is embedded in an interconnection with the action of other human beings, strengthening this interconnection and being strengthened by it.

By contrast, Schleiermacher expects little success from the attempt to develop an ethos solely out of merciful person-to-person relationships. He criticizes the good deed done out of a condescension that gives rise to egotistic feelings ("to be the author of another's happiness"), and asks: "How can sociable sentiments of significant strength arise from these egotistic feelings?"¹⁷. Moral self-reflection and the ethos of "the other" or of "being for others" are thus from the outset embedded in more complex social forms. We find ourselves and others in environments that are shaped by us and by others, both actively and passively. If our

15 Ibid., 166.

16 On the significance of Schleiermacher's theory of sociability for his thought, see M. Welker, "Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher: Universalisierung von Humanität," *Grundprobleme der großen Philosophen, Philosophie der Neuzeit III*, ed. J. Speck (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1983), pp. 9-45; Bernd Oberdorfer, *Geselligkeit und Realisierung von Sittlichkeit* (cf. footnote 9).

17 Ibid.

actions are to be accompanied by strong sentiments or to give rise to strong sentiments, we must reflect on those actions with regard to their "sociable" embeddedness and influence. Whoever disregards this context of Schleiermacher's theory of feeling, whoever thinks of "feeling" only as a form of self-related sensitivity or as a more or less clear or diffuse sense of one's environment, has lost sight of Schleiermacher's thought.

The third fundamental idea connects piety with the complex ethical line of thought and with the theory of feeling and of sociability. If I not only perform individual beneficent actions, but at the same time, through and with these actions, enter into or give rise to reciprocal relations that are sociable, beneficent, and strong in feeling, I contribute to "promoting God's glorification". More precisely: it is always "we" who contribute to that glorification. No matter how strong and pure the individual relation to God may be, it rises to the level of glorification only when it draws other human beings into this relation or acquires a share in the others' relations to God. At the same time, Schleiermacher sees that this glorification has practical-ethical dimensions. Inasmuch as beneficent actions are done to God's honor in a contagious way, "the perfection in the individual parts of the world as a whole [becomes] more and more clear to me and to others, and the apparent imperfections and disharmonies disappear."¹⁸

Yet a fourth idea is required in order to grasp Schleiermacher's early concept of ethics and to understand his genius in the way it pushes us beyond modern thought. This idea is esteem for individual difference, or the concept of "polyindividuality." Today this polyindividuality is captured and emphasized in the vague talk of "diversity," "plurality," "sociality" and "relationality."¹⁹ The attempt to grasp polyindividuality and to think it through is an important shift in comparison to typically modern thought.

When typically modern thought employed the foundational anthropological concepts "individual," "subject," "person" and "ego," it always tied them simultaneously to radical uniqueness and universality. I am this ego here and now--and at the same time a representative of the human species! The subject is unique and at the same time a bearer of universal transcendental conditions of knowledge. The universal forms subsumed the unique

18 Ibid.

19 Use of these vague notions does not yet amount, as is often erroneously assumed, to proposing a conception of "pluralism." Cf. Michael Welker, *Kirche im Pluralismus* (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1995).

individuality. Reason and ethical life characterized the individual in and prior to all other expressions of herself. By contrast, Schleiermacher belongs among those precursors of so-called postmodernity who weight individual difference more strongly than universal commonality. In order to highlight this subtle but important difference, I recommend differentiating modern "individualism," with its assumptions of homogeneity and of abstract equality, from "polyindividualism."²⁰ Polyindividualism emphasizes individual differences without thereby necessarily surrendering the interest in what is universal and the search for commonality. But with this shift an important displacement with extremely far-reaching consequences occurs in what is assumed to be self-evident.

Schleiermacher emphasizes that a "practice of beneficence that is really supposed to nourish sociable sentiments, and even to awaken the need for them", must induce human beings to transcend themselves and their own conceptions and ideas about beneficence.²¹ This requires a readiness to mediate sameness and difference. It is also essential that there be an interest in having one's own ideas and conceptions broadened by those of "another being." On the one hand, Schleiermacher expresses this with the term "subordination". On the other hand, he says that in this subordination we can "not consider [the other being] otherwise than from the perspective of equality."²² The individual grows and unfolds only in this free subordination. The reciprocal sentiments of sociability and of relations of friendship unfold only in this lively and changing interplay of sameness and difference, of subordination and growth, of the assertion of higher position and the strengthening of the one who is subordinated.

It is unclear in Schleiermacher's text whether it is the recipients of the beneficent deeds or other exemplary practitioners of beneficence who spur on one's own free subordination and the attendant growth of personality. The ethical, sociable and doxological community that Schleiermacher has in mind bursts the mold--so difficult to avoid in personalistic forms of thought--that divides people into two classes. The giver and the receiver of a beneficent action are "needy" in different ways.²³

20 Existentialism attempted to press forward to this differentiation. Existentialism emphasized the radical uniqueness of the individual, but at the same time carried along the baggage of the modern world of forms. Each human being sought to attain "his own most authenticity."

21 According to Schleiermacher, beneficence must "move beyond the system of its own ideas", "Notes on Aristotle," 166.

22 Ibid., 167.

23 "This beneficence is therefore the most praiseworthy type, because in it human beings are always conceived and treated as beings that are free and follow their own maxims, yet at the same time are needy" (5,23-25).

The sentiments of being dependent and the sentiments of power that promote both personal development and the ethical, sociable and doxological community, are by no means the same in all human beings. Nor do they change simply with an increase or decrease in external situations of need. They also change with age. Building on Aristotle, Schleiermacher reflects upon the feelings of religion, ethical life, and sociability taking different forms in youth, adults and seniors. In a sketchy manner he reflects upon the different ways in which social sensibility and the powers of life are constituted in the various stages of life, and upon the corresponding ethical and religious sentiments, as well as their interplay.

As the young Schleiermacher sees it, religion can have a tempering effect on the young man, who tends to bring in too much of his own subjectivity and thus to introduce "a powerful illusion into the interest of the rest."²⁴ Religion prevents the young man from bringing too much of himself into ethical and sociable relations, from being overly determined by his own pride and his own affects. Religion can lend heightened power to the adult, because by means of religion she finds other human beings who are like-minded and who offer communal powers to open a broad field for ethical actions. While friendship brings together two persons or just a few, religion brings together a multitude of human beings. Finally, for the elderly person whose own capacity for action has grown weak and who is resigned in the face of the powers of the world, religion provides assistance by helping him to recognize, not just ideally but in a very realistic way, that his spirit can have an ongoing effect, not only in his immediate friends, but also in generations to come (cf. 6-7). Moreover, this happens not through an external art of persuasion or through the exercise of power to gain influence, but through an intimate commonality, the purpose of which is the shared glorification of God and the shared transformation of disharmonies in this world.

CRITIQUE OF KANT

If one has grasped the complex internal constitution of Schleiermacher's earliest ethical study, one can readily discern the logical consistency of Schleiermacher's various critical engagements with Kant's thought. In "On the Highest Good,"²⁵ a text written in 1789,

24 Ibid.

25 *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, I/1, 83-125.

Schleiermacher attempts to understand the possibility of shared orientation in the multiplicity of individual personality formation. The appeal to self-referential regulative reason is insufficient because it does not provide a way of grasping the individual differences among those endowed with reason. Schleiermacher insightfully objects that Kant is unable to think of the sensually determined faculty of desire in any way other than by negation and exclusion. In a text entitled "Dialogue on Freedom,"²⁶ Schleiermacher problematizes Kant's understanding of freedom by adopting the style of the Platonic dialogues and attempting to unify various understandings of freedom with the Kantian understanding, and to bring them "under one meaning": political, civil, external and internal, indeterminate freedom and freedom in the Kantian sense.²⁷ At the same time Schleiermacher is seeking to specify complex and coherent conceptions that, in their power of integration, occasion pleasure and excite people to take interest and to act. He is not aiming at conceptions that, in their simplicity and homogeneity, demonstrate only minor synthetic and stimulating power. He sees in nature and religion examples of that which he envisions conceptually. "All of nature gives us the finest example of this when, under gentle heavens after a refreshing rain, we enjoy the vista of the realm of plants in the beautiful order planted by the Creator."²⁸ It is characteristic of Schleiermacher that he seeks in the image of revitalized nature in bloom an equivalent to Kant's reverence before the movement of the planets and the moral law in us. Reason is directed not only toward correctness and coherence, but also toward "harmony, beauty and perfection," which--according to Schleiermacher's thesis--delight and enrapture us: "Sensuality incessantly presents reason with the problem of providing for the greatest possible continuous satisfaction of the totality of inclinations in one subject. This is a problem that reason will never be capable of solving."²⁹

DIVERSE INDIVIDUALITY WITHIN COMMUNITY

Independently of his critique of Kant and of his attempts to develop an alternative to Kant's ethics, Schleiermacher also proceeds with his efforts to clarify how we can orient ourselves in a community marked by manifold, diverse individuality. A short piece from 1798 on "The

26 Ibid., 137-64.

27 Ibid., 141-42.

28 Ibid., 156.

29 Ibid., 164.

Naïve"³⁰ and a writing from 1790/91 "On Style"³¹ serve these clarifications. The writing "On Style," Schleiermacher's first hermeneutical writing, reflects on the purpose of style: to procure understanding, on the one hand, and interest, on the other.³² "On Style" takes as its point of departure the individual selectivity, the particular preferences, talents and facilities of individual faculties of perception, imagination and thought. This particularity of perception can render us unable to communicate ourselves to other human beings. But on the basis of this particularity of perception we, with the help of style, communicate a particular communal effect, a particular nuanced mediation, and new degrees of insight and of comprehensibility. Schleiermacher proceeds to attempt to characterize style more precisely with regard to its clarity, its appropriateness, its facility and its vitality. Here, too, his goal is to preserve the complexity of psychological and social interconnections, while mediating individual and perspectival insights.

Schleiermacher also retains the theme of piety in his early studies. In the 1790 writing entitled "To Cecilia,"³³ he works through his own development, his break from Herrnhut, by writing five letters to a fictitious friend named Cecilia, who is upset, indeed profoundly distraught, by the religious skepticism of a mutual friend named Selmar. Schleiermacher attempts to explain to Cecilia that this attitude which so disturbs her represents only a phase in a complex religious and biographical development. He empathetically describes this phase, which he maintains is typical. He then characterizes further stages of individual intellectual and religious development, in which the interplay of feeling and reason changes, and in which the relations between virtue, religion, sociability and blessedness take different forms. Here he is sketching a theory of individual development and formation in a broader attempt to grasp individuality in a more differentiated way, and at the same time to uncover typical shared forms without distorting or obscuring the details of the purely personal course of development and formation.

This capacity to make sensitive connections between self-observation, transcendental reflection, reconstructions of typical individual developments, and reconstructions of both interpersonal and complex social relations of interaction is characteristic of Schleiermacher's thought. The study of philosophical, theological and literary classics was not the primary

30 Ibid., 177-187.

31 Ibid., 363-390.

32 Ibid., 369.

33 Ibid., 191ff. Cf. Seibert, "Auf dem Weg."

means by which he acquired this capacity. Instead his family background, above all his multi-year residence in the Pietist community of Herrnhut, inculcated in him this sensitive and innovative way of thinking in complex interconnections. Already as a thirteen-year-old he receives letters from his mother and father in which they charge him to make himself receptive to the love of Jesus Christ in his soul, and to attach himself completely to the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ and to the community. The thirteen-year-old responds to his parents that he does not rightly sense "that the love of Jesus Christ already dwells in his soul."³⁴ He assures them all the more zealously that he wishes to hold fast to the community: that is, to take his orientation from the relations and forms of expression in the Pietist community. At the age of seventeen Schleiermacher for the first time reveals to his father his doubts about the theological honesty of the upbringing in the Moravian community. On January 21, 1787 he writes to his "tenderly beloved" father that he must leave the community due to strong doubts about the faith.³⁵ He writes that for now he has lost his faith, and he earnestly implores his father to petition God to restore this faith to him. He emphasizes repeatedly that he must have the opportunity to test the arguments advanced both in favor of and against the Christian faith.

His father is very upset and responds with a cascade of laments and accusations. He calls his son a "horrible disturber of the rest of [his] blessed mother" (who has died in the meantime),³⁶ and reproaches him because he no longer prays to the God of his father and "no longer kneels before *one* altar with him."³⁷ After the break can not be mended and after Schleiermacher decides to study in Halle, his father turns to secular opinions. He says that his son ought to practice speaking English and French,³⁸ that he ought to be cautious and prudent in his dealings with his sister and other persons, and that he should attempt to transpose himself into other human beings' way of thinking.³⁹ All these messages do not fail to have their effect on the son. After he arrives in Halle, he writes and tells his father how cautious he wants to be in entering into student public life and other public circles, how careful he wants to be in cultivating his dealings with others, how dangerous it is to become too familiar in one's relations with other persons, because otherwise one will to a large extent lose track of the goal

34 *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* V/1, ed. Andreas Arndt and Wolfgang Virmond, (Berlin / New York: de Gruyter, 1985), Brief 4, 4.2.

35 *Ibid.*, Brief 53, 49-52.

36 *Ibid.*, Brief 54, 53.

37 *Ibid.*, Brief 54, 55.

38 *Ibid.*, Brief 62, 67, Brief 80, 93; Brief 84, 95f, Brief 88, 99.

39 *Ibid.*, Brief 84, 96; Brief 88, 99.

of learning the fine art of living, and so on.⁴⁰ Here we have a very particular relation to interpersonal, community and social contacts and environments. It is a secularized religious relation, a highly sensitive relation, a relation that has undergone manifold brokenness and reflection. We must pay attention to this background and come to a sharper vision of it if we want to understand the genius of the way in which Schleiermacher introduces his commentary on Aristotle's ethics.

"We live deeper than we think." In his earliest ethical study, Schleiermacher combines transcendental-philosophical reflection with steps towards an ethics of the immediate personal sphere, towards social ethics, the theory of sociability, the theory of feeling and the theory of religion. He does this because he is attempting to capture the depth of life in his thought. We owe the genius of his ethical proposal to the fact that his thought is profoundly anchored in the depth of life. This proposal is not only a key to Schleiermacher's development. It sets high standards, even two hundred years later, for every effort to develop a philosophical or theological ethics.

40 Ibid., Brief 91, 101.