

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) is sometimes referred to as the “father of liberal Protestant theology,” largely on the strength of his massive work of systematic theology, *The Christian Faith*. It is generally recognized that Schleiermacher grounded his theological work in an innovative and historically important understanding of religion in general, and that the influence of his thought about religion has extended beyond the boundaries of theology. In *Schleiermacher on Religion and the Natural Order*, Andrew C. Dole presents a new account of Schleiermacher’s theory of religion. His purpose is to challenge a deeply entrenched tradition that characterizes Schleiermacher’s account of religion as “subjective” or “individualistic.” While many scholars view Schleiermacher primarily as a theorist of “religious experience,” Dole argues that Schleiermacher integrates the individualistic side of religion with a set of claims about its social dynamics, and that this takes place within a broader understanding of all events in the world as the product of a universal, law-governed “causal nexus.” Schleiermacher argued that religion emerges out of the interactions of cause and effect that constitute the “natural order”—or *Naturzusammenhang*—and is thus to be understood as naturally caused.

Properly understood, says Dole, Schleiermacher’s account of religion is an early and important example of a combination of theology and the “scientific” study of religion. Dole focuses particularly on Schleiermacher’s lectures in ethics at Halle and Berlin, wherein he developed an understanding of religion as a process of the social formation of feeling, and also investigates

the relationship between this account of religion and Schleiermacher's theological account of Christianity in *The Christian Faith*. By calling attention to this under-discussed aspect of Schleiermacher's work, Dole hopes to correct the historical record and stimulate interest in Schleiermacher outside the field of theological studies.

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