

CALL FOR PAPERS: INTERNATIONAL SCHLEIERMACHER CONGRESS 2020

Theme:

Communication in Philosophy, Religion, and Society

Date:

June 2-5, 2020

Location:

Université Paris IV Sorbonne (June 2, 2020); Université Nanterre (June 3, 2020); Institut Protestant de Théologie Paris, IPT (June 3-4, 2020)

Organizers:

Université Paris Nanterre (Christian Berner); Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Sarah Schmidt); Centre Georg Simmel-EHESS/CNRS (Denis Thouard); Internationale Schleiermacher Gesellschaft

In the “age of digital communication” words and images travel effortlessly across vast distances, transmission rates are calculated in fractions of a second, storage capacity seems unlimited, and the world is connected by various forms of social networking and social media. Everyone everywhere is texting, emailing, facebooking, twittering, and googling. Meanwhile, information – its diffusion, selection, withholding, manipulation, analysis, and utilization – is becoming a central economic and political factor reflecting power differentials and fueling conflict. At the mercy of all this is the individual “user.”

Such a situation demands critical reflection on the contemporary conditions of communication, including not only informed criticism of this new “information economy” but also careful attention to the concept of communication itself. Our daily dealings with Twitter and Co. threaten to oversimplify this complex concept, for the frequent sending of increasingly shorter messages and simpler “likes” not only normalizes a type of communication fixated on Either/Or decisions, but also fosters the positivistic notion that processes of communication amount to little more than the sending back and forth of packets of information.

In this context it is worthwhile to step back and consider conceptions of communication that, long before the digital revolution, once shed light on the nature of communication—its linguistic, cultural, and social dependence, its religious and aesthetic significance, as well as its profound ethical dimensions.

The 2020 Schleiermacher Congress in Paris will examine the philosopher, theologian, pedagogue, translator, and educational reformer Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher from the perspective of his work as a theorist of communication.

Whether as university teacher, preacher, political reformer, journalist, salon frequenter, or personal correspondent, Schleiermacher was himself a gifted communicator. The concept of communication, moreover, gathers together and concentrates many central aspects of his thought. Far from forming a rigid system, his philosophy, theology, and philological practice are distinguished by a pronounced fluidity. For Schleiermacher, knowledge (manifesting itself

in language), moral action, religious experience, and the devising of shared institutions are in a constant process of becoming. Indeed, they become real only in exchanges taking place between people who fight, love, and hate each other, who create ideas and meaning together, who struggle for community and maintain their individuality. Communication does not take place in a vacuum; rather, every communication is always at once an expression of, and contribution to, a religious, linguistic, scientific, and cultural history. We inscribe ourselves into this history in each moment, and because of this entanglement we are granted only limited insight into it.

Schleiermacher's theory of communication is grounded in the theory of language and theory of knowledge he developed in his university lectures on hermeneutics and dialectics; it is reflected practically as well as theoretically in his translation work, which acknowledged the ultimate irreducibility of languages; and it is the driving force and modality of a vital religious practice. In his conception of sociability (*Geselligkeit*) as the free play of ideas in an experimental space free of hierarchies, his theory of communication receives its central aesthetic and social meaning and significance. It is also part of an ethical theory which strove to encompass all human activities.

The Paris Schleiermacher Congress aims to explore "communication" in its full range of meanings. For, as constitutive of the human subject, communication determines the further development of all thinking, every judgment of conscience, and each artistic act; yet equally significant is the communication taking place between states, religious communities, and cultures. Special emphasis will be placed on the relevance of Schleiermacher's proposals today as well as their place in the history of ideas, i.e., his systematic parallels with other thinkers and the ability of his thought to inform current debates and address contemporary problems. Approaches that investigate the conditions and possibilities of intercultural and interreligious dialogue or the presuppositions of communicative action are therefore just as welcome as conceptions of authorship or investigations comparing older and newer forms of media.

How can networks of communication be mapped and sorted out, e.g., from Schleiermacher's daily calendar? What significance—social and political as well as religious—should we attribute to the communication of emotions, e.g., in a sermon? What work does translation perform in transferring knowledge and culture? And is there slumbering in Schleiermacher's ethics a politically viable and ethically obligatory form of hospitality and sociability that could provide us with orientation in a time of worldwide migration?

You are cordially invited to think with and beyond Schleiermacher on these and other questions concerning the theory and practice of communication, both yesterday and today. In order to foster interdisciplinary conversation, the conference is organized around three thematic foci:

1. *Polemics – Apologetics: Cultures of Debate in Religion, Science, and Society*
2. *Play – Protest – Utopia: Dimensions of Sociability*
3. *The Materiality and Mediality of Communication: Cultural Practices of Speaking, Writing, Reading, and Translation*

Plenary lectures by invited speakers will take place in the morning. To apply to give an afternoon panel-presentation, please send a title and an abstract of your paper (approx. 200-300 words) in electronic form to Sarah Schmidt (sschmidt@bbaw.de) before October 31, 2019. Please include your name and address and indicate to which of the above themes your paper best belongs.

All conference participants (audience as well as speakers) are warmly invited to have a drink at the Sorbonne on June 2, 2020 and to participate in a reception in the court of Institut Protestant de Théologie Paris (IPT) on June 3, 2020. The organizers are currently seeking funding for the travel and hotel costs for all speakers. However, a reliable confirmation about funding is not possible before early 2020.

A preliminary program of the conference as well as suggestions regarding affordable travel to, and accommodations in, Paris will soon be posted on the website of the Schleiermacher-Gesellschaft: <http://schleiermacher-gesellschaft.theologie.uni-halle.de/de/>