DATA

The 'Kritische Gesamtausgabe' contains 1,356 of Schleiermacher's sermons with ~11,000 pages of text. This is too much to examine it in a traditional 'close reading' approach (in a reasonable amount of time). The corpus is available in readable PDF format.

Based on a keyword search I developed a theologically categorized database of all 2,134 relevant passages containing the term ewig* (etern*).

* wildcard

HEURISTIC MACRO-LEVEL

The heuristic macro-level approach is inspired by Franco Moretti's concept of 'distant reading,' which suggests that larger quantities of text necessitate a greater analytical distance. Using the open-source tool '**Voyant Tools**,' I identified conceptual foci, distributions, and cross-connections in the entire corpus of Schleiermacher's sermons. This approach enabled me to visualize term distributions, examine collocates, and analyze frequency patterns.

- *Trends* visualize the relative frequency of terms, such as the decreasing use of 'eternity' in the corpus.
- *Collocates* identify terms occurring near 'eternity' (five words before and after), revealing contextual usage.
- *TermsBerries* display the most frequent terms and highlight their collocations with *ewig** within the corpus.

This heuristic approach provided initial insights and research possibilities that traditional close reading might overlook.
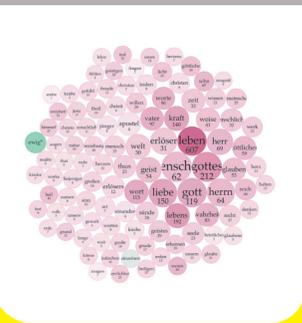
TRENDS

TERMSBERRY

COLLOCATES

METHODOLGY

While digital forms of ecclesial and religious life and reflection are now taken for granted, digital textual research in theology is still in its infancy, if it exists at all.

There are approaches to digital editions in Schleiermacher research with the 'schleiermacher digital' project (*schleiermacher-digital.de*). But, as far as I can see, the possibilities of digital text processing and analysis in theology are still largely unused.

I tried to use computational support, always aware that, as an individual researcher working on a part-time project, I would not be able to delve into the ultimate depths of technology and linguistics. The aim, therefore, was to design a kind of 'do-it-yourself methodology' that would be a real research aid without excessive effort.

So I developed a three level methodology that tries to combine digital approaches and traditional theological research.

I suggest to distinguish three methodological levels, which of course cannot be strictly separated from each other: A heuristic macro-level, an analytical meso-level and a hermeneutic micro-level.
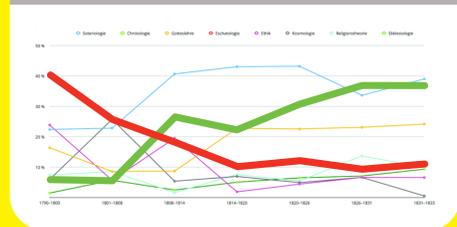
ANALYTICAL MESO-LEVEL

The analytical meso-level of my thesis aims to bridge the gap between classical 'close reading' and digital 'distant reading'. This core methodology involves categorising the 2,134 relevant passages containing the term *ewig** (*etern**). I have classified these passages into specific theological contexts based on the classical loci of dogmatics.

In contrast to the mere presentation of terminological contexts, I carried out a selective 'close reading' for theological analysis. This approach allows for statistical approximations that provide deeper theological insights and identify key areas of research. For example, I have observed a decline in classical eschatological uses of 'eternity' and an increase in its Christological significance. Thus, the concept of eternity is shifting from an afterlife concept to a theological and hermeneutical concept focused on Christ and faith in Christ.

This analysis offers a theologically enriched heuristic that opens up more detailed research possibilities.
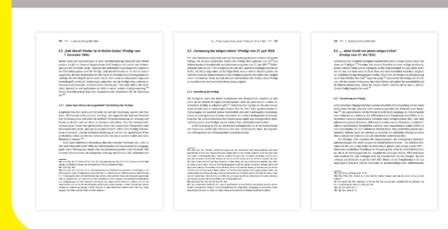
STATISTICAL OBSERVATIONS

HERMENEUTIC MICRO-LEVEL

The hermeneutic micro-level focuses on the individual sermon, the smallest unit of the corpus. It uses concrete examples to substantiate or correct the findings of the previous studies and makes visible theological patterns of argumentation, which was not possible with the previous methodology. The interpretation of individual sermons allowed to supplement the diachronic analysis with a synchronic view of Schleiermacher's sermons.

EXAMPLES

*"And if we now feel close to the end? [...] Then the soul engages its final energies in alternating conjectures, allowing its imagination to blend the last colors to sketch **wavering images of eternity**, and exhausted, it sinks back into uncertainty twice as deeply in the final moments of life."*

'WAVERING IMAGES OF ETERNITY'

QUOTED FROM A SERMON FROM 12 DECEMBER 1790

A DIGITAL RESEARCH OF 'ETERNITY' IN SCHLEIERMACHER'S SERMONS

DR. SEBASTIAN RINK

Sebastian Rink
EWIGKEIT IN SCHLEIERMACHERS PREDIGTEN
FUNKTIONEN UND ENTWICKLUNGEN DES BEGRIFFS IM GESAMTWERK