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Understanding the Parables over the Past Century: An Overview of the History of Research

As was demonstrated in the last chapter, the parables of Jesus are texts that can be considered from three different perspectives. First, they are historical texts that arose in a particular time and cultural space and that are part of a history of tradition. Second, they are fictional texts that have a typical form and poetic style and that use literary devices. Third, they are texts notably addressed to their recipients, their hearers and readers, in order to evoke a process of thinking and rethinking that ultimately leads to deeper insights and even corresponding (re-)action. In order to understand parables, all three aspects need to be taken into account—and indeed parable research has repeatedly emphasized exactly these three dimensions.

In the following, I would like to systematically present the parable research of the last one hundred years[1] from these three perspectives.

1. According to Charles W. Hedrick, there have been, in total, only five strikingly different stages of parable understanding in the past two thousand years: 1) authentic interpretations of Jesus'

Although individual authors may include more than one of these perspectives in their work, the fundamental direction of the approach taken is generally clear, allowing, for the purposes of simplicity, the works to be placed into one interpretative category or another. This overview of parable research therefore does not follow a strict chronological representation[2] and cannot deal with all individual works in detail.[3] Rather it will attempt, following the above-mentioned system, to work out the *hermeneutical aspects* of several larger works on parables. What is the contribution of an individual approach with regard to the comprehension of the parables? In which sense does this approach help foster the understanding of a particular aspect of the parables? What are the opportunities created and the limits of a particular perspective on the parables?

Another aim is to further differentiate between the three fundamental dimensions of the understanding of parables as historic, literary, and reader-oriented approaches.[4] Under each of these headings one can further identify several perspectives. Within the historical approach, for example, one could consider the quest for the historical Jesus as parable teller or raise questions concerning the socio-historical context or tradition history of a parable.

Simultaneously, this overview will attempt to build a bridge between English and German language parable research, which is often carried

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first audience; 2) anti-historical, allegorical interpretations of the early and later church (approx. 50 CE–nineteenth century); 3) historical-moralistic interpretations since Jülicher; 4) symbolic-metaphoric interpretations since Dodd (with the kingdom of God as referee); 5) aesthetic-existential interpretations since Via; see Hedrick, *Parables*, 7–10. However, this classification, particularly in the second period, is oversimplified because parable exegesis over the course of so many centuries can scarcely be subsumed under the heading of "allegory" alone.

2. Chronological overviews of the history of research can be found in Perrin, *Jesus*, 89–193; Kissinger, *Parables*, 1–239; Dschulnigg, "Positionen"; Blomberg, "Parables"; Erlemann, "Einführung"; idem., "Gleichnisforschung"; idem, "Jülicher"; Gowler, *Parables*; Snodgrass, "Allegorizing"; Liebenberg, *Language*, 5–75; Müller, "Exegese"; Neubrand, "Gleichnisse"; Mell, "Gleichnisforschung 1" and "Gleichnisforschung 2"; Blomberg, *Parables*, 33–194; Thurén, *Parables Unplugged*, 3–50. Illuminating is also the hermeneutical reading of parable research in Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 35–59.

3. I will concentrate especially on publications that deal with the parables of Jesus in a broader sense and cannot take all parable books on particular aspects or sources (e.g., parables in Matthew) into account.

4. K. Erlemann structures his overview of the history of research, which is fundamentally historically oriented, under the headings "the religious-historical approach," "the hermeneutic-metaphoric approach," "the literary criticism approach," "the 'wirkungsgeschichtliche' approach," and finally "recent approaches," see Erlemann, *Gleichnisauslegung*, 5–52.

out along parallel tracks. Therefore, recent German scholarship on parables is taken into account more extensively than has often been done in English-speaking publications.[5]

Historical Approaches

The dominance of historical-critical questions in the exegesis of the past several centuries has allowed the historical approach to occupy a central position in parable research for many years. Parable scholarship was also closely connected to the question of the historical Jesus.[6] Throughout all phases of research into the historical Jesus, researchers held fast to the fundamental conviction that the parables belong to the very foundation of the Jesus tradition. It was believed that the parables could bring us very close to Jesus and his ministry.

The individual historical approaches, however, have had quite different emphases. Some parable scholars looked at the *original inventory* of Jesus' parables and attempted to reconstruct them in their number and form, in some cases all the way down to the literal, original text of the parables. The goal of such interpretation was to break through to the parable speech of Jesus, which is preserved only indirectly in the biblical texts. This form of historical work ranges from *Adolf Jülicher's* opus magnum[7] through *Joachim Jeremias's* search for the "*ipsissima vox*" and "original meaning"[8] or *Jonathan Breech's* search for the "authentic voice"[9] to the early works of *John D. Crossan*[10] and then all the way to the Jesus Seminar, founded by *Robert W. Funk* at the Westar Institute, with the goal, even at the end of the twentieth

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5. In most English language publications on parables only the old, basic works of Jülicher and Jeremias are referred to.
6. See on this aspect in particular chapter 3 in this book. See also the overview in my article, R. Zimmermann, "Jesuserinnerung," here: 1. Gleichnisse und der, historische Jesus'.
7. See Jülicher, *Gleichnisreden* I. The title of Jülicher's opus magnum is striking. He was looking for the "parable speech" of Jesus in a literal sense, that is for the oral performance of parables by the historical Jesus; a comprehensive appraisal of Jülicher is found in Mell, *Gleichnisreden*.
8. See Jeremias, *Gleichnisse*, 18; English translation: *Parables*: "The main task still remains to be done: the attempt must be made to recover the *original meaning* of the parables" (19); "Our task is a return to the actual living voice of Jesus" (114).
9. Breech, *Silence*.
10. Crossan, *In Parables*, who refers to "original sayings" and in his reconstruction employs the criterion of double dissimilarity (ibid., 5).

century, of determining the authentic words of Jesus and thereby the authentic parables.[11] A more recent work that falls into this group is that of *Bernard Brandon Scott,*[12] who himself was a charter member of the Jesus Seminar. In his book, he bases himself on the results of the Jesus Seminar and thus concentrates on a limited number of Jesus' parables deemed to be authentic.[13] Scott, drawing on orality research, attempted to work out the "*ipsissima structura*"[14] of Jesus' parables with a three-step method. Basing himself on the synoptic tradition (and drawing upon the Gospel of Thomas), he first reconstructed the original structure of the text. Then he attempted to demonstrate how the original structure affects the meaning in order, finally, to understand the pragmatics of the parable in relation to the ministry of the kingdom of God.[15] This kingdom, called by Scott the "re-imagined world,"[16] makes his followers view a new option for living, one that contrasts with the default world of the everyday. The parables of Jesus, therefore, represent Jesus' words and deeds in a broader sense and demonstrate a startling and provocative picture of Jesus as a historical figure.

Charles H. Dodd focused less on Jesus' speech and much more on the *original setting* in the application of form-critical categories (particularly the "setting in life").[17] In what historical situation were these texts spoken? How can the historical context be determined? Dodd, and in his footsteps, Jeremias,[18] clearly differentiated between

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11. See Funk, *Five Gospels*; on the parables Beutner, *Parables*; for the Westar´s list of "authentic parables" see chapter 3 in this book.
12. See Scott, *Parable*.
13. In his second book he dealt only with nine parables as the base for Jesus' message of the kingdom of God, see Scott, *Re-Imagine the World*. The parables are: 1. Leaven; 2. Mustard Seed; 3. The Empty Jar (Gos. Thom. 97); 4. Hidden Treasure; 5. Samaritan; 6. The Prodigals; 7. Shrewd Manager; 8. Unforgiving Slave; 9. Dinner Party.
14. This term is first found in Crossan, *Cliffs of Fall*, 27.
15. See Scott, *Parable*, 74–76.
16. See the title of Scott, *Re-Imagine the World*.
17. See Dodd, *Parables*, chap. IV, 84–114.
18. See Jeremias, *Parables*, chapter II: "The Return to Jesus from the Primitive Church" (23–114), in which he points out "ten laws of transformation" as an aid to the recovery of the original meaning of the parables of Jesus" (114). "As they have come down to us, the parables of Jesus have a double historical setting. (1) The original historical setting of the parables … is some specific situation in the pattern of the activity of Jesus. … (2) But subsequently, before they assumed a written form, they 'lived' in the primitive Church" (23).

the setting in Jesus' life and that in the earliest church, with the aim of the interpretation being to get back to the original context. "We shall sometimes have to remove a parable from its setting in the life and thought of the Church, as represented by the Gospel, and make an attempt to reconstruct its original setting in the life of Jesus."[19]

Later works expanded this focus in two directions. In one, the historical setting was examined more concretely as a communicative event. *Eta Linnemann,*[20] strongly influenced by the hermeneutics of Ernst Fuchs,[21] understood the original setting of the parable as a conversation: "The parable ... is a form of speech. Its original setting is discussion, conversation."[22] In a communicative event, a process of interweaving takes place between the judgment of the parable narrator and that of the hearer,[23] and this process brings with it the potential for deepened comprehension:

> A successful parable is an event that definitively changes the situation. It creates a new opportunity for the addressee and the narrator to overcome their difference and to come to agreement. This opportunity is based on the fact that the narrator re-addresses the issue that is causing disagreement between himself and his listeners and thereby opens up new comprehension.[24]

More often, however, the historical situation has been analyzed intensively with regard to its *socio-cultural conditions and contexts.* There are several authors, such as *Kenneth E. Baily,* who have described the Galilean-agricultural background of the parables,[25] or who have elaborated case studies on particular socio-historical issues, as *John S. Kloppenborg* did on viticulture, shepherding, and thievery based on evidence found in papyrological sources.[26]

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19. Dodd, *Parables*, 84.
20. Linnemann, *Gleichnisse.*
21. See ibid., VI. Die Gleichnisse als Sprachgeschehen, with reference to Fuchs, *Hermeneutik.*
22. Linnemann, *Gleichnisse*, 27.
23. Ibid., 35.
24. Ibid., 38.
25. E.g., Bailey, *Poet and Peasant.*; idem, *Through Peasant Eyes*; idem, *Poet and Peasant and Trough Peasant Eyes*; idem, *Finding the Lost.* The author's own regional experiences as a missionary in Lebanon is both an advantage and a disadvantage because he runs the risk of projecting present-day culture back to ancient times. Also Rohrbaugh. "Parable"; Bösen, "Figurenwelt."

Others have connected the analysis of the socio-cultural setting to the attribution of a political function to the parable texts. In this area, the works of William R. Herzog II and more recently Luise Schottroff have attracted great interest. According to *William R. Herzog II,*[27] Jesus' parables can be appropriately understood only within the framework of an exact socio-historical and sociological analysis of their context. Because parables speak about the real details of daily life, the societal context must be illuminated, which involves the micro context of the Galilean farmer just as much as the macro context of ancient Mediterranean society. Herzog asked, "How do the social scenes and social scripts of the parables disclose and explore the larger social, political, economic, and ideological systems of Palestine during the time of Jesus?"[28] According to him, the parables fulfill a liberationist-educational[29] function for the first listener by becoming a reflection of and analytic instrument for societal reality. By raising awareness and exposing settings of social oppression, these texts give their readers an alternative social construction and in the process, turn into subversive speech that calls established worldviews into question.[30]

For *Luise Schottroff*, it is possible to understand the parables only by precisely situating the texts or their first listeners in a socio-culturally defined social setting.[31] By revealing the socio-historical context, she criticizes large segments of a tradition of "ecclesiological interpretation" and in contrast, explores an "eschatological interpretation," which discloses the liberating message of Jesus as that which it originally was: a message that was aware of the real-life circumstances of its addressees and had the power to change them. These ideas lead to some basic methodological decisions: Schottroff

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26. See Kloppenborg, *Tenants in the Vineyard*, esp. 278–313; Kloppenborg, "Pastoralism," Kloppenborg, "Parable of the Burglar."
27. Herzog II, *Subversive Speech.*
28. See ibid., 7.
29. Herzog also refers explicitly to the liberationist educator, Paulo Freire, cf. ibid., 7, 25–29.
30. See ibid., 29: "The interpreter must pay attention to the scenes they encode and attempt to understand how they could generate conversations that enhanced the hearer's ability to decode their oppressive reality, or how they encode limit situations depicting limit acts that are intended to challenge the boundaries of their closed world."
31. Schottroff, *Gleichnisse*. See also her summary in "Gleichnisauslegung."

explores a so-called non-dualistic parable theory, which means that the "image" (*Bild*) of the parable is not to be separated from the "content" (*Sache*). Therefore, a "virgin" or a "landowners and slaves" cannot be read just as a metaphor for something else but must be understood against the background of the socio-cultural settings of "young women" or "conditions of employment" in ancient society. At the same time, she denies the influence of "existing metaphors,"[32] that is, metaphors already perceived as mere metaphors in Jesus' day, because according to Schottroff metaphors are closely linked to the socio-historical setting and less to traditional religious language. Thus, for example, one must resist associating each reference to a king with "God as a King." Therefore, she concludes that power-mongering kings or violent landlords have nothing in common with God or God's kingdom. In fact, parables like Mark 12:1–12 (wicked tenants) or Matt. 22:1–14 (King's banquet) can only be understood as "anti-parables."[33] Similar to the approach of Schottroff is the work of *Sigrid Lampe-Densky*, who presents a model for reading parables by applying socio-historical analysis, especially with regard to economics and working world.[34] More recently, some scholars honored Schottroff with a "Festschrift" entitled "*Gott ist anders*" (God is different), in which her approach is taken up in various ways.[35]

Socio-revolutionary interpretation of the parables is certainly not new. It was proposed with great pathos by Leonard Ragaz in 1943.[36] In a work that received little attention, *David Wenham* characterized the parables as "pictures of revolution:"[37]

In proclaiming the kingdom of God, Jesus was announcing the coming of God's revolution and of God's new world, as promised in the

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32. Ibid., 131: "Gegen die Annahme stehender Metaphern"; eadem, *Parables*, 99.
33. See, for instance, the comments in Schottroff, "Verheißung."
34. See Lampe-Densky, *Gottes Reich und antike Arbeitswelten.*
35. Crüsemann, Janssen, Metternich, *Gott ist anders.*
36. See Ragaz, *Gleichnisse.* According to Ragaz, one misunderstanding of the parables is that "their enormous revolutionary meaning" has gone unrecognized or that they have been given "only an individualistic or better a private meaning. In reality, their meaning is primarily social, that is directed at society. Entirely in the spirit of the prophets of Israel" (7–8). "One thing above all arises with enormous force and with luminous power from this new way of understanding the parables of Jesus—*Jesus' social message* or, in other words, the *social* meaning of Jesus' message" (9).
37. See Wenham, *Parables.*

Old Testament. God was at last intervening, Jesus declared, to establish his reign over everything, to bring salvation to his people and renewal and reconciliation to the world. But fortunately Jesus did not announce his message in such general theological terms; he announced it primarily through vivid, concrete parables.[38]

Attention to real-life situations also characterizes the parable research of *Charles W. Hedrick*.[39] He supports the idea of not loading parables down with theological meaning but rather of reading them simply as poetic constructs in an historical context, namely as the "creative voice of Jesus."[40] "The parables are thoroughly secular, and realistic slices of first-century Palestinian life."[41] The reader is meant to attempt to understand these texts as "ordinary stories."[42]

They do not "teach" anything in particular or in general; they do not provide normative guides for ethical human behavior; they do not reveal theological truth or overtly push any particular values—certainly not religious values.[43]

Similar to Schottroff, Hedrick states that the "figurative character of the parables may not simply be assumed … the stories of Jesus are not inherently figurative."[44]

One of the most recent monographs on Jesus' parables was authored by *Amy-Jill Levine*[45] and follows the historical line of interpretation. According to Levine, the Evangelists wanted to "domesticate the parable by turning it into a lesson"[46] (e.g., about constant prayer or forgiveness). Levine is convinced that "Jesus taught in parables,"[47] however, the "parables … began their process of domestication as soon as the evangelists wrote them down, and probably before that."[48]

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38. Ibid., 25. In this context, appendix 2 of the following book is also interesting "The Interpretation of Parables," cf. ibid., 225–38.
39. Hedrick, *Poetic Fictions*; idem, *Many Things*.
40. See the subtitle of Hedrick, *Poetic Fictions*.
41. Hedrick, *Many Things*, 35.
42. Hedrick, *Poetic Fictions*, 4: "We should begin reading the parables on their own terms, as ordinary stories, rather than for what we imagine they might 'reveal' about the kingdom of God, morality, human existence, or some other value."
43. Hedrick, *Many Things*, 103.
44. Ibid., 102.
45. See Levine, *Short Stories*.
46. See ibid., 14.
47. Ibid., 13.

Levine assumes that moral teaching or christological interpretation "is not the message a first-century Jewish audience would have heard."[49] Hence, it is necessary to uncover and bring to light the "initial context"[50] or "original provocation"[51] of Jesus' voice. "The parables need to make sense not only to those who chose to follow him, but to those who found him just a wise teacher, a neighbor in Nazareth, or a fellow Jew."[52]

It could be said that with Schottroff, Hedrick, and Levine the historical approach comes back full circle to Jülicher and Jeremias. Jülicher also wanted to uncover, contrary to the early church tradition, what Jesus really meant with the parables. Like Schottroff or Levine, he also wanted the parables to be understood for what they were and meant "originally." While Jülicher—and now once again Levine[53]—campaigned against the allegorical tradition, Schottroff, with her non-dualistic theory, negates all existing traditionally and conventionally joined images found in stock metaphors (*Bildfeldtraditionen*). According to Schottroff, one must dare "to read socio-historical details as narratives of human life and not as an image for something else."[54] Hedrick takes this a step further and in addition to figurative interpretations, criticizes every generalizing or ethical interpretation of the parables. For him, parables can "be analyzed apart from their literary context"[55] and understood, simply and clearly, on their own in their relation to reality,[56] exactly as postulated by Jülicher.

Finally, within the historical perspective there are parable interpretations that perceive the transmission process of the texts and their manifestation in the New Testament not only to deconstruct it in the search for the original form of the parable but also to evaluate the

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48. Ibid., 278.
49. Ibid., 14.
50. Ibid., 9.
51. Ibid., 10.
52. Ibid., 17.
53. See ibid., 7; for further comments see chapter 4.
54. See Schottroff, "Sommer," 74.
55. Hedrick, *Poetic Fictions*, 5.
56. See Hedrick, *Many Things*, 103.

traditional development on its own terms. Such a traditio-historical or transmission-historical approach exists in the works of *Michael G. Steinhauser* on the "*Doppelbildworte*" (double parables)[57] as well as in the works of *Hans Weder* on the synoptic parables.[58] Although Weder draws on a philosophical-theological metaphor theory for the general framework of comprehension, the individual analyses demonstrate a "consistently traditio-historical" interpretation:

> An analytical process reconstructs the original form; a synthetic process reflects on the history of the parable in its employment in the listener's world of experience. ... The Interpretamente that were added throughout the tradition should be studied themselves with regard to their concinnity to the parable.[59]

In his own way, *Jacobus Liebenberg* more recently traced the transmission of individual parables from the Q source through the Synoptics up to the Gospel of Thomas.[60] His central focus, however, is not a detailed description of the transformations in the individual texts but rather the influence of the respective context on the parable understanding. With this perspective "one will be able to describe the varying receptions of these Kingdom parables and aphorisms in a manner which will allow their different nuances to be identified."[61]

Finally, to conclude this first, historical section, I would like to draw on the words of Crossan. Although John Dominic Crossan is a fairly recent figure considering how one can gain access to the historical Jesus through parables, his insights can act as a reminder to sound out both the opportunities and limits of historical inquiries:

> Historicity is always a valid question, and there are times when it is an absolutely crucial one. But notice how, in parables by or especially about Jesus, such questions about historical accuracy may be used and welcomed to avoid questions about parabolic challenge.[62]

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57. See Steinhauser, *Doppelbildworte.*
58. See Weder, *Gleichnisse Jesu.*
59. Ibid., 97.
60. Liebenberg, *Language.*
61. Ibid., 165.
62. See Crossan, *In Parables*, 259.

Literary Approaches

A second area of parable research can be summarized under the heading *literary approaches,* which established themselves particularly during the *linguistic turn* in biblical exegesis. It is no longer the historical origin or the textual prehistory that is of central importance but rather the transmitted texts themselves. The hermeneutical principle here is that a parable can be appropriately understood if one understands its linguistic structure. Several works that can be summarized under the label "the literary turn in parable studies" had a ground-breaking effect. Two examples are the studies of Robert W. Funk and Dan O. Via, which are also representative of the two main approaches and fields of study in the linguistic analysis of the parables. Via emphasized, from a structuralist perspective, the narrativity of the parables; Funk placed his central focus on metaphoricity.

The work of *Geraint V. Jones*[63] represents a first application of dimensions of literary theory to the interpretation of the parables, which is then taken up and greatly expanded by *Dan O. Via.*[64] Via consciously rejects the historical paradigms and considers parables to be "genuine works of art, real aesthetic objects."[65] Thus, he attempts to develop a method of interpretation that does justice to this aesthetic character.[66] As autonomous works of art, the parables do not refer to anything outside of themselves; instead their content and form are fused into an organic unity.[67] The meaning of the parables is expressed *in* and *through* the linguistic structure and not outside of it.[68] As basic structures, Via differentiates "two basic kinds of plot movement ... the comic and the tragic,"[69] which he combines with a three-part series of episodes (action-crisis-solution or crisis-answer-solution). The

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63. See Jones, *Art and Truth.*
64. See Via, *Parables*; the early German translation by E. Güttgemanns was certainly responsible for the wide reception in German-speaking circles, cf. Via, *Gleichnisse.*
65. Via, *Parables,* ix.
66. See particularly the first chapter in ibid., Part One: Methodological, 1–107.
67. See ibid., 96.
68. Via speaks about "in-meaning" and "through-meaning" (79): "a work of literary art means both in and through itself but ... the inner, non referential meaning is dominant." Ibid., 86.
69. Ibid., 96.

linguistic structure reflects a certain human understanding of existence that then can span time to become a hermeneutical bridge between the narrator and the contemporary reader. Therefore, parables can be removed from their original, historical context and can unfold the impact of their message through their linguistic structure.

Structuralist-narrative or semiotic approaches remained dominant—not just in American parables research—in the 1970s and found expression through various channels. For example, one should mention the Parables Seminar, a working group of the Society of Biblical Literature and the resulting discussion, documented in Semeia.[70] Further, the contributions to a conference at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, in 1975 were published in a volume entitled *Semiology and Parables.*[71] These contributions demonstrate that the parables are classified as paradigmatic for a semiotic hermeneutic of the Bible. A working group of exegetes in France, who named themselves the Entrevernes Group after the location of their meetings, applied A. J. Greimas's structuralist-semiotic narrative theory to parable texts.[72] Corresponding to the guiding paradigm of structuralist semiotics, the content and linguistic structure of the parables are closely linked, although the dimension of the recipient (for example in the role it plays in the threefold symbol definition of Peirce) is not yet suitably worked out.

Within German-language exegesis, *Erhart Güttgemanns* adopted Via's structuralist approach and developed it further in the scope of Propp's narrative theory as well as that of "generative poetics."[73] The analysis of the actions of the individual narrative figures, or in linguistic terms, the "actants," is of central importance. For *Wolfgang Harnisch*, the constellation of figures in a particular series of scenes (ideal typically in three acts) is constitutive for every parable,[74] which he defines as "dramatic parable narration."[75] According to Harnisch, the abundant

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70. See, for example, Semeia 2 (1974) and the article by Funk, "Structure."
71. Patte, *Semiology.*
72. See Groupe d'Entrevernes, *Signes.* An English translation can be found in The Entrevernes Group, *Signs.*
73. See particularly Güttgemanns, "Methodik;" idem, "Narrative Analyse."
74. Harnisch, *Gleichniserzählungen.*

use of direct speech makes parables into "the miniature edition of a stage play composed in narration with stylized plot structure and the idiosyncratic arrangement of figures."[76] Typified constellations of figures (e.g. relationships between a constellation of three characters) can be seen in individual parables[77] and the stylistic law of the "weight of the stern" (*Achtergewicht*) is dominant, meaning that the plot becomes transparent only at the end of the story. Thus, the listener is formally obliged "to let the narration scroll by him again in order to discover what can be understood from the story as a whole."[78]

Along with narrativity, the metaphoricity of the parables has come into new appreciation through the linguistic perspective. Jülicher and the parable research that followed him devalued metaphor as a building block of allegory, but *Robert W. Funk*[79] and later *Norman Perrin*[80]—based on a changed understanding of metaphor—were able to prove metaphoricity as a fundamental category of all parables and work out their creative potential and impact with regard to the recipients.

In Europe, *Paul Ricœur* has been able, more than any other scholar, to fruitfully employ the so-called interaction theory of metaphor, drawing on E. Richards and M. Black, to contribute to the understanding of parables.[81] In this theory, metaphors are not limited to the status of a substituted word but rather are always related to a section of text within which an interaction is created between two semantic fields that normally do not belong together but that a reader can bring together on a new level of meaning. This understanding of metaphor implies that longer narrative texts like the parables can also be regarded as metaphoric in their entirety. Ricœur also transferred

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75. Ibid., 71.
76. See ibid., 12.
77. Ibid., 74–80.
78. Ibid., 41.
79. See Funk, "Parable as Metaphor," 133, 137 (partial translation into German in idem, "Gleichnis als Metapher"); Funk's essays are now easily accessible in an anthology edited by Scott, see Scott, *Funk on Parables.*
80. Perrin, *Jesus.*
81. See here primarily Ricœur, "Stellung"; later Ricœur's comprehensive metaphor theory in Ricœur, *Lebendige Metapher.*

the linguistic and epistemological intrinsic value of metaphor to parable. In the same way that metaphors are not translatable and are constructive, parables are not concerned with an illustration but rather with a "new introduction of meaning" or ultimately with "a new vision of reality."[82] By linguistically exploring new territory, parables, in the end, expand the understanding of reality that can be observed and interpreted within the scope of parables as divine reality.

Hans Weder draws directly on such an understanding of parables and expands upon it with a view toward theological considerations. The "semantic innovations" of the metaphoric parables not only re-describe reality but create points of contact with God's existence and activity. "It is Jesus' intention to understand people and the world in the scope of God and not to make God a function of human existence."[83] In parables, "the *Basileus* and thus God himself become so understandable" for the listener "that he at the same time gets to know himself differently, more appropriately."[84] The parables enable us, therefore, not only to speak about God with images of the world, but they also create space for God in and with the world.

Although metaphorical and narrative approaches play a role in almost all subsequent parable studies, there are works that study particular aspects more intensively or that explicitly create a synthesis of both aspects. In such works, the emphasis can be varied by distinguishing between the "metaphoric narrative,"[85] in which the narrative in its entirety carries the metaphoric process, and the "narrated metaphor."[86] The latter approach is employed by *Bernhard Heininger* in his work on the parables unique to Luke (*Sondergutgleichnisse*). The core of every parable is "the metaphoric, that is the tense coupling of two semantic concepts ... out of the interaction or interanimation (Soskice) of which a narrative arises. It is advantageous in this process if the narrator can fall back on a

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82. Ricœur, "Stellung," 49.
83. See Weder, *Gleichnisse Jesu,* 68.
84. Ibid., 69.
85. Harnisch, *Gleichniserzählungen.*
86. See Heininger, *Metaphorik.*

distinctive image field."[87] Thus the analysis of basic and foundational stock metaphors is of central importance in Heininger's parable interpretation.[88] With regard to the narrativity of the texts, the works of Heininger deserve particular recognition for working out the importance of the monologue in the scope of other ancient texts (the novel, comedy).[89]

A direct continuation of Ricœur's approach can be seen in the dissertation of *Herman-Josef Meurer*.[90] Meurer adopts the approaches of structuralist parable research in detail (drawing on Propp and Greimas) and ties them into Ricœur's metaphor and symbol theory. Taking up the dialectic of "explaining" and "understanding," the hermeneutic process reaches its goal when "people following Jesus implement in their concrete historical existence the concepts from his parables of a life full of salvation."[91] Thus, the metaphor is not only the model of explanation for the parables but it is a new "concept of revelation" that enables the communication of biblical-Christian truths of salvation.

A different direction is outlined by research that considers not so much the elements of the linguistic micro-structure but rather the macro-structure of the text in a form critical perspective and thus concentrates on the *genre of parable.*

Paul Fiebig, an early critic of the Jülicher approach, protested the special status, postulated by Jülicher, of the New Testament parable genre and instead emphasized the close relationship to the Judaic-rabbinical Meshalim.[92] Not until there was a renewed interest in the Jewish influence on early Christianity in the 1970s was this aspect taken up again and then by both Jewish as well as Christian scholars, as can be seen in the works of *David Flusser* or *Peter Dschulnigg*.[93] Earlier research was defined by diachronic questions concerning the

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87. Ibid., 27.
88. See the example exegesis. Ibid., 83–218.
89. Ibid., 32–77; cf. similarly—and according to the author—independently: Sellew, "Monologue."
90. Meurer, *Gleichnisse Jesu*.
91. Ibid., 735.
92. See Fiebig, "Chronologie;" idem, *Gleichnisreden*; cf. also Oesterley, "Gleichnisse."
93. Flusser, *Gleichnisse*; Dschulnigg, *Gleichnisse*.

development of rabbinical and early Christian parables and questions of possible dependence;[94] however, for the past decade the discussion has concentrated, based on a nuanced appraisal of the rabbinical parable material,[95] on a synchronic intertextual comparison of linguistic structures and motifs, as demonstrated by the works of *Brad H. Young* or *Frank Stern*.[96] More recently, *R. Steven Notley,* and *Ze'ev Safrai* provided an annotated collection of narrative parables found in the earliest stratum of Rabbinic Judaism—the Tannaitic and Early Amoraic Literature (e.g., Mishnah *Sukkah 2:9; Niddah* 2:5; 5:7). In the introductory chapter the relation between Jesus' parables and Jewish ones is reconsidered.[97]

Models of understanding through which the New Testament parables are classified into Greco-Roman literary history and categories of ancient rhetoric are also both form-critical and religio-historical. *Klaus Berger* and *Detlev Dormeyer*[98] worked out the formal linguistic parallels between the parables in Greco-Roman texts and the New Testament parables. With reference to the ancient rhetoricians such as Aristotle and Quintilian,[99] the rhetorical-argumentative dimension of the parables was emphasized in these works. *Eckhard Rau* put forth the hypothesis, particularly by drawing on Quintilian, "that Hellenic-Roman rhetoric, by exerting influence on Judaic schooling,

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94. See, for instance, Oesterley, *Gospel Parables.*
95. Most of the rabbinical parables in their redactional, written tradition cannot be dated before the third/fourth century CE (e.g., the Pesiqta de Rav Kahana in the fifth century CE). Even if some texts in their literary, unfinished form can be traced back to the pre-rabbinical period (PesK 11,3) or to the second century (PesK 1,3) (see Thoma, Lauer and Ernst, *Gleichnisse*, 63–64.), this can scarcely function as a basis for hypotheses about the history of transmission. The term *mashal* is used only three times in the Mishnah (mSuk 2:9; mNid 2:5; 5:7); cf. Neusner, "Parable," 260–61.
96. Young, *Jesus*; idem, *Parables*; Stern, *Rabbi*; cf. Hezser, "Rabbinische Gleichnisse." The book of McArthur and Johnston is predominantly a mere collection of rabbinical parables, cf. McArthur and Johnston, *Parables.*
97. See Notley and Safrai, *Parables of the sages*, 67: "we have seen that there are close connections between Jesus' parables and those of the Sages, along with quite a number of differences." See also the table with summary, 67–69.
98. Berger, "Materialien," 25–33; idem, "Gattungen," 1110–24 (a religio-historical and popular expansion with reference to parables from all world religions in Berger, *Gleichnisse des Lebens*); also Dormeyer, *Literaturgeschichte*, 140–58.
99. Rau, *Reden in Vollmacht*, 18–107. Both Aristotle in the second book of Rhetoric (Arist. rhet. 1393a, 28–31) and Quintilian in chapter 11 of the fifth book of his »Institutio Oratoria« (Quint. inst.) cite the παραβολή, under the main category of example (παραδείγμα) as one of the structural and persuasive devices of speech. See my contribution, Zimmermann, "Ancient Rhetoric."