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Thesis statement:

The parable of The Sower in Mark 4 both reveals and conceals, dividing the audience into two groups based on their response such that its "meaning," including mysteries and potential ambiguities in meaning, is not strictly separable from its function in differentiating the two groups. This bifurcating property of self-referencing (recursive) speech is intentional and unavoidable, and therefore defines a speech act that can be generalized to apply to many of Jesus' parables. Not only does this speech act differ from both Old Testament *mashal* and rabbinic *midrash*, it also differs from the various authorial-

intent solutions to the triple problems of Mk 4:1-20—*Messiahgeheimnis*, *Parabeltheorie*, and *hina/hoti* hardening. It is not new, for bifurcating speech acts have been used throughout the New Testament, principally for doctrine. And because it ties authorial intention to audience response so closely, it also provides a valuable tool for a constructive response to the Post-Modern critique.

Method:

We focus on the function and dynamics of self-referencing communication and its implication for meaning.

Introduction: The Post-Modern Crisis

This new analysis of the parable of The Sower using the tools of speech act theory to discuss self-referencing or recursive speech is more than an academic exercise in manipulating obscure tools in novel ways. The real tension in this parable between insiders and outsiders permeates the entire New Testament and informs the role of the Church in the wider world, so that a solution to this text that bifurcates the audience has ramifications for understanding two millennia of church history. More pointedly, it has direct relevance to a current, 21st century urgent problem: the Evangelical method of biblical interpretation, or what is sometimes stereotyped as the “grammatico-historical method” is in danger of extinction.¹ Why is this urgent? Because biblical exegesis is the lifeblood of the Reformation worldview and without its support, Evangelicalism would become just a sociological phenomenon. As George Marsden writes about the 18th century milieu of Jonathan Edwards,

Since the late seventeenth century modern biblical criticism had been emerging as an important means for progressive intellectuals to free themselves from Protestant dogmatism. In an era of ecclesiastical establishments, when much of intellectual and political life was tied to the church, questions of biblical authority had immense implications for other areas of thought and society. Many of the secular dimensions of the Enlightenment depended on displacing biblical accounts of history and human nature.²

These observations are as true today as they were then, for every innovation in theology, in culture, in education, or in government requires a displacement of the previous biblical worldview that constructed and supported these societal institutions. And the 21st century Post-Modern challenge to truth is no exception, for it undermines creeds, constitutions and culture alike. Nor should we permit ourselves to be persuaded that this Post-Modern change is a development, an evolution, or a natural progression, for like the Enlightenment in Edwards' New England, it demands radical changes to the understanding of the Bible and the practices of the Church.

This thesis is an attempt to introduce a resistant variety of biblical interpretation that will not wilt under 21st century criticism. It is specifically focussed on those who would call themselves Evangelicals, and accept some form of Biblical inspiration, but it is still relevant to 21st century Post-Modernism in general, i.e., to those who accept no text as inspired or have no interest in reconciling Biblical inerrancy with 21st century criticism, partly because it raises larger questions about the nature of communication and truth, and partly because it challenges the assumptions and tools of the Post-Modern critique.

1 Insert footnote here

2 Marsden, “Jonathan Edwards”

The Fading of Evangelical Interpretation

Like most extinctions, the fading of Evangelical interpretation is initially quite invisible, a slow recognition that the product of exegesis, a sermon or a biblical commentary, is becoming less and less relevant to a 21st century culture. Under the guise of relevance and seeker-friendly contextualization, the gospel defenses that Evangelicals devised against the onslaught of 20th century Modernism, such as Machen's emphasis on the proper reception of truth, or VanTil's emphasis on the inability to defend presuppositions, are being turned on their head and made into a support for a relativizing 21st century Post-Modernism.³ (We are not here intending to undertake a sociological or theological thesis, only indicating the larger context for this work on the parable of The Sower.)

Post-Modernism, however, is neither compatible with Modernism nor with Evangelical exegesis, so that the drift toward Post-Modernism is deeply disquieting to Evangelicalism and the modern inheritors of the Reformation. For Evangelicals believe both in absolute truth, and the possibility of knowing it through the Scriptures, whereas Post-Moderns admit to neither, or more precisely, believe that human language is unable to convey absolute truth should it exist in the abstract. If Enlightened Thomas Jefferson excised books from his Bible, and Modernist Wellinghausen made a collage of the Pentateuch, then relativist Post-Moderns with their private interpretations have made a sieve of the lexicon. And without a reliable lexicon, there can be no reliable exegesis.

In their zeal for the Scriptures, 20th century Evangelicals may have laid the seeds for this 21st century Post-Modern innovation. In his highly influential 1923 book, *Christianity and Liberalism*, J Gresham Machen defended the fundamental doctrines of the Church by criticizing those who deny the miracles yet confirm the creeds:

But the trouble is that he [a liberal] attaches to the words a different meaning from that which is attached to them by the simple-minded person to whom he is speaking. He offends, therefore, against the fundamental principle of truthfulness in language. According to that fundamental principle, language is truthful, not when the meaning attached to the words by the speaker, but when the meaning intended to be produced in the mind of the particular person addressed, is in accordance with the facts.⁴

Machen is saying that words are not true until they are properly understood, that reception is a necessary part of process that makes truth true, and if we fail to be understood, we are not speaking the truth. He meant to critique equivocating sermons, but 21st century Post-Moderns used similar arguments to critique the Bible, which is a very serious problem. For if the truth of the inerrant Scripture that Machen was so jealous to defend depends upon the audience, then the infallibility of the original autographs does not protect the content from misuse, and the truth can be (Machen) or must be (Post-Moderns) lost in translation. What Machen meant as a critique of equivocating (or as he would say, prevaricating) liberals, was used subsequently as a critique of the doctrine of perspicuity, of the understandability of Scripture itself.⁵

In a similar fashion, the philosophical defenses of Cornelius Van Til, by which he meant to critique Modernism, were used by his heirs to attack Evangelicalism. For example, his “transcendental defense” of the plenary inspiration of the Bible argued that this presupposition was indefensible (as Modernists conceive of defense), for any argument that proved it from a neutral starting point (Greek philosophy, mathematical logic, etc.) would then become a higher authority, an inspiration greater than

³ Cite vanhoozer here on Post-Modern views of truth

⁴ J. Gresham Machen, “Christianity and Liberalism” p95

⁵ Footnote w/Peter Enns “I & I”

that of the Bible. Instead, Van Til argued, apologists should adopt the opponent's worldview, the Modernist presuppositions, and demonstrate their inferiority to the Evangelical ones. However, the Post-Modern critic happily engages Van Til, agreeing that there can be no defense for presuppositions, but argues that a Post-Modern worldview is an even larger superset, which includes Van Til's as one of its many approaches that may produce truth, so that it is Van Til's that is narrower and inferior. The problem, says the Post-Modernist, is the hubris that prevents the Evangelical from harvesting the truth available in other systems. In fact, the Post-Modern critic goes on, the "all-or-nothing" antagonism of Van Til toward other worldviews, the exclusivity of Aristotle's law of the "excluded middle" is an un-Biblical carryover from Greek philosophy that has contaminated Evangelical theology through the unexamined use of a common vocabulary. For that matter, the critic concludes, the contamination has fatally affected the Early Church creeds such as the Nicene Creed, as well as the more modern expressions such as the Westminster Standards. And so Van Til's transcendental defense is turned on its head, giving ample ammunition to his Post-Modern critics who argue that the indefensibility of any system of presuppositions makes all such systems equally true (or equally false.)

While Machen and Van Til are examples of significant scholars in the Reformed sub-category of Evangelicalism, the Post-Modern critique broadly attacks all 20th century Evangelical scholars, especially those that made a separate peace with Modernism, because Post-Modernism is not principally a critique against Evangelicals, but a critique against Modernism going all the way back to the Enlightenment if not ancient Greece itself. Our concern in this thesis, however, will be limited to the Post-Modern impact on Evangelical exegesis, with special interest for 20th century Reformed exegesis.

Evangelical Exegesis Reconsidered

Given the situation described above, the usual practice of starting a New Testament dissertation by presupposing an Evangelical commitment to the plenary inspiration of the Bible and a synchronic approach to exegesis, is not sufficient to answer this 21st century challenge to truth. For if an Evangelical attempts to defend absolute truth exegetically, the Post-Modern need only reply that the conclusion is contained in the assumptions, rendering the argument trivial and as erroneous as the assumptions themselves. Nor do appeals to logic help, for the Post-Modern finds them as well to be tools contaminated with his own presuppositions.

In response to such Post-Modern attacks, Modernists and Evangelicals both point to the circular logic of a Post-Modernist who uses language and logic to make his anti-language argument, which appears patently inconsistent. The Post-Modernist merely smiles and agrees that everyone's logic is inherently circular, so makes his point because he is at least willing to admit that his truth is only true for himself and his own presuppositions, whereas Modernists and Evangelicals seem to think their truths are valid for everyone. Even Modernist appeals to the pragmatic necessity of an absolute rule of law or government are met with similar replies, for these are clearly the arbitrary institutions of men, which have varied with time and place. So without persuasion and without logic, what tools are left to convince a Post-Modern? What can be done to keep the Evangelical exegesis alive, to preserve the faith once delivered?

Just as the Modernist critique of the fallibility of the texts was countered by Evangelicals who used their same higher-critical tools to demonstrate the reliability of the texts and the unreliability of the critique, so also the "circular-logic" tools of Post-Modern critique of truth can be used to demonstrate the reliability of the truth and the unreliability of their critique. That is, the Post-Modern attack on logic and its necessary truths is based on the use of circular arguments, on self-reference, or

what mathematicians call recursion. These same tools can be used to defend truth, so that if the Post-Modern critique is validated by the use of recursion, then it must also be a valid tool in the defense against it. (We are not arguing for or against the validity of Post-Modernism and its favorite tools, merely the self consistent use of these tools, an important topic that has been neglected in the Post-Modern critique, but aligned with Van Til's transcendental approach.)

Are we still in danger of presupposing a common text, one that may not be presupposed by the Post-Modernist? Certainly Modernists cast off all texts as historically unreliable, but this was shown by both Evangelicals and Post-Moderns to be a consequence of their presuppositions. If the Post-Modernist will not accept a common Biblical text, he is in effect agreeing with Modernists and clearly at war within himself. We cannot help those sorts who cast off all restraint—textual, logical, and rhetorical—rather we address those who agree that texts can be valid, perhaps even divinely inspired yet without trusting their ability to understand and comprehend the truth of the text. Our goal is to assure these reluctant Post-Modernists that there is a way through this impasse, that there is gold and silver to be found through the purifying fire of circular logic, through the mathematical torture of recursion.

Even if the text is divine, can we make any progress without agreeing on the definitions of the words? After all, is not the principle disagreement with Post-Moderns in the definition of terms? While this may be one manifestation of Post-Modernism, it is possible to go beyond the dictionary, to find truths that are nearly independent of the lexicon, truths of general revelation. It is certainly from linguistics that we learn how slippery it is to translate words, but as Kenneth Pike illustrated with his practical linguistic method of “tagmemics,” one can still find a universal way to group the words in a sentence, where the “slots” are nearly independent of content. From the opposite side of linguistics, Noam Chomsky argues that this universal approach is a built-in property of human babies, whose ability to learn any language is genetically programmed (or we prefer to say, God-given). Therefore some of the truths of grammar do not rely on words but word slots, and do not rely on particular content but on universal syntax. This observation will establish a beachhead for absolute truth, through the peculiar properties of self-referencing grammar, or as Pike would say, through a spiral process that loops back upon itself at a higher level.

All this may be true, but are we not in danger of relying on the inspiration of linguists rather than the inspiration of God? Are we in danger of violating Van Til's axiom that whatever we base our truth upon becomes our Absolute, our idol, our god? If we were basing our defense of the truth on linguistics, we indeed would be in trouble, but we are instead founding it upon the very words of Christ, who used these self-referencing linguistic tools to describe himself. These recursive tools, which the Post-Moderns have perfected for the tearing down of dogma, were used by Christ to establish dogma. These same tools, given by God in our genetic equipment, are used by Christ to construct a permanent beachhead of truth in the Gospels. Nothing is of human construction, nothing is from the corrupted (by the Fall) creation, and so nothing is available with which to build an idol. Everything in this recursive tool is a divine gift coming directly from God, so that it is true and cannot bear false witness to the truth.⁶

If then we can rediscover the absolute truths of Christ from his own words, we can not only counter the Post-Modern critique, but we can replace it with the sure foundation of Christ, from whom

⁶ The nutshell version of this claim, is that language is of divine origin, which is why it can communicate divine truth. If, as Saussure and Derrida claim, language were merely human, then it would be unable to achieve what Christ did with it. And while the Fall corrupted God's gift of language, it can never remove the divine origin of the gift, or its ability to communicate truth.

the entire Church, and yes, even the amazing accomplishments of the West owes its success. But before we launch directly into the words of Christ, we need to explain briefly the tools necessary for this exegesis. First, we define the circular-argumentation used so effectively by Post-Moderns. Since this is principally a mathematical and philosophical approach to language, we will necessarily delve briefly into the history of this kind of linguistics. Second, we must develop tools to describe this third use of language that is distinct from content or response. For this purpose we find Speech Act theory to be extremely helpful in differentiating between propositional content, audience response, and this extra property of language that requires the author and audience to reflect upon the structure of the language rather than the content or response. Third, we find a theological connection to the parable of The Sower, narrowing our selection of a text by demanding that the text also defend the Reformation *solus* (a proxy for Protestant creeds) against the Post-Modern critique. After polishing the tools and selecting the text, we will then begin the traditional approach of exegeting the passage, demonstrating its three functional properties that establish it as a solid foundation for Evangelical exegesis, able to withstand the Post-Modern critique.

A. The Origin in Mathematical Philosophy

Since the Post-Modern critique uses circular reasoned arguments, there is a tendency among Evangelicals and Modernists to dismiss it as nonsense, just as illogical as the aesthetic appeals of the Romantics a century earlier. But it is logical, with origins in respectable 20th century linguistics and roots in mathematical philosophy.

Briefly, when mathematician, philosopher and arch-Modernist Bertrand Russell mounted his positivist attack on metaphysical entities in the early 20th century, he proposed that equivocal human language be reduced to symbolic logic so that the truth or falsity of a sentence could be determined mathematically. In contrast to those logical sentences, a rhetorical sentence does not intend to carry propositional truth but generate a moral response so as to convey an opinion or a feeling, which Russell did not oppose so long as it was not confused for a propositional truth. This is necessary because if even one untrue presupposition were used in a proof, it did not so much disprove the conclusion, as make all conclusions provable; false assumptions did not make mathematical proof too difficult, but too easy.⁷ Russell was sure this was why religion and metaphysics had gone astray, simply because they sloppily incorporated a false premise, which could only be solved by greater attention to rigor. His brightest pupil, Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*⁸ quantified Russell's approach as the "picture" theory of language, and applied it to eliminate the "*synthetic a priori*,"⁹ the establishment of non-scientific metaphysical constructs, which confuse morals or values with scientific propositions. To sum up the Modernist "logical empiricist" approach,¹⁰ there are two kinds of language which are exclusive and distinct: propositional truths needed for science and logic, and emotional appeals used by theologians and demagogues.

Wittgenstein, however, later concluded in his *Blue and Brown Books* that the picture theory of language was insufficient to describe all the functions of language.¹¹ Perhaps what convinced him of

7 Russell was challenged to use this principle to prove he was the Pope. Easy, said Russell, assume 2 equals 1, and assume that I am in a room with the Pope. Since the two of us are one, I must be the Pope.

8 Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Logico-Philosophicus"

9 Rudolph Carnap, " ", see also the Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on "positivism"

10 Modernism is a broader movement than the logical empiricism of positivism, but it always aspired to the clarity and purity of the truth revealed by logical empiricism, even if it became bogged down in details and real-world applications.

11 Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Blue and Brown Books"

this was Kurt Gödel's 1931 "Incompleteness" proof¹² that even axiomatic mathematical systems powerful enough to include Peano arithmetic, not to mention the symbolic logic, could still not exclude statements that were neither true nor false, and therefore Russell's program to exclude falsehood by starting from logical foundations also failed. The importance for this thesis is that Gödel's proof relied on self-reference, paradoxes that looped back on themselves, analogous to "This statement is false." Russell tried hard to avoid such pathological statements, just as mathematics had attempted to use Zermelo-Fraenkel axioms to exclude self-referencing sets.¹³ Gödel's genius was to find a way to number all such exclusions and propositions so that language and math were inextricably united, and then make his proof on these numbered, though infinite, sets of propositions.¹⁴ Every possible excuse, every possible exclusion, every possible propositional truth was covered in Gödel's proof, and Russell, as well as Wittgenstein's picture-model of language, was shown to be incapable of determining the truth/falsity of all statements. Wittgenstein, and most philosophers that followed him (or at least, followed the crowd) in the "analytic" tradition, abandoned the Platonic goal of absolute truth, and limited their investigations to small problems involving the consistent use of language. This is the turn that Post-Modernism followed in the late 20th century,¹⁵ concluding that the search for absolute truth in texts was quixotic.

For this thesis, the significance of Gödel's work is that there are not two kinds of language as Russell and the early Wittgenstein supposed, but three: propositional statements, rhetorical or non-propositional statements, and recursive (or self-referencing) statements. Like Russell, Post-Modernists inconsistently hold to a two-fold use of language, that statements are either propositions or opinions, but then use recursion to demonstrate the superiority of the latter, so that there are no self-evident, opinion-free propositional truths. That is, they follow Wittgenstein in claiming that words and statements must be interpreted in the context of a metaphysical "language-game," so that propositional statements are based upon rhetorical (e.g., unprovable metaphysical) statements, which made absolute truth unattainable]. This is why Post-Moderns assert¹⁶ that there are no general truths, no absolutes, no propositional statements that can direct us to Plato's eternal realm of Forms; rather language is limited, a fallen instrument, a human construct forever bound to Earth and its historical contexts. Yet in making this claim, they are using this third form of language without acknowledging it; they are explicitly self-referential, using language to describe language in a manner akin to Gödel's approach. Therefore the remedy to a Post-Modern self-destructive argument must involve the proper treatment of this extra aspect of language—the self-referencing syntax, recursive speech, and linguistic recursion. Understanding how this third form of language is used and how it is distinct from both propositional truth and persuasion while remaining essential to both of them, is one purpose of this thesis.

When we examine the Bible to see if it gives us any insight into recursive speech, we are astounded to find example after example. The Bible is constantly talking about itself, beginning in the

12 Kurt Gödel, "" 1931. Note that Gödel's proof relied heavily on set theory, and its ability to describe infinity, as developed by Georg Cantor. That is, every possible proposition that can be made with language is an infinite set, but can be described exhaustively using set theory, so that Gödel could incorporate everything in Russell's positivist agenda, and then show that Russell's set still could not handle certain types of statements, making it inadequate or incomplete.

13 See a history of set theory, e.g. (hannah's book)

14 Hannah's book on Set theory, discussion of Goedel's numbering algorithm

15 Vanhoozer ("Is there a Meaning in this Text?" p19) calls this the "literary turn" in philosophy, though in this analysis it occurred 20 years earlier as a "mathematical turn."

16 Of course, many Post-Moderns come out of a literary or Marxist background, and would not recognize the mathematical bases of their claims, but both historical and metaphysical origins of these Post-Modern traditions are deeply rooted in this logical critique of Modernism, which can be seen simply from the nomenclature—Post-Modernism.

Garden when the Serpent exegetes God's prohibition,¹⁷ continuing to the Exodus when Moses commands us to be careful to keep God's commands,¹⁸ all the way to Revelation where John tells us not to add to the words of this book.¹⁹ This form of language is common to the Bible, and like Gödel's proof, always conveys something more than a simple propositional or a rhetorical statement. We try to capture this third, recursive meaning by saying something like Augustine's "we believe in order to understand," but the Modernist and Post-Modernist insist we are being incoherent, for belief is a rhetorical use, while understanding is a propositional use of language, which cannot be mixed without losing one of them.²⁰ Therefore Evangelical presuppositions that rely on propositional truth alone are insufficient to exegete these passages, as are Post-Modern presuppositions that rely on rhetorical "language-games"; rather the Bible is conveying something potentially as powerful as Gödel's use of infinite sets to permit the finite and immanent tool of language to convey the infinite and transcendent truths of God. Then when Jesus tells us that the parable of The Sower is about the telling of parables, we are clued in that we are being given something more than a propositional truth, more than a rhetorical demand, but a transcendental argument, a bridge between fallible words and absolute truth.

B. The Tool of Speech Act Theory

Having established the existence and significance of a third category of linguistic recursion for philosophical linguistics and Biblical interpretation, we turn to Speech Act theory for a tool that develops this third category and applies it fruitfully to the analysis of texts. Speech Act theory was invented by J.L. Austin in the 1950s and upon his untimely death famously popularized by his pupil John Searle, but we prefer the alternate development by his other pupil, Donald Evans, which makes explicit the fact that words or speech acts do three separate things: they convey information, they persuade, and they create.²¹ In Austin's terminology these three functions are called the locution, the perlocution, and the illocution, which we will often refer to simply as category one, two and three, respectively.

Despite these novel labels, there is little novelty in the categories. We note that the first functional category of propositional truth (what Searle called assertion) is the focus of what was taught in the Greek Trivium as Logic and was the subject of Russell's attempt to reform language as well as the basis of most written communication.²² The second functional category of persuasion was the focus

17 Gen 3

18 Deut 2?

19 Rev 21

20 Nancy Pearcey in her book "Total Truth" discusses this philosophical attack as the "fact/value" distinction which she attributes to a Platonic dualism that propagated through Western philosophy. While she exposes many abuses of dualism, her solution is to fall back on an amorphous monism, whereas the Church Fathers relied on highly precise Trinitarian theology to combat Greek dualism. It is our opinion that the loss of an Eastern church emphasis on Trinitarian metaphysics and epistemology is what ultimately led to the Western abuse of fact/value distinctions, so that Vladimir Lossky is justified in blaming these ills upon the Great Schism and the introduction of the filioque clause. [The Great Schism is indeed a problem, and from what I know it is largely due to the arrogance of the Pope. But Westerners have tended to see the introduction of the filioque as ecclesiastically wrong (arrogant) and theological right (in accord with biblical teaching). This point seems to play a significant role in your thinking, and in good time you may get a chance to expound it. But it does not help the persuasiveness of your thesis here, especially because naive Western theologians would tend to see filioque as an implication of John 16:7. Doubtless it is contrary to Lossky's intention, but the idea that the introduction or lack of introduction of this clause betrays all theology is going to sound very deductivistic--as if all of theology was a more or less direct consequence of a creed.]

21 Donald Evans, "The Logic of Self-Involvement."

22 Derrida's comment is relevant here, that a dominance of the written mode in education and commerce causes all of Western culture to value the propositional mode (logic, philosophy) over the other functional modes of

of what was taught in the Trivium as Rhetoric, and was what Russell wanted to exclude from philosophy. The third functional category of the creation of metaphysical constructs, by definition must draw attention to itself rather than the propositional truth value or its persuasive effect.²³ The medium is no longer an invisible communication channel, but the medium is the message. That is, when we make a promise or a command or a confession, its significance is not derived from its factual content, which may lie in the uncertain future, nor is its significance derived from its effect on the audience, which may be undeserving of the promise, but precisely because it is explicitly a promise, a command, or a confession. Nor can there be ambiguity in the construction, for a promise must identify itself as a promise or it is not a promise. Now most presentations of Speech Act theory see this self-reference as corollary property rather than constitutive of an illocution, but several analyses insist on its necessity.²⁴ And because this property of self-reference²⁵ is also true of the Greek subject of Grammar—which is important not because it is a statement of fact or persuasion, but because it is explicitly a metaphysical construction or rule, and because it is doubly recursive by being expressed in the same medium as it regulates—we argue that this third use of language forms a tri-unity as ancient as the Trivium. That is, many people in different ages have analyzed language to discover a threefold functional grouping along these same lines. Therefore the purpose of Speech Act theory (as Austin often remarked) is not to invent complicated models of communication or introduce novel theories, but to study how one does things with words, to explain this third category of what has long been recognized as the proper functioning of plain language.²⁶ Our purpose in adapting Speech Act theory will be to avoid the dualist pitfalls—the truth-value dilemma discussed by Pearcey,²⁷ the false dichotomy of Post-Modernism as presented by Derrida²⁸—to regain the trinitarian truths of Evangelicalism discussed by Machen.²⁹

Although Evans' development of Speech Act theory into these three categories is more useful for this thesis than Searle's, we have hitherto defined his third category differently, drawing attention to its recursive properties rather than its constructive speech act properties. This difference, however, will not matter because at a deeper level the two definitions are synonymous, partly because the categories will turn out to be exhaustive admitting no fourth category, and partly because the two approaches complement each other. Although this thesis is not the place to develop hermeneutics, John Frame, Vern Poythress and Kevin Vanhoozer all agree with Evans that there are no less than three and no more than three uses of language, so that all apophatic methods (the method of eliminating alternatives) of analyzing the text will result in essentially the same conclusions—e.g., that text that is neither

communication. In a way, this is an explanation for Post-Modernism making the same turn as Wittgenstein did from logical positivism to an analytic form of philosophy.

23 Need footnote of female SAT paper

24 Female SAT and Donald Evans on self-awareness of speech acts.

25 Donald Evans calls it Self-Involvement, which we argue is the same as self-reference, because in the case of written text, the author is often absent or dead, so that self-involvement is always mediated by and through the text. Forming fine-distinctions to avoid recursion is precisely the psychological avoidance mechanism which attempts to defuse this self-reference, and demonstrates that the reader is conscious of the problem, though I believe, is ultimately unable to avoid the self-referential nature of the text.

26 One might argue that Speech Act theory also discusses the assertive locution and the persuasive perlocution functions, but since these have been well-developed previous to SAT, the principle reason for SAT is a discussion of this third category. Nor should one mistake Searle's categorizational approach as Austin's or Evan's approach to SAT, so perhaps we should preface "Evan's" to SAT, calling it ESAT to distinguish it from Searle's or SSAT.

27 Nancy Pearcey "Total Truth"

28 Derrida engaged Searle in a dialogue about the universality of speech act theory. This provides a good insight into the way in which SAT undermines and is itself undermined by Post-Modernism. We expand this discussion in an Appendix on the ways in which Evan's approach to SAT is distinct from Searle's and answers Derrida's concerns.

29 Machen "Christianity and Liberalism"

propositional nor rhetorical must fall into a third category. Because Evan's explication of Speech Act theory is the oldest and the most developed of these “trinitarian” linguistic tools, we will use his approach and accordingly follow his definition of the functional third category, the constructive aspect of a speech act.

Refining our working definition above using Evans' terminology, the self-involving function is performed, for example, when we say “I promise...,” for we have created something with our words that did not exist previously. This thing we created is not subject to the laws of physics, nor can it be predicted or validated by any scientific method, so it is not a “brute fact” but a construction, an “institutional fact” that exists because of a proclamation. Rorty and Fish might argue that precisely because it is institutional, it depends upon the audience, becoming a relativistic value or rhetorical statement as Wittgenstein argued. Evans argues, however, that the audience can be the unchanging God, which then makes it as firm as any empirical statement about reality. But what distinguishes it from similar empirical observations of reality is the self-involvement of the observation, the recursion in the statement, so that once again it is neither empirical nor rhetorical, but a third thing. Therefore one way to identify an function is by asking what is left over after subtracting away the factual and rhetorical content.

This “apophatic” definition of an illocutionary function would include any speech that is more than information and more than persuasion, such as the laws of Moses and the proverbs of Solomon. It includes the constructions that the writer of Psalm 119 praises in his paean to the law, and it is these metaphysical constructions that will turn out to be the secret for interpreting Jesus' words in the parable of The Sower. Since all of these constructions are composed in a language, and must be recognized as a construction, (e.g., a promise must include the word “promise” or an equivalent future tense to be a valid promise) there is a sense in which all illocutions are implicitly self-referential. This implicit self-reference criterion, however, lacks the power to distinguish between, say, exegetical assertions about the language and metaphysical constructions in the language, and so cannot be trusted to reliably identify illocutions. So in this thesis we are additionally limiting our discussion to those illocutionary speech acts that are explicitly self-referential, that do refer to themselves directly. In Evans' terminology, this would be explicit declarations of self-involvement, rather than implications from a “stance” or from the fact of being expressed in words.

Now these three speech act functions—assertion, persuasion, and construction—are not exclusive, for in fact it is rare to find any use of language that can be classed in purely one category. The criticism of Speech Act theory by Poythress was directed at the exclusive categories of Searle's interpretation, which attempted to reduce natural language to “atoms” of speech acts.³⁰ Evans avoids this atomistic reductionism and hence the thrust of Poythress' critique by demanding an overlapping, functional interpretation of speech acts. Evans' theory assumes that each category of language use must be treated respectfully, in an attempt to understand how these three categories synergistically contribute toward the mutual goal and purpose of the single utterance. With Evans' trinitarian tools, we can begin to see how “we believe in order to understand” becomes intelligible once again and how absolute truth can be regained from the dualist antinomies of the Post-Modern collision between locutions and perlocutions.³¹

30 Poythress, “God's Speech and Ours”, p281ff

31 We note how Pearcey has the same enemies and the same goal in “Total Truth”, but lacks the trinitarian perspective.

C. The Theological Choice of a Text

We have addressed the origin of the Post-Modern critique, and found a tool that will help us navigate past the impasse it caused, but we have not yet connected this thesis to a particular New Testament text. Are we in danger of acting autonomously, claiming that our methods are biblically derived, while in practice choosing a biblical text to substantiate our philosophical claims? No, for as Machen and Van Til were careful to stipulate, the Bible is our only infallible source and foundation of all our philosophy, so the Bible does come first, and must in some manner also provide the basis for our selection of text. And so it is that we find in the text of The Sower, a text that not only addresses recursion, but provides a lesson in illocution from the mouth of Christ, directing the approach we planned to use.

Because the text addresses the foundational approach to texts, it also addresses the very topics that inspired the Protestant Reformation—that of rediscovering the primacy of Scripture. So we should not be surprised to find that this text also addresses the secondary issue of Post-Modernism, that of determining the reliability of the Creeds and Confessions of the Church. In order to encompass the widest possible definition of New Testament studies, we want the text to address not only Biblical Theology, but also Systematic Theology and Church History, demonstrating the relevance of the text to the Reformation creeds and confessions. For if in this 21st century the creeds are being rewritten, then *sola fide* is at risk; if trinitarian theology is being redefined, then *solus Christus* is endangered; if Biblical anthropology is lost then so is *sola gratia*; if liturgy and doctrine demand the pronoun “I,” then *solī deo gloria* is null and void; and most significant of all, if the Bible is being retranslated, if the Hebrew and Greek dictionaries are being revised, then *sola Scriptura* cannot stand.

We want our textual exegesis to respond to this Post-Modern critique, so if we are concerned with reestablishing *solus Christus* without contamination from human error, then we must examine Christ's own words rather than what others said about him. If we are concerned to reestablish *sola gratia*, we must look at what Christ gives freely, rather than the costly advice of two millennia. If we are concerned to preserve *sola fide*, we must look at what Christ says about belief, at those immaterial constructions of the mind that shape our will, and mind, and heart, and not at the words and actions of our noblest intentions. If we are concerned with *sola Scriptura*, we must rely only on the words of Christ, and not on the theological dictionaries and histories and interpretations of the text. And finally, if any of this approach requires clever tricks, arcane knowledge, or brings attention to itself, then it has failed the most fundamental test of all, *solī deo gloria*, which is to say, the text must itself be an illocution that gives glory to God alone.

Is there a single text that does all this, that can answer all the Post-Modern objections at once? Surely it must be easier to draw these points from separate texts, much like the church confessions themselves. Yes, but in the process of juxtaposition, we are inserting our own interpretation, choosing which texts to modify with other texts, and so reintroduce the recursive subjectivity that began the Post-Modern attack. Fortunately for us, all these textual criteria are fulfilled in the parable of The Sower, which was in Christ's words, referenced himself, directed to the public, concerned with belief, and brought men into the kingdom. Therefore this text does more than demonstrate the validity of self-reference as a defense against Post-Modernism: it demonstrates the superiority of Biblical texts over Post-Modern ones, and the necessity of keeping the ancient Evangelical creeds of the Church. Not only does it demonstrate that the Post-Modern critique fails, but that the Bible succeeds, and that there is a future for the Reformation.

D. The Approach of this Thesis

The analysis of this text naturally falls into three sections: the locution, the perlocution and the illocution of the parable. By far the greatest emphasis will be upon the illocution of the text, but it cannot be addressed properly until both the locution and the perlocution have been fully explicated. Therefore the first chapter deals with the text itself, first in Greek, then in translation, and then as a simple propositional story. Even in this simple explication, problems will be noted that cannot be resolved with simple locutionary explanations. The second chapter will deal with the perlocution of the parable, the rhetorical character and potential dramatic purposes of the text. Again, difficulties will be noted that cannot be solved by locution and perlocution alone. Finally the third section consists in the longest and most developed analysis, as we examine the metaphysical constructs created by The Sower, and the resolution of many of these earlier difficulties. Not only will it be found to address the origins of absolute truth in response to modern critics, but also how Christ responded to his own first century critics.

Chapter 1. Locutionary (Exegetical) Analysis of the Parable of the Sower in Mark 4

This chapter provides the first step in a three-step analysis of The Sower, that of identifying the authorial intent—the traditional meaning of the text—whereas the second chapter will examine its rhetorical use, and the third chapter its metaphysical constructs. Each chapter builds on those previous so that this chapter involves laying the foundation for the subsequent analysis: establishing the stable Greek text, its most probable English translation, and then a grammatico-historical exegesis of the propositional content of the text.

A. Greek Text of Mark 4:1-20 (Westcott and Hort)

- ¹ Καὶ πάλιν ἤρξατο διδάσκειν παρὰ τὴν θάλασσαν
καὶ συναγεται πρὸς αὐτὸν ὄχλος πλεῖστος, ὥστε αὐτὸν εἰς πλοῖον ἐμβάντα καθῆσθαι ἐν τῇ
θαλάσῃ
καὶ πᾶς ὁ ὄχλος πρὸς τὴν θάλασσαν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἦσαν.
- ² καὶ ἐδίδασκεν αὐτοὺς ἐν παραβολαῖς πολλὰ
καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς ἐν τῇ διδαχῇ αὐτοῦ·
- ³ Ἀκούετε. ἰδοὺ ἐξῆλθεν ὁ σπείρων σπεῖραι.
- ⁴ καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ σπείρειν ὃ μὲν ἔπεσεν παρὰ τὴν ὁδόν,
καὶ ἦλθεν τὰ πετεινὰ καὶ κατέφαγεν αὐτό.
- ⁵ καὶ ἄλλο ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ τὸ πετρῶδες
[καὶ] ὅπου οὐκ εἶχεν γῆν πολλήν,
καὶ εὐθὺς ἐξανέτειλεν διὰ τὸ μὴ ἔχειν βάθος γῆς·
- ⁶ καὶ ὅτε ἀνέτειλεν ὁ ἥλιος ἐκαυματίσθη
καὶ διὰ τὸ μὴ ἔχειν ρίζαν ἐξηράνθη.
- ⁷ καὶ ἄλλο ἔπεσεν εἰς τὰς ἀκάνθας,
καὶ ἀνέβησαν αἱ ἀκάνθαι
καὶ συνέπνιξαν αὐτό,
καὶ καρπὸν οὐκ ἔδωκεν.
- ⁸ καὶ ἄλλα ἔπεσεν εἰς τὴν γῆν τὴν καλὴν
καὶ ἐδίδου καρπὸν ἀναβαίνοντα

καὶ αὐξανόμενα
καὶ ἔφερον εἰς τριάκοντα
καὶ ἐν ἑξήκοντα
καὶ ἐν ἑκατόν.

⁹ καὶ ἔλεγεν· ὅς ἔχει ὧτα ἀκούειν ἀκουέτω.

¹⁰ Καὶ ὅτε ἐγένετο κατὰ μόνας, ἠρώτων αὐτὸν οἱ περὶ αὐτὸν σὺν τοῖς δώδεκα τὰς παραβολάς.

¹¹ καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς· ὑμῖν τὸ μυστήριον δέδοται τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ· ἐκείνοις δὲ τοῖς ἕξω ἐν παραβολαῖς τὰ πάντα γίνεται, ¹² ἵνα

**βλέποντες βλέπωσιν
καὶ μὴ ἴδωσιν,
καὶ ἀκούοντες ἀκούωσιν
καὶ μὴ συνιῶσιν,
μήποτε ἐπιστρέψωσιν
καὶ ἀφεθῇ αὐτοῖς.**

¹³ Καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς·

οὐκ οἶδατε τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην
καὶ πῶς πάσας τὰς παραβολὰς γνῶσεσθε.

¹⁴ ὁ σπεύρων τὸν λόγον σπεῖρει. ¹⁵ οὗτοι δὲ εἰσιν οἱ παρὰ τὴν ὁδὸν· ὅπου σπεῖρεται ὁ λόγος
καὶ ὅταν ἀκούσωσιν, εὐθὺς ἔρχεται ὁ σατανᾶς
καὶ αἶρει τὸν λόγον τὸν ἐσπαρμένον εἰς αὐτούς.

¹⁶ καὶ οὗτοι εἰσιν ὁμοίως οἱ ἐπὶ τὰ πετρώδη σπειρόμενοι, οἱ ὅταν ἀκούσωσιν τὸν λόγον
εὐθὺς μετὰ χαρᾶς λαμβάνουσιν αὐτόν,

¹⁷ καὶ οὐκ ἔχουσιν ρίζαν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἀλλὰ πρόσκαιροι εἰσιν, εἴτα γενομένης θλίψεως ἢ
διωγμοῦ διὰ τὸν λόγον εὐθὺς σκανδαλίζονται.

¹⁸ καὶ ἄλλοι εἰσιν οἱ εἰς τὰς ἀκάνθας σπειρόμενοι· οὗτοι εἰσιν οἱ τὸν λόγον ἀκούσαντες,

¹⁹ καὶ αἱ μέριμναι τοῦ αἰῶνος

καὶ ἡ ἀπάτη τοῦ πλούτου

καὶ αἱ περὶ τὰ λοιπὰ ἐπιθυμίαι εἰσπορευόμεναι συμπνίγουσιν τὸν λόγον

καὶ ἄκαρπος γίνεται.

²⁰ καὶ ἐκείνοι εἰσιν οἱ ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν τὴν καλὴν σπαρέντες, οἵτινες ἀκούουσιν τὸν λόγον

καὶ παραδέχονται

καὶ καρποφοροῦσιν ἐν τριάκοντα

καὶ [ἐν] ἑξήκοντα

καὶ [ἐν] ἑκατόν.

All variants are taken from the Nestle-Aland edition 27 (Bible Works 6) apparatus.

9: Minor variants append καὶ ο συνιων συνιετω, but it is not well attested. We keep the WH/NA version.

11: The Byzantine majority (Byz.) uses δεδοται γνωμαι το μυστηριον in place of τὸ μυστήριον δέδοται, but lack of better support suggest the WH/NA is preferred.

12: Byz. appends τα αμαρτηματα, but neither the LXX nor Acts 28:26-27 have this addition, which supports the WH/NA version.

15: Byz. has εν ταις καρδιαις αυτων in place of εἰς αὐτούς, but it is not well attested elsewhere, and appears to be an attempted harmonization with Mt/Lk, so we stay with WH/NA.

16: WH and NA 25ed. go with the Byz. εἰσιν ὁμοίως, whereas NA 27ed. prefer the omission of

ὁμοίως . As Willker argues,³² NA 27ed. seems to overly favor manuscript D, which would account for this change. We stay with WH.

18: Byz. eliminates the second of the pair, ἄλλοι εἰσὶν ... οὗτοι εἰσὶν, whereas other “Caesarean” variants eliminate the first of the pair to smooth it out and harmonize better with Mt. The weighting of the MSS suggest that WH/NA is probably the more authentic version.

19: Byz. appends the word τούτου τοῦ αἰῶνος, but support is weak and we stay with WH/NA.

20: Byz. replaces ἐκεῖνοι with οὗτοι. This is consistent with Mk's usage elsewhere. Both because the editing tendency is toward smoother reading, and because the support for ἐκεῖνοι is strong, we stay with WH/NA.

B. English Text of Mark 4:1-20 (ESV)

Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. [2](#) And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: [3](#) “Listen! [Behold] A sower went out to sow. [4](#) And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. [5](#) Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. [6](#) And when the sun rose it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. [7](#) Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. [8](#) And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” [9](#) And he said, “He who has ears to *hear*, let him *hear*.”

[10](#) And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. [11](#) And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything [is | is done] in parables, [12](#) so that

**[seeing they may | they may indeed] see but not perceive,
and [hearing they may | may indeed] hear but not understand,
lest they should turn and be forgiven.**

[13](#) And he said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? [14](#) The sower sows the word. [15](#) And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they *hear*, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. [16](#) And these [likewise] are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they *hear* the word, immediately receive it with joy. [17](#) And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they [fall away | are scandalized]. [18](#) And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who *hear* the word, [19](#) but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it [becomes | proves] unfruitful. [20](#) But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who *hear* the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”

We add the following notes on the English translation.³³

3. ESV does not translate “Behold” perhaps for stylistic reasons, yet ἰδοὺ indicates a word-picture follows, which is more information than simply deictic throat clearing, because it implies a visual unity to the following passage.

3ff. Mark switches verb tenses between present and aorist/perfects, which many commentators view as

³² Willker reference

³³ English Standard Version, Wheaton: Crossway, 2007.

exegetically significant. We view it as a consequence of narrative story-telling, and accordingly keep to the ESV translation rather than endow it with some special significance.³⁴

11. ESV translates “everything is in parables” where “is”=γίνεται, though ASV prefers “are done,” which more clearly puts the focus not on the content of parables with an implied equivalence (is), but upon the form (parabolic) with an implied action (are done). This is admittedly a subtle difference, but relevant to the later analysis and supported by the grammar of the Greek verb.

12. ESV replaces the double verbs with “may indeed.” We think it is nearly equivalent, but still prefer the ASV double verb version (seeing they may see...hearing they may hear), which draws more attention to the two perceptions of hearing and seeing, as well as keeping closer to the LXX parallel in Isaiah 6:9.

16. ESV follows NA 27ed and eliminates “likewise,” but preferring WH we add the missing ὁμοίως.

17. ESV footnote translates σκανδαλίζονται as “fall away” with an alternate translation “stumble.” ASV uses “offended,” other translations have “caused to stumble” or “scandalized.” While ESV captures most of the meaning, there is something pungent about “scandalize” that carries a stronger ethical rebuke.

19. ESV translates γίνεται as “proves,” whereas ASV uses “becomes” and others use “made.” Once again, it is not an unchanging existence but an action of transformation that is emphasized by γίνεται, so we prefer ASV “made” or “becomes.” That is, translating it “proves” is more a category one propositional “assertion” that we think is better captured with a third-category constructive illocution “becomes.”

C. In Literary-Historical (Locutionary, Author) Criticism

Our goal in this section will be an expository analysis of the parable of The Sower, identifying some of the problems raised by particulars that are not easily explained from a grammatico-historical approach, and analyzing the various proposed solutions. We will give a simple expository reading of the text followed with some comments on any difficulties with the simple exegesis. We will demonstrate that many of these expository difficulties are a result of the structure of the text, rather than merely the “meaning” or propositional content of the particulars. That is to say, the difficulties are not lexical and cannot be solved by a new definition of a difficult word, but rather syntactical difficulties existing at the sentence or paragraph level. This may mean that they serve a rhetorical purpose, or failing that explanation, possibly an intentional illocutionary construction.³⁵

³⁴ Marcus (p80) translated aorist/present into English as past/present, but found it did not work in English the same way.

³⁵ Joel Marcus (p81) describes the art of commentary in very similar terms, beginning with authorial intent and ending with reader response: “Here I present my vision of what each pericope is centrally about. The COMMENT sections begin with an “introduction” that describes the passage’s relation to what precedes it, makes an attempt to reconstruct its redactional history (...), and outlines its structure. They then move on to an exposition of the passage, usually broken up into the smaller subsections discerned in the analysis of structure. In these expositions I have tried to keep two things constantly in mind: that Mark has produced a narrative text and that he intended it for specific first-century readers, or, better, for specific first-century hearers. So my attempt has been to read myself and my own readers back into the first hearers’ sequential experience of the unfolding passage...Sometimes, however, they would probably have been just as baffled as we are and would have heard as addressed to themselves the words with which the Gospel’s first act closes: “Do you not yet understand?” (8:21). Our Gospel is written by someone who thinks that the path of interpretation is arduous and beset with pitfalls, and who does not set out to make things too easy for his readers, partly because he believes that human puzzlement is a necessary part of the revelation of divine mysteries (...). No commentator on Mark, then, can hope to solve all its perplexing problems; the best an exegete can hope to do is to help his readers (and himself) reproduce the situation of the disciples and place themselves on the road that leads to understanding. Further steps are up to the reader and, Mark would say, to God, for Mark presents the healing of blindness as a divine miracle that takes place in the context of the miracle of discipleship.”

1. Problems in the exegesis

Since we exegete the text synchronically, without textual emendation, the parable of The Sower, Mark 4:1-20, can be roughly outlined in perhaps four parts:

- a) Narrative prologue vv.1-2
- b) An agricultural sub-story vv. 3-9
- c) Interlude and Scriptural basis for the story vv. 10-13
- d) An allegorical interpretation vv. 14-20

More parts might be discerned and certainly more sub-headings, but these four divisions are objectively distinct because both the subject matter and the method of discourse contain abrupt shifts at these points. Since the pericope begins in a narrative form, let us first consider it as a story intended to convey information, as expository writing conveying clear and distinct ideas, noting the places where we encounter difficulties.

a. *The Prologue, vv. 1-2*

The prologue is comparatively straightforward, with few difficulties for a grammatico-historical exegesis. The pericope, vv. 1-20, is about Jesus, accompanied by the Twelve and a few more disciples, who was teaching crowds of people beside the Sea of Galilee (or simply “sea” in the gospel, but by elimination, the Sea of Galilee). The location turns out to be a common one in the gospels, with several events taking place in this locale, but no further reference is made in this pericope to a sea, boats, or fishing, so we do not attach great interpretive meaning to this location, only a setting for a lecture or teaching by Jesus.³⁶

1. The Setting

We are given the detail that Jesus preached from a boat, though some have claimed that the human voice is incapable of such projection at a beach.³⁷ This criticism is not valid for the Sea of Galilee, for under conditions of calm water, it is well-known³⁸ that the reflection of sound waves off a flat sea would double or treble the received sound intensity, making this an ideal “auditorium” for a lecture (provided the sailors in the boat did not splash or talk themselves.)³⁹ The necessity for such a platform suggests that the very large (superlative, *πλειστος*) crowd was having trouble standing close enough to Jesus to hear his message, which would be especially true if the landscape was flat, and if the crowd exceeded a few hundred. So from these simple narrative details, we infer a crowd approaching 1000 persons, standing (or sitting) on a flat beach, on a quiet day by the Sea of Galilee, eager to hear the message. We also infer that the disciples were keeping exceptionally quiet, so as to permit Jesus the maximum amplification the flat sea provided.

36 Gundry (“Mark” p4) argues that secret meanings for “boat” or “sea” are unjustified by the simple text of Mark, which is to say, he denies a “contextual” connection that would posit a special meaning for these words not at the paragraph, pericope, or chapter levels of organization, but at the level of the entire book. This is an example of the hermeneutical rule that long contextual jumps among levels should be less common than short ones.

37 Strange footnote to journal.

38 Bob Utley 1996 Notes on Mark, at <http://www.freebiblecommentary.org/pdf/VOL02.pdf>

39 The effect is similar to a mirage, where warm air above the surface of the road causes light from the sky to refract from the surface, giving the appearance of water. In this case, the cold lake water cools a layer of air above the lake causing sound waves to refract downward until they are reflected back up by the water. The net effect is to produce a waveguide of channeled sound that attenuates the sound intensity as $1/r$ rather than the usual $1/r^2$. To listeners it would appear as if the sound were amplified at the source.

Because the Sea is some 90 miles from Jerusalem and situated in an agricultural region, his audience could be predicted to consist of agricultural laborers of no great education, though we have evidence that by 30AD Jewish boys were expected to know how to read the Torah. We do not know from the text where this beach was located, though an examination of a topological map of the modern day Sea indicates that large beaches of the northeast and west would have fulfilled this criterion of flatness. The north is today a swamp, which weakly suggests a preference for the western side. The western side of the Sea of Galilee, however, had been populated by ten Greek cities, the Decapolis, which means the agricultural laborers who came to hear Jesus were perhaps more cosmopolitan than the Torah-educated Judeans around Jerusalem. We speculate that Jesus would have tailored his message for the audience, and therefore would have been more inclined to use Greek rhetorical devices than appeals to Mosaic authority, as he did later in his ministry in Judea. In any case, Jesus' subsequent teaching has many points in common with allegorical fables, but few explicit links to OT Scriptures or the Law.⁴⁰

2. The Call

Jesus begins with some words intended to focus attention on what follows, or deictic words: ἀκούετε ἰδοὺ “Listen! Behold!” Calling them deictic does not really explain what they mean, or why they invoke two different sensory perceptions in an imperative mode.⁴¹ After all, what is there to see in a story that has not first been heard? And if it has first been heard, then what is there left to see? The ESV sidesteps this problem by translating only half of the pair, but it would seem that invoking two senses carries a different meaning than repeating one word twice: “Hear! Hear!” That is, the visual sense indicates there will be a tableau, a picture, a vision which is grasped *in toto*, as a gestalt, rather than serially in the way aural information is processed. We use pictures to convey information in a different way than words, and even word-pictures, such as the story Jesus tells, convey information differently than propositions which are linked locally and logically rather than globally. This is only a hint of complexity to follow, but first and foremost, these are marker words, used to indicate a change in written topic, or a change in oral communication. What follows will be the beginning of a story, and these words mark the transition.

b. The Sub-story and Jesus' Interpretation, vv. 3-9, 14-20

The subsequent agricultural sub-story about a sower planting seeds on four types of soil would have had an immediate resonance with the rural audience. We call it a sub-story because it is only a part of the entire pericope about Jesus by the sea, and because the sub-story is not just introduced, but bracketed with the words “hear” (Ἀκούετε... ἀκούειν ἀκούέτω) which unify this section, and assign it some rhetorical importance. Mark tells us it is a parable (v. 2), whose principle intention is to involve the hearer in making some judgment.⁴² Judgment implies a court, and the judge or jury of the court must listen closely, hence the admonition to “hear”. Therefore a parable is a “story with intent,” but beyond this generalization, further distinctions are not fruitful, not only because parables have such varied style, length and topics, but also because at this point in Jesus' ministry, the disciples had not

⁴⁰ Need footnote here

⁴¹ Gundry (p195) defends this “clumsiness” of construction, and suggests cliched overuse leads an imperative to deictic. Lane (p153) sees this construction as “a solemn call to attentive hearing.”

⁴² Lane (p151) “The parables make a direct appeal to the imagination and involve the hearers in the situation. This factor lends to the parable the character of an argument. It entices the hearers to judge the situation depicted, and then challenges them, directly or indirectly, to apply that judgment to themselves.” [Dodd had language like this earlier than Lane.]

heard very many parables.⁴³ Then like them, let us hear it as a simple story.

1. The Sub-story, vv. 3-9

A sower took seeds and scattered them on the soil, but the four types of soil described had differing results. The beaten-path soil never absorbed the seed, so birds ate it. The shallow soil had warmth, but lacked moisture, so germination was followed by wilting. The weedy soil germinated the seed, but then starved it of nutrients and light, so that it barely survived and bore no fruit. And the fertile soil provided warmth, water, and nutrients so that it germinated, sprouted and thrived, bearing 30-, or 60-, or 100-seed heads. Each of these soils and the observations of them are scientifically accurate, as reliable an account as any from Ancient Greece. Some have contested the hundred-fold number as an obvious exaggeration, but once again, cultivars with these yields are attested both today and in the historical record.⁴⁴

The last verse forewarns us of what will turn out to be the principle unsettling characteristic of this pericope—the non-sequitur. No obvious sequence is formed by the numbers 30, 60, and 100. The increase from 30 to 60 is a factor of 2 and a step of 30, but the increase from 60 to 100 is a factor of 1.67 and a step of 40, eliminating the possibility of both geometric and arithmetic series.⁴⁵ Finding a theory or a rational explanation for this non-sequitur becomes very challenging, and this same challenge is magnified in the interpretation of the entire sub-story: the first factual step toward understanding is easy, the second allegorical step feels unsettling, and the third theoretical or synthesis step becomes quite hazardous. That is, the allegorical interpretation of this sub-story given by Jesus seems obvious, but it is also unsettling, because the sub-story possesses few of the characteristics expected of an allegory. We are surprised by the lack of a surprise, by the lack of the counter-factual detail, the allegorical hook.

a. The surprising lack of allegorical hook

This sub-story unsettles us when nothing internal defines it to be an allegory, in the way a talking animal flags a fable.⁴⁶ Consequently the disciples were clearly perplexed because they did not recognize it as an allegory at all. They knew it was a parable, but beyond that they were stumped, which is indication that the parable lacked a pointer, a clue, or a suggestion as to how it should be interpreted.⁴⁷ In a fable, by contrast, one knows beforehand that if a character is a talking fox, then cleverness will be presented, or if it is a talking donkey, then stubbornness will be on display. A fable gives a rough indication of what direction the allegory will proceed, and a memorable one takes the expectations and develops them further. But Jesus' parable of The Sower lacks almost all such forward indications or hooks, either to Greek fables or Old Testament riddles.⁴⁸ We say “almost” because as is

43 Klyne Snodgrass “Parables” () argues that because parables are so diverse, this phrase is the only common factor among all the parables—that they have some purpose beyond the telling of the story.

44 See Marcus, “Mark” p293.

45 Marcus p297, says “Things do not unfold in the logical manner humans anticipate, as would be suggested by a straight linear progression of thirty, sixty and ninety or even by a regular doubling of thirty, sixty and one hundred twenty; there is, rather, an element of divine exuberance and even playfulness in the unanticipated leap at the end: the yield is thirty-, sixty- and onehundredfold.”

46 Gundry suggests that the deictic “Hear!” flags it as an allegory, citing OT references,

47 Lane (p150) “In rabbinic literature the Word designates the extended simile, allegory and fable as well as proverbial maxims.”

48 Marcus (p295-297) admits there is merely a hint of OT references, which he finds in the eschatological harvest/field analogies, and draws most parallels with extra-canonical writings such as 4 Ezra to establish a continuity of this parable.

true of many of Jesus' exegeses, there is usually a single, obscure OT reference that may prove insightful,⁴⁹ which in this parable is the conjunction of the definite nouns “the sower” and “the word.”

Clearly “sowing” and “seed” appear to be central to this parable, but examining the OT usage of the titular character “the sower” provides almost no insight⁵⁰ The word “sower” in Hebrew is a participle related to the verb “to sow,” זָרַע, or *zara'*. Of the fifty-six uses of this root in the OT, fifty-three of them are translated in the NASB with a verbal sense “to scatter” or euphemistically “to conceive,” while only three are translated as a noun: Isa 28:24, which is more a product of the English translation than the Hebrew, Isa 55:10 and Jer 50:16.

Zara' appears in Isa 28:24 as an infinitive and only once, making both the ASV and NASB somewhat prolix (prolix? redundant?) with their translation of *zara'* as both verb and direct object, perhaps because the poetic syntax of Isaiah is highly compressed. An even more literal translation “Does the whole day plow the plowing in order to sow?”⁵¹, shows the usage is clearly verbal. Similarly, the participle “sower” in the Jer 50:16 passage is indefinite, and can be easily understood as an agricultural laborer of the Babylonian empire: “Cut off the sower from Babylon, and the one who wields the sickle at the time of harvest” (NASB). This use of the participle has no connection to seed, conception, or metaphorical scattering, but is only representative of an economic class, where the lack of an article indicates that the participle is a generic title, rather than a specific metaphor.

This leaves precisely one OT passage—Isa 55:10-11—in which the Hebrew parallels the Greek, ο σπειρων, with a definite article modifying the participle:

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there without watering the earth, and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to me empty without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. Isa 55:10-11 (NASB)

This passage manages to mention “The Sower” and “My word” in close proximity, but syntactically the comparison is “rain” is to “sower/seed” as “word” is to “what I desire/what I purpose.” Isaiah's poetic syntax connects “word” with “rain” rather than with “seed,” and likewise connects “the sower” to “what I purpose,” which is a recipient rather than an actor.⁵² So when Jesus told the parable of The Sower, there really were no direct OT analogs to a sower being the actor or main character of the allegory, only a vague indirect notion that God was distributing His word and receiving what He wanted. One cannot avoid the sensation that Jesus is deliberately hiding the allegorical interpretation by

49 See the confrontation between Jesus and the Sadducees, where he uses the peculiarity of a plural participle in Deuteronomy to defend the eternal life of the patriarchs: <http://rbsp.info/WTS/NT941-ii.pdf> accessed 1/12/2011.

50 Snodgrass “Parables” remarks that only two of the parables are given a title in the synoptics, so that the title “The Sower” carries special significance for this character, despite the puzzling lack of character development. Contrasting with Aesop's fables or other parables of Jesus, the main character usually develops the plot, which does not happen here.

51 Syntax in Hebrew is quite a bit different than Indo-European languages, and a syntactical analysis of this verse, without regard to its English meaning (since poetry often has ambiguous meaning) gives this “literal” translation, where we used parsed the Hebrew using the syntactical rules developed by Kirk Lowery as displayed in tree form in EMDROS.

52 A check on the Isaiah Targum as well as LXX shows the same understanding as Masoretic—the sower is a recipient of the benefits of the rain.

choosing an ambiguous symbol from the OT repertoire, intended more for indirection than clarity.

b. The surprising lack of character development

The second surprising thing is that there is no development of the titular character. That is, one of the principal reasons to use an indirect form of communication such as an allegory instead of direct speech, is that the indirection holds the audience captive to a potentially inflammatory message before springing the disturbing conclusion.⁵³ Usually, though not always, the main character is identified with the audience, and the character development parallels some action or morally important decision of the hearers. The parables about the man who builds on a rock, the renters in the vineyard, the man who builds a storehouse, etc., all contain some actor who plans, purposes, and acts. By contrast, the Sower seemingly has no plan, no explicit purpose, and (arguably) random actions such as scattering seed on the path. Rather, it is the soils that appear to “decide” passively, if one can call their necessary response a moral “act.” This reversal of normal allegorical expectations is so confusing that the secondary literature is full of attempts to “correct” this lack of development—explaining the random scattering as an agricultural misunderstanding where plowing occurred after sowing⁵⁴, or explaining the passive response of the soil as a consequence of a purposeful preconditioning. Some have even suggested that The Sower be renamed “the parable of the soils” so as to direct the audience in identifying the correct actor.

While all of these well-meaning attempts to contextualize the sub-story may be valid, the mere fact that the literature is full of this extra-textual explanatory material indicates that the sub-story is in some fashion incomplete, lacking the hooks that normally identify it as a parable or allegory. And of course, commentators expect it to be an allegory simply because that is how Jesus explained it, rarely recognizing that in the act of doing so, Jesus simultaneously undermined the genre. To understand the subversive nature of this allegory, we turn next to Jesus' allegorical interpretation.

2. The Allegorical Interpretation, vv. 14-20

After the sub-story ends, Jesus apparently takes a break from his teaching, so his disciples, having failed to grasp the significance of the sub-story, seize this opportunity to speak up, asking for an interpretation (v 10). Jesus then launches into a more pointed lesson with his disciples, quoting Isaiah (v 12), and explicating the sub-story using an allegorical method (vv 14-20). He identifies each type of soil with a type of listener. Skipping over the textual transition vv. 10-13, we pick up with Jesus' interpretation of the parable in v. 14.

He begins with a series of definitions, “These are (εἰσιν) that,” where we are introduced to a word-to-word or word-to-phrase mapping, a kind of second-level local dictionary that gives a context-specific definition of key words. This two-level interpretation is often called “allegory.” We discover that “soil” equals “receptivity of the word,” “birds” equal “Satan,” “rocky ground” equals “uncommitted listeners,” “sun” equals “tribulation on account of the word,” “thorns” equal “cares/ deceitfulness/ desires of world/ riches/ other things,” and “good soil” equals “hear/ accept/ fruit-bearing receptivity.”

Significantly, Jesus departs from his usual template when he defines the meaning of seed indirectly, “The sower sows the word”. If he had not already told us that the sower was scattering seed,

⁵³ Lane “Mark” p150. “The special characteristic of the OT parable is that it assumes such an understandable narrative form that its proper meaning can be concealed from its hearers”

⁵⁴ Lane p153. “The parable of the sower is faithful to the life situation of Palestinian agriculture, in which plowing follows sowing.”

we might not recognize this as a definition of “seed” at all. One reason, perhaps, is that the next clause begins with a pronoun referring to seed, “these are the ones who . . . when they hear,” which makes the seed ambiguously both “word” and “hearers of the word”. Perhaps by using an indirect definition, Jesus can get two meanings out of one word without there being a clash of direct definitions. We suggest that this ambiguity is a Semiticism, since the Hebrew root for both sowing and sower is *zara'*, which in Hebrew also carries the euphemistic meaning “to conceive.” Then the indirect definition, “The sower sows the word” does not so much identify seeds with words since seeds are never mentioned, but rather connects sowing with intellectual conception, or the reception of words.

With these idiosyncratic definitions the agricultural story becomes an explanation of how the same text can provoke very different responses in its hearers. The first three soils are three kinds of hearers who each lack some attitude which is necessary for a proper response to the sower's word. The first, trodden soil, never really accepts the word but rejects it without understanding. The second, rocky soil, accepts it superficially but without deep commitment. The third, weedy soil, accepts and commits to the word but not exclusively, so that competitive words starve it of nutrients. By contrast,⁵⁵ the last and good soil is the person who possesses each of the attitudes that were deficient, and thereby conceives or bears many more words of similar kind. Gundry writes,

In summary, the good hearers welcome the word immediately, so that Satan cannot snatch it away. They welcome it deeply, so that persecution because of it cannot induce them to apostatize. They welcome it exclusively, so that other concerns do not stifle it. The understanding that results from this kind of reception goes beyond the intellectual to touch conduct, commitment, and devotion.⁵⁶

While Gundry's conclusions are supported abundantly throughout the gospel of Mark as well as the entire NT, Jesus' disciples had neither the NT canon nor the rest of the gospel to draw from. Not knowing that “fruit” was “conduct, commitment and devotion,” they had to rely on a method, on an interpretive approach that would make sense of “bearing fruit.” It was this method that Jesus referred to when he said (v. 13) “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?” implying that they should have an interpretive approach for this exemplary parable. If he means that this allegory is normative, then an examination of his list of definitions can be used to further develop our allegorical method. Rather than match text to a method as Gundry does when he expands the text with the allegorical method, Jesus' unusual allegory permits us, even commands us to match a method to the text.

a. The surprising lack of an allegorical rule

This attempt to resolve the ambiguities and make sense of the indirection by developing a method brings up the third surprise in this allegory: the lack of regulative principles. For if we suppose this allegory is normative, then we should be able to extract some rules by observing its characteristics. First, the allegorical meanings (the second level dictionary) are all immaterial whereas the words themselves are all concrete. Second, there is no grammatical agreement between words themselves and the second level dictionary definitions—the plural “birds” correspond to a singular “Satan”; the singular “seed” maps to a plural “ones sown”⁵⁷; and “thorns” can simultaneously be the oppressive

⁵⁵ Mark makes the contrast very clear, switching from οὗτοι “these” for the three bad soils to ἐκεῖνοι, “those” for the good soil, switching from present participle to aorist participle, and adding the reflexive pronoun οὐτινες, “who are those such that.”

⁵⁶ Gundry, p206.

⁵⁷ There is some debate whether “seed” is a collective plural, as it can be in English. Gundry (p 192) argues that the

“cares” as well as the liberating “desires” of a personal actor, while “the deceitfulness of riches” is an inanimate object also equivalenced to “thorns.” Third, the predication in the sub-story is different than the predication in the allegory—the organically active seed sown on the inanimate passive path becomes the passive words heard by morally active people who passively let it be eaten by active birds; or the active seed sown on the passive rocky soil sprouts to become the morally active hearers who passively wilt under active persecution.⁵⁸ The “seed” is both passive word and active soil.⁵⁹ This active-passive ambiguity makes a one-to-one mapping between active subjects and passive objects difficult.⁶⁰ Finally, there appears to be no connection in the allegory between moral actors and amoral objects.⁶¹ The “seed” maps to the “word,” which identifies a dynamically organic and therefore an ethically capable (concrete) actor (“seed”) with a static (immaterial) and therefore ethically neutral second level object (“word”). Likewise the identification of “soil” with “hearers” maps a static object (“soil”) to a dynamic personality (“hearers”).⁶² In this way, the allegory complicates the assignment of moral responsibility implied by the sub-story. In summary, these four generalizations are the exact opposite of regulatory principles we would expect, making it difficult to define Jesus' allegorical method.

b. The surprising lack of an allegorical identification

A fourth surprise is the lack of identification for the main character—the sower.⁶³ Consider how much easier this whole exercise of extracting allegorical rules would have been if Jesus had started out the parable, “I, the plower, went out to plow the soils,” because then the ethical demands placed on the audience would have been proportionate to the identity of the main actor. Since the power of an allegory appears to be a delayed identification between story and audience, the lack of any identification of the sower is a punch that never lands, a shoe that never drops. Instead of limiting the allegorical options by making the main character a concrete figure—Jesus, disciples, or crowd—this lacuna in the allegorical mapping permits an even wider range of interpretive options.⁶⁴

singular pronouns used necessitate the singular, whereas in vv. 26-27 where Mark uses a collective plural “seeds” he uses the masculine rather than the neuter.

58 It may be easier to see this paradox by recognizing that the Hebrew *zara'* can be euphemistically defined as “to conceive,” reflecting a very ancient metaphor of plowing/sowing as masculine impregnation of the feminine soil. So the predication problem can be seen as a confusion in the allegory between the masculine actors and the feminine response.

59 Gundry p205 recognizes the confusion, “The hearers, then, are the middle term that makes sense out of what appears at first glance to be a confusion between the seed as the word (...) and the seed as hearers (...).” But he argues (p207) that the confusion is necessary to make the allegory work. “It is difficult to imagine how the parable as explained would make sense unless the seed represents both the word and its hearers.”

60 See also Chip Anderson (2005) “Rough Cuts” at <http://www.wordstome.com/archive/Documents/Rough%20Cuts%20%20Mark%204%20Sower.pdf>

61 Marcus p312 writes “Contrary to the way the Parable of the Sower is often interpreted, then, its message is not “Become good soil!” Good soil is good soil, and bad is bad; the ground cannot change its nature. The image, indeed, seems to be deliberately chosen for its passivity. Human beings, to be sure, do act; the descriptions of the second and fourth soils () particularly emphasize the importance of the human action in receiving and holding fast to the word. But these more anthropologically framed descriptions alternate with the descriptions of the first and third soils (), which are frankly demonological.”

62 Gundry (p195) dismisses the attempt to make “the soil” an ethically responsible actor in the allegory, an attempt relying on the Gospel of Thomas. The fact that a Gnostic gospel made these changes, and that commentators attempted a redaction along these lines, demonstrates that there is ample historical evidence for the tension we describe.

63 Marcus (p311) writes “It is puzzling that the explanation goes on to interpret every other major element of the parable—the kinds of soil, the factors that inhibit the seed's growth, and the results of the sowing—with the conspicuous absence of the sower himself.”

64 Gundry (p193) lists several interpretive options for “the sower” with differing implications. Marcus (p311) sees this

So if we insist that this allegory is normative despite these irregularities, then the second level allegorical dictionaries can be quite freely defined, as Philo and the Alexandrian school did when interpreting Scripture. Conversely, if we abandon the idea that this allegory is normative for the genre, we implicitly recognize that it subverts the genre. This is more than a problem for literary critics; it is a problem for exegetes who use genre identification to find the purpose, the authorial intent of a text.

c. The surprising lack of literary genre

So the biggest surprise of all is that, under the two widely accepted definitions of the genre of allegory, *The Sower* is not a proper allegory at all. The difficulties we have mentioned so far—the lack of allegory indicators, the lack of character development and the lack of an allegorical rule—have sometimes been taken by commentators as a property of (Alexandrian) allegory itself, which was claimed to be imprecise, inexact, and creatively poetic.⁶⁵ Julicher argued that the misidentification of parables as allegories was a category mistake that created this interpretive confusion.⁶⁶ That is to say, Julicher believed Alexandrian allegories are inherently vague, but parables escape this fate because they are not allegories, as defined by Aristotle, the father of literary theory.⁶⁷

Julicher's thesis has been debated by a half-century of scholars,⁶⁸ perhaps the best being Boucher who gave an excellent critique using classical literary categories. She argued that a metaphor is a single item with two levels of meaning, while a parable is a collection of several two-level items either tightly or loosely bound together in the story.⁶⁹ Therefore an (Antiochene) allegory is simply an extended metaphor with two levels of meaning; most parables satisfy the requirements of an (Antiochene) allegory.⁷⁰ So applying Boucher's terminology to *The Sower*, the first level of meaning consists in an agricultural sub-story about a farmer, seed and soils; while the second, metaphorical level involves abstract nouns about word and receptivity. Boucher would also limit allegories to two-levels,

intentional lapse as needed to produce ambiguity, “As I have suggested elsewhere (Marcus, “Blanks”), this absence is probably an intentional “gap” in the narrative—a point that has been left obscure to engage the reader's attention and thought and to point to the central concern of the parable (...). For in the apocalyptic Markan worldview, the identity of the sower or the word of God is not a simple matter, since proclamation is not an autonomous human action in which a person merely decides to open his mouth and form words about God; it is, rather, a complex act in which divine and human factors are inextricably and confusingly mixed up together. On one level, that is to say, the Markan sower/proclaimer is God himself, as in the many OT passages that speak of the powerful divine word. On a second level, the sower is Jesus, as in the Markan passages in which Jesus teaches, speaks, or proclaims the word (...) On a third level the sower is the preachers of the Markan community, whose proclamation of the good news (...) will continue Jesus' own announcement of it.

65 Reference R--- and the history of 20th century allegory criticism.

66 Adolf Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* (2 vols; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1888, 1899).

67 Aristotle “Poetics” transl Henry Fyfe (1925) accessed 1/28/11 at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=aristot.+poet.+1447a&redirect=true>.

68 See R. and the references within.

69 Madeleine Boucher “The Mysterious Parable” attempts to refute a half-century debate begun by Julicher who argued that parables were not metaphors based on an Aristotelian definition., and therefore required some textual emendation.

70 Kevin Vanhoozer (“Is there a Meaning in this Text?” p117ff) gives a brief history of the allegorical method in Biblical hermeneutics, arguing that the Antiochene view was that allegorical interpretation was permissible only when the author intended it, which also applied to the 2nd level mappings. In contrast, Augustine (and Alexandrian school) used the allegorical method whenever the literal method failed to satisfy. Aquinas and the Reformes had nuanced views between these two extremes.

rarely three-levels,⁷¹ and certainly not infinite (or nested) levels.⁷²

So in the first case, if we view The Sower as an Alexandrian allegory, we destroy the concept of an allegorical genre, because the second level meaning of The Sower is not delimited by the text. Jesus may have suggested a few second-level mappings, but he did not limit the list, but rather provided every encouragement to add to the list, as most commentators do when they identify The Sower. If neither the author nor the text delimits the allegory, then it must be the reader who completes the second-level meanings. But then we are left with a reader-community definition of genre or no genre at all.

In the second case, if parables are examples of an Antiochene allegory, we must exclude The Parable of the Sower from the genre. For the Antiochene allegory genre is defined and delimited by the intention of the author, but The Sower has ambiguities with respect to the noun number/case, the predication, the ethical party, and the character development as mentioned earlier, all of which interfere with understanding the intent of the author. If this is an example of the Antiochene allegorical genre, it must be an exceptional case, which is just another way of saying that it is not really in this genre.

3. Sub-story and Allegory Conclusions

As Gundry and many of modern commentators demonstrate, the sub-story and its allegorical interpretation provide little difficulties for a grammatico-historical exegesis once the allegory is deemed an intention of the author. This easy interpretation, however, comes with a hidden cost of destroying the interpreter's tools. For despite the ease with which “the meaning” of the sub-story is extracted by subsequent allegory, the large number of loose ends requiring judicious choices on the part of the interpreter establish a dangerous precedent for a method. The ambiguity of authorial meaning is not so very great that the reader despairs, for indeed whether the unspecified sower is Jesus, the disciples, the gospel of Mark or the entire New Testament does not seem to affect the meaning of the parable, nevertheless, the intentional ambiguity does affect the hermeneutics, the methodology advanced by Jesus' interpretive technique. Thus easy conclusions produce difficult hermeneutics, whereas the disciples found the opposite—easy hermeneutics produced difficult conclusions.

For if we approach the text as the disciples did, as a first-time reader ignorant of the New Testament canon but careful to follow the Greek and Hebrew literary signposts, there is no guarantee that we will arrive at the traditional “meaning.” Since this was precisely the position of the disciples as they heard this parable and its explanatory allegory for the first time, it is highly important that we examine the question they asked and Jesus' response, for perhaps we can discover whether Jesus means to challenge our hermeneutics or challenge our conclusions. This brings us to the textual transition, vv. 9-13 which attaches the sub-story to its allegorical interpretation.

71 Metaphors are a bit like Bach's “Art of the Fugue”, where weaving in multiple meanings becomes more and more difficult as the number of meanings increases. For example, CS Lewis' Seven volume “Narnia” series is a two-level metaphor, where lion (Aslan)=Christ. Lewis' three-volume “Out of Silent Planet” is a three-level metaphor where Weston=Secularism=Satan. And in his one-volume “Till We Have Faces” he writes a four-level metaphor with explicit recursion, Joy Gresham=Psyche=Orual=Self. The more the levels, the harder to write.

72 In Fish's Reader-response theory, or Derrida's post-modern analysis, every iteration of a metaphor invokes a different set of nuances, and therefore a metaphor has an infinite number of levels. Hirsch would distinguish between “meaning” and “significance”, where the infinite levels of post-modernism are applications of significance, but the two levels of Boucher are the stable “meaning.”

c. *The Transition, vv. 10-13*

If we want to understand the function of the allegory in this pericope, we must see how the allegorical interpretation is related to the rest of the story: is it the main point as most commentators suggest, or only a subpoint of a larger message perhaps related to hermeneutics? The semantic emphases and rhetorical divisions indicated by the transition should help us decide between these options.⁷³ We have already noted several textual features that provide a bracket or a framework around the allegory, all of which point to the Isaiah quotation in the transition as the interpretive key.⁷⁴

1. Structural Words

We have remarked earlier how the opening verb Ἀκούετε acts as a bracket around the sub-story as well as a bracket around the entire pericope. But it additionally brackets the transition and the allegory in the same way, since the sub-story not only ends with ἀκούειν ἀκουέτω (v. 9), but the transition quotes Isaiah with the same double verb (v. 12), while the allegory uses the word three times, ending with a single instance of the same verb (v. 20). Therefore, considering the pericope as a whole, the verb acts as three pairs of bookends—single on the ends, double in the two middle instances. This suggests that the three sections are independent elements within an overarching unity.

Not only Ἀκούετε, but ἰδοὺ appears in the beginning (v. 3), as well as in its finite verb form in the Isaiah quote (v. 12, ἴδωσιν), where it does more than bracket; it designates the type of perception—visual. The use of the visually oriented term ἰδοὺ introduces a subtle pressure to consider the sub-story as a whole, as an entire picture, rather than nibbling away at the parts in progression. But this command must lie outside the pictured tableau, which is the object of the observation. And since the command must precede the action, it also establishes a precedence, a temporal and logical priority for the “seeing” text over the “pictured” text. There is no question that ἰδοὺ functions in this manner, but ἴδωσιν (v. 12) is only an echo of ἰδοὺ, which, though amplified by its adjacency to βλέποντες βλέπωσιν, still does not indicate what text should be pictured. Temporally, the nearest concrete noun that follows these visual verbs is the “sower” (v. 14), which begins the allegory. This would suggest that the bracket containing the Isaiah quote is in some sense causally prior to the bracket containing the allegory.⁷⁵

Putting together these structural elements, we have an introductory ἰδοὺ that subordinates a bracketed sub-story (vv. 3-8), followed by a bracketed Isaiah quotation involving ἴδωσιν that subordinates a bracketed allegory (vv. 14-20). Having broken the text into these two pieces, can we further determine whether the sub-story (vv. 3-8) is dominant, equivalent or subordinate to the allegory (vv. 14-20)? The traditional view holds that the allegory is the principle point of the pericope, and the preceding sub-story (vv. 3-8?) is a pretext for explaining the differing reception of Jesus' teaching. Alternatively, the allegory (vv. 14-20) may a pretext for undermining the established hermeneutical principles of his hearers, which are challenged in the sub-story (vv. 3-8). We turn next to the rhetorical structure of the pericope to get insight into the location of the rhetorical emphasis.

⁷³ Compare to many sermons, for example, David A Leiter “The Sower: A Parabolic Sermon”, Brethren Life and Thought. 43.1-2 (1998): 9-13.

⁷⁴ We have excluded higher critical methods from our thesis, but it is revealing that nearly all of these methods (C. H. Dodd pp 14-15; J. Jeremias pp. 77-79; pp. F. Hauck pp 753-755; R.-----) delete the Isaiah quote from the original, on the grounds that it does not fit in the sub-story/allegory pair. This is implicit recognition that the Isaiah quote is a structural discontinuity which detracts from making the allegory the principle point of the pericope.

⁷⁵ If this bracketing by akoute and subordinating with idosin is correct, it may explain why Mark reversed the LXX order by putting “seeing” first and “hearing” second, because this puts “seeing” within the Isaiah bracket, so as to subjugate the entire allegory to the Isaiah quote in a way that the correct order might not. [difficult to understand]

2. Chiastic Outline

The rhetorical structure of a text can be independent of its logical structure, revealing more about the emphasis than the content of the text. The emphasis in a text can sometimes be found by noting its chiastic structure, which is often a characteristic of oral argument. That is, when making an oral argument that requires a diversionary topic that itself needs another diversion, the route out of this nested explanation is the reverse of the route taken in. Numbering the levels of explanation with “1” being the top level and “3” the nested level, we identify the pattern 1-2-3-2'-1' as a chiasm. Now there is no rhetorical rule that requires the chiasm to put the most general arguments on the outside, so the chiasm could equally well be constructed 3-2-1-2'-3' with the main point in the middle, but what the chiastic structure tells us is that 2-2' is certainly not the main point.

Several commentators have found chiastic outlines for the whole of Mark 4, which are confirmed through their extensive parallels with the synoptics. The following is one such outline of the chapter:⁷⁶ A-Narrative Introduction (vv. 1-2): B-The Sower Parable (vv. 3-9): C-The Purpose (vv. 10-12):: D-The Interpretation (vv. 13-20):: C'-General Statement (vv. 21-25): B'-Related Parables (vv. 26-32): A'-Narrative Conclusion (vv. 33-34). Such an analysis would put the allegory at the rhetorical center of the chapter, supporting the traditional view that this allegory is the principle point of the parable chapter.

The difficulty with making chiastic outlines, however, is not only that they are somewhat subjective, but also that they depend crucially on where they begin and end. If instead of diagramming the entire chapter, we focus only on the pericope of The Sower, we get a very different chiasm: A-Narrative Introduction (vv. 1-2): B-The Sub-story bracket (vv. 3-9):: C-The Purpose bracket (vv. 10-12):: B'-The Allegory bracket (vv. 13-20): (A'-missing). If this be rhetorically accurate despite the absence of A', perhaps due to a postponed conclusion, then both the sub-story and the allegory are relegated to the non-emphatic position, while the transition outshines the obviously unimportant narrative introduction.

The important point is not that chiasm-finding is a treacherous tool, but that there are very few ways to arrange three blocks of text in a rhetorically useful manner, the three most common being ascending, descending, and chiastic order. The traditional view chooses ascending, putting the emphasis on the final allegory.⁷⁷ Various higher critics choose the descending view, arguing that the allegory was appended later, and the emphasis is on the sub-story.⁷⁸ We examine the chiastic view, that the Isaiah quote rhetorically subordinates both sub-story and allegory.

From the traditional ascending viewpoint, it is peculiar that the Isaiah quote lies outside the sub-story and outside the allegory, yet Jesus emphatically claims Isaiah is central to the interpretation (vv. 11-13). Rhetorically, the allegory answers both the riddle of the sub-story, and the cryptic phrase, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God,” which makes the allegory an expansion of the Isaiah quote. This suggests that Isaiah's prophecy logically as well as historically precedes both the allegory and the sub-story, and may indeed be expressing the cause or purpose of both. Then the chain of causal priority begins with the Isaiah quote (v. 12), followed by the “secret of the kingdom” (v. 11),

⁷⁶ Klyne Snodgrass (p157) “Stories with Intent”

⁷⁷ Lane (p155) gives a common understanding when he writes “The sequence of Jesus' parabolic teaching of the multitude is interrupted by Ch. 4:10-20.”

⁷⁸ Lane (p156) responds to higher critics such as C. Dodd “parables” and J. Jeremias “Parables” who would delete or move this text elsewhere so as to give primacy to the sub-story, by demonstrating that their linguistic critique is not compelling. While we dismiss any attempts to tamper with the text as inherently destabilizing and ultimately misguided, it is important to recognize the tension they sought to remove was a stress on the Isaiah quote.

the sub-story (vv. 3-9), and finally the allegory (vv. 14-20). Again, to compare this to the case of a fable, the moral or telic point lies outside the fable itself, and supplies the cause of the telling of the fable, which is exactly how Isaiah's prophecy functions in this parable—it lies outside both the sub-story and its allegorical interpretation, providing the reason for both. And what is the purpose of the prophecy? This is examined in the next section.

3. The Centrality of Isaiah's prophecy

We have suggested a chiasmic outline of this pericope which in a nutshell is “Jesus taught the meaning of Isaiah 6 using a parable that was later explained allegorically.” So if the Isaiah passage is the actual I'm not fond of this Aristotelian distinction of types of cause, but if you are going to use it you have to indicate what "actual" means.] or final cause and not just the formal cause for this parable, then the words around the quotation from Isaiah will be critical in ascertaining its function.

Note how Jesus uses the verb γίνεται (vv 11, 19) to introduce and conclude the interpretive section. “For those outside, everything is done (γίνεται) in parables,” repeating the same verb in speaking of the fruitless seed among thorns, which “choke the word, and it becomes (γίνεται) unfruitful.” In both cases, the subject of the verb is not a state of being, but a mode of receiving, of changing, of transformation. Liddell-Scott parses γίνεται as intransitive based on the root “to be born,” or in a predicate “to become.” Strong's Greek lexicon points out that it is a deponent middle or passive form, which means the active or transitive form had vanished from usage, so the passive-transitive takes on an active-intransitive meaning. Friberg and Friberg further argue that while the Attic Greek analyzed by Liddell-Scott had an active sense (and therefore a true passive), the first century Greek had lost the active future tense, making γίνεται deponent in either middle or passive form.⁷⁹ But in neither case (vv. 11,19) does it imply simple existence “is,” for despite the deponency masking the difference between active, middle and passive, γίνεται suggests that there may be a self-transformation taking place. The repetition of a deponent middle or passive voice in v. 20, where the good soil likewise “receives” the word, suggests that both good and bad reception may be a self-caused state.

Drawing from Saussure, the meaning of a particular word is as much a function of what is excluded as what is included. Therefor γίνεται replaces the more common verb “to be” with a resulting copula verb that indicates some sort of relationship between the word and soil which is mutual and transformative. In addition, the double occurrence of γίνεται (vv. 11, 19) also links the allegory in subordinated bracket (d) with the cause or purpose of main bracket (c). Paraphrasing vv. 11-12 very crudely, “those who do not get the main point (c) are the same ones described in parable (b) and its interpretation (d).” But who exactly are these ones?⁸⁰ Certainly not the disciples, who are told that they are given the secrets as special insiders. The nearest context for these outsiders are the crowds in (a), or more generously, some of the people in the crowd. Then the purpose of the parable (b) was to self-transform the crowd (a) into those that understand Isaiah (c) from those that do not, thereby fulfilling the prophecy.

If we now see the Isaiah passage as both rhetorically and logically the central theme of the pericope, then we must address the intent of Isaiah's prophecy and the intent of Jesus' quotation. Only then will we be able to comment on the purpose or final cause of The Sower. However, when we turn to the commentaries on Mark 4:10-13, we immediately find a great controversy among scholars who, among other things, claim there is a misunderstood OT context behind Jesus' parabolic exegesis.

⁷⁹ Barbara and Timothy Friberg, “Analytical Greek New Testament” p812-816.

⁸⁰ J. Marcus “Blanks and Gaps in the Markan Parable”, *BibInt* 5, p 248 argues that Mark's inadvertent switching of antecedents is a “blank”, an accidental omission in the narrative.

Therefore we turn to an exegesis of the OT passage itself.

d. The Quotation, Isaiah 6:9-10

As several scholars have remarked about the Isaiah quote in Mark 4:11-12,

These two verses have probably generated more secondary literature than any other passage in Mark, but, in line with contemporary trends in biblical interpretation, most studies of Mark 4.11-12 to date have focused on source, form, and redaction critical issues.⁸¹

Verses 10-12 are perhaps the most difficult and most discussed verses in the whole of Mark's Gospel.⁸²

The amount of literature which has been written on this rather disturbing logion of Jesus is, without exaggeration, staggering.⁸³

For the sake of brevity, we dismiss all the analyses that modify the text, skipping over the majority of the higher critical approaches that solve the problem by deletion, and instead consider only those solutions which leave the text intact. In the discussion below, we closely follow the argumentation from Hatina.⁸⁴

The exegetical problem raised by the quote from Isa 6:9-10, is essentially a theological problem:⁸⁵ Mark's version of Isaiah uses the Greek logical connectives, ἵνα . . . μήποτε, which are usually translated with a sense of purpose, a telic meaning: "in order that . . . lest." The sentence seems to say that Jesus taught in parables "in order that some would not understand lest they turn and be saved." This exclusion appears to contradict other inclusive verses beginning with Mark 4:33 that say Jesus spoke clearly, that he came to seek and to save the lost, to teach about the Kingdom, to put a lamp on a stand, etc. Then the problem becomes one of reconciling these two contradictory theological ideas of inclusion and exclusion.⁸⁶

Those who would subordinate the text to theology are greatly encouraged by the synoptic parallel from Matthew 13:13, where Jesus paraphrases the OT, "διὰ τοῦτο ἐν παραβολαῖς αὐτοῖς λαλῶ, ὅτι βλέποντες οὐ βλέπουσιν." The telic *hina* is converted into an explanatory *hoti*. For in Matthew's quotation, the outsiders are not prevented from understanding by the parable, but have already made themselves unable to understand and therefore must bear the responsibility for their own moral failure. Unfortunately, current critical consensus suggests that Matthew redacted Mark in order to make this quote indirect with *hoti*, so that the synoptic parallel cannot be used to explain Mark as a misprint of

81 M. A. Beavis "Mark's Audience: The Literary and Social Setting of Mark 4.11-12" Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989.p 2.

82 Morna D. Hooker "Mark's Parables of the Kingdom" in *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables* ed Richard Longenecker, p90, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

83 Aloysius Ambrozic "The Hidden Kingdom: A redaction-critical study of the references to the kingdom of God in Mark's Gospel" *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly—Monograph Series II*, p46. Wash. D.C.: Catholic Biblical Assoc of America, 1972.

84 T. Hatina "In Search of Context" 2002, pp184-238.

85 Frank Kermode, a secular literary critic, sees the problem as a hermeneutical problem rather than simply a theological problem. He writes ("The Genesis of Secrecy", Cambridge: Harvard U Press, 1979, p2) "He [Jesus] handed down not only a text for them to interpret, but also rules and a theory of interpretation. The theory seems, however daunting, plain enough, though like many clear things it darkens under the interpreter's gaze. Here, at the outset, we need to confront it in its original, uncompromising, and disquieting form. When Jesus was asked to explain the purpose of his parables, he described them as stories *told to them without*—to outsiders—with the express purpose of concealing a mystery that was to be understood only by insiders." It is clear that for literary critics, hermeneutics is theology, and the issues are one and the same. But note how Kermode recognizes that it is self-reference that causes the trouble.

86 Heikki Raisanen "The 'Messianic Secret' in Mark's Gospel" p79.

Matthew but rather confirms Mark's version with *hina* as the original and controversial conjunction.

An alternative explanation for *hina* is to argue that both Matthew and Mark used another source, where Matthew did a better job transcribing or translating it. Therefore many Biblical scholars seek a resolution in the Scriptural antecedents for Mark's quote, including the Hebrew Masoretic text (MT), the Aramaic Isaiah Targum (IT), and the Greek Septuagint (LXX), which we reproduce below.

1. Hebrew Masoretic Text of Isaiah 6:9-10⁸⁷

וַיֹּאמֶר לָךְ וְאָמַרְתָּ לָעָם הַזֶּה שְׁמַעוּ שְׁמוּעָה וְאַל תִּבְיִנוּ וּרְאוּ רְאוּ וְאַל תִּדְעוּ:

הַשָּׁמַן לִב־הָעָם הַזֶּה וְאָזְנוֹי הִכְבֵּד וְעֵינֵי הִשְׁעוּ פֶּן יִרְאֶה בְּעֵינָיו וּבִקְוֵנוֹ יִשְׁמַע וְלִבָּבוּ בֵּין וְשָׁב וְרָפָא לוֹ:

[Translation:⁸⁸ And he said, “Go, and say to this people: “Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”]

The underlined pair of words, “hear, hear” and “see, see” are in the imperative in the Hebrew, whereas Mark has both in the future indicative. The 1Q Isaiah scroll from the Dead Sea, while nearly a millennium older than the MT, does not differ materially from the MT.⁸⁹

2. Aramaic Targum of Isaiah 6:9-10⁹⁰

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵיזֵיל וְתִימַר לְעַמָּא הַדִּין דְּשִׁמְעִין מִשְׁמַע וְלֹא

מִסְתַּכְלִין וְחֻזֵן מַחֲזָא וְלֹא יִדְעִין:

טְפִישׁ לִבֵּיהֶם דְּעַמָּא הַדִּין וְאֹדְנֵיהֶם יִקַּר וְעֵינֵיהֶם יִמְטִים

דְּלִמָּא יִחֲזֹן בְּעֵינֵיהֶן וּבִאֹדְנֵיהֶן וּבִאֹדְנֵיהֶן יִשְׁמַעֵן

וּבִלְיָבָהֶן יִסְתַּכְלוּן וְיִתּוּבוּן וְיִתְבַּיְקוּ לְהֹן:

[Translation⁹¹: And He said, Go and tell this people, who are diligently hearing, but understand not, and see diligently, but know not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make theirs ears heavy, and darken their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and repent, and it shall be forgiven them.]

Unlike the MT and LXX in the second person, both the Isaiah Targum (IT) and Mark use the third person plural for the doubled verbs “hear, hear” and “see, see.” It seems the IT shifts the person in order to agree with the relative pronoun “who” which introduces the clause, though the shift seems grammatically unnecessary. The conjunction is translated “lest.” Finally, the verb “forgive” in Mark and IT replaces the verb “heal,” which appears in MT and LXX.

3. Greek Septuagint on Isaiah 6:9-10

καὶ εἶπεν πορεύθητι καὶ εἶπὸν τῷ λαῷ τούτῳ ἀκοῇ ἀκούσετε καὶ οὐ μὴ συνῆτε καὶ βλέποντες
βλέψετε καὶ οὐ μὴ ἴδητε ἐπαχύνθη γὰρ ἡ καρδία τοῦ λαοῦ τούτου καὶ τοῖς ὠσὶν αὐτῶν βαρέως

87 Westminster Leningrad Codex

88 ESV

89 Richard Schneck, “Isaiah in the Gospel of Mark I-VIII” pp 103-104, Vallejo: BIBAL Press, 1994.

90 Targum Jonathan, from <http://cal1.cn.huc.edu/> accessed 12/15/09.

91 Rev C. W. H. Pauli, “The Chaldee Paraphrase on the Prophet Isaiah”, London: London Society's House, 1871.

ἤκουσαν καὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτῶν ἐκάμμυσαν μήποτε ἴδωσιν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς καὶ τοῖς ὠσὶν ἀκούσωσιν καὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ συνῶσιν καὶ ἐπιστρέψωσιν καὶ ἰάσομαι αὐτούς

[Translation 1851:⁹² Ye shall hear indeed, but ye shall not understand; and ye shall see indeed, but ye shall not perceive. For the heart of this people has become gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.]

[NET Translation 2007:⁹³ And he said, “Go, and say to this people: ‘You will listen by listening, but you will not understand, and looking you will look, but you will not perceive.’ For this people’s heart has grown fat, and with their ears they have heard heavily, and they have shut their eyes so that they might not see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn—and I would heal them.”]

The underlined sections match closely the quoted passage in Mark, demonstrating that his text abbreviates the LXX. But other than the two points of similarity to the MT and IT, Mark elsewhere appears very close to the LXX.⁹⁴ Clearly Mark’s quotation is neither a misquote nor a misunderstanding of the OT passage. Though present in the LXX translation of 1851, the omission of “lest...should” in the translation of 2007 merely deflects the same theological issue that we confront in Mark. Making a new translation of the LXX does not remove the problem, but it does show that scholars have not yet found a solution to the NT quotation.

4. NT understanding of Isaiah 6:9-10

A recent trend in NT studies has been to downplay the obvious parallels with the LXX and emphasize the similarities with the IT. But as can be seen, the voice/number of the verbs and the substitution of forgive/heal are a poor foundation on which to base a rewrite of the *hina . . . mepote* clause. The 2007 retranslation of the LXX is likewise a disturbing development that merely hides exegetical differences in a less accessible form. After analyzing all the sources, Hatina concludes that Mark has used a synthesis of the IT and the LXX in composing the quotation, which, he argues, is typical of Scriptural quotations in the gospels, and, in this case, is a consequence of the importance and common usage of this passage.⁹⁵ This is also compatible with Maurice’s view that Mark translated this passage from an Aramaic source document.⁹⁶

If we cannot pin the theological problem on a particular OT source, what other options do we have? There are three types of solutions: modifying the Greek text (higher criticism); modifying the Greek translation (lexical/syntactic grammar); or modifying the Marcan context (text-linguistic, historical criticism). Responding to the first proposed solution, we have already made it clear that we do not allow modification of the text, since a solution that preserves the text is obviously to be preferred to one that is speculative.⁹⁷

92 Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton 1851 at <http://www.ecmarsh.com/lxx/Esaias/index.htm> accessed 12/15/09.

93 Moises Silva “The New English Translation of the Septuagint” Oxford: Oxford 2007. at <http://www.us.oup.com/us/catalog/general/subject/Bibles/TextReferenceBibles/NewEnglishTranslationoftheSeptua/?ci=9780195289756> accessed 12/15/2009.

94 Ambrozic (p47) lists two other Marcan similarities with the Targum, a passive voice used to avoid mentioning the Name, and the last word of Matt is *lo*, LXX has *autous*, Marc has *autois*, and Targum *lahon*. Neither addition seems compelling.

95 Hatina, p188.

96 Casey, p136.

97 Even if it were not speculative, it is mathematically unstable, because any text that modifies itself introduces feedback into the output, making all forms of higher criticism unrepeatably, and therefore not the objective scientific method

a. The Greek grammar

What about appeals to grammar, that the usual lexical or syntactic use of the *hina . . . mepote* phrase is incorrect? This is a perfectly legitimate approach, as long as we are not creating a special entry in the lexicon or grammar just for this verse, which is to say, as long as there is external linguistic support for an alternate reading.⁹⁸ Hatina critiques five appeals to grammar: (1) Mark made an error in translation from the Aramaic;⁹⁹ (2) less common definitions for *hina* are not telic, but causal, and when combined with an alternate reading for *mepote* as “for fear of,” the theological conflict is removed;¹⁰⁰ (3) *hina* introduces a result clause, not a telic clause;¹⁰¹ (4) *hina* represents a Hebrew MT imperatival meaning;¹⁰² and (5) *hina* merely acts as a marker for a direct quotation.¹⁰³ Hatina thinks the most plausible of these arguments is that Mark misinterpreted the Aramaic conjunction, but if we assume Mark translated poorly, we are modifying the lexicon for this particular usage only, which as we said earlier, is an ill-advised speculation. Furthermore, the “mistake” or grammatical correction must include both conjunctions *hina* and *mepote*, which strain credulity and extra-textual support. Nor are the suggestions that *hina* merely introduces a direct quote able to deflect the logic of the quote itself, which still contains the offensive *mepote*.

Hatina dismisses all these grammatical evasions by demonstrating their lack of coherence, both with the text and with the lexicon, concluding:

In the end, the arguments for a non-telic meaning of the conjunctions are difficult to sustain. The grammatically oriented arguments, which at least try to deal with the conjunctions at the Markan level, run into the problem of the syntactical relationship between ἵνα and μήποτε as well as the implication of purpose expressed in v. 11. Perhaps the main reason why arguments for a non-telic meaning do not satisfy is that theological criteria tend to supplant the grammatical issues.¹⁰⁴

This lack of coherence is a global critique, that asks whether the grammatical changes make sense in the light of the whole. Kermode, a literary critic skilled in these sorts of rhetorical analyses, comes to the same conclusion:

As I shall try to explain in the second chapter, the true sense of this theory of parable interpretation is much disputed; cunning ways are found of making mean other than it seems to say, involving accusations of treachery in redactors and scribes, and even in the Greek language as Mark used it. But in my opinion the distinction holds, that in this tradition insiders can hope to achieve correct interpretations, though their hope may be frequently, perhaps always,

they claim to be.

98 Once again, there is a regrettable trend to put “special case” translations for single instances into the lexicon so as to hide exegetical problems in a deeper level. Without external support for these exceptions, we have reintroduced the same circular feedback that made higher criticism unstable and unscientific. When recourse is made to such special definitions, they must be flagged as speculative and awaiting further confirmation, though personally I think it preferable to imitate the practice of the KJV and merely transliterate an undefined word.

99 C.F. D. Moule “An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek” p 143; ‘Mark 4.1-20 Yet Once More’ in E.E. Ellis and M. Wilcox (eds) *Neotestamentica et Semitica: Studies in Honour of Matthew Black*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1969, p 100-101.

100 T. A. Burkill “Mysterious Revelation: An Examination of the Philosophy of St Mark’s Gospel”, Ithaca: Cornell U Press, 1963, pp112-113.

101 C. H. Peisker, ‘Konsekutives ἵνα in Markus 4.12’ *ZNW* 59 (1968) pp 126-127.

102 C. J. Cadoux, ‘The Imperatival Use of *hina* in the New Testament’, *JTS* 42 (1941) pp 165-173.

103 J. Jeremias, ‘The Parables of Jesus’ p17.

104 Hatina, p196. We understand this “failure to satisfy” as a veiled reference to the self-referential instability problem, that the unsatisfactory explanations assume the conclusion in their argument when they use higher hermeneutical levels to modify lower ones.

disappointed; whereas those outside cannot.¹⁰⁵

Therefore Kermode from a rhetorical analysis and Hatina from an exegetical analysis agree on the function of the *hina . . . mepote* clause, it really means what the Greek says—that Jesus' parables are intended to enlighten the insider while bewildering the outsider.¹⁰⁶

b. Historical criticism

This brings us to the last way to resolve the theological problem of inclusion and exclusion: historical criticism, a close cousin of higher criticism. Similar to higher criticism in its desire to rearrange the text, historical criticism does not modify the text so much as the context surrounding it.¹⁰⁷ The general approach is that the telic meaning is the actual meaning, but Mark 4:1-20 has been displaced from its original setting and therefore addresses a problem external to the one in Mark 4. Many contexts for the original composition have been suggested;¹⁰⁸ Hatina addresses seven typical ones: (1) the early Church;¹⁰⁹ (2) a Palestinian riddle;¹¹⁰ (3) the later Church;¹¹¹ (4) the evangelist's ecclesial theology;¹¹² (5) the evangelist's *Sitz-im-Leben*;¹¹³ (6) the evangelist's resurrection-theology;¹¹⁴ or, (7) the evangelist's biblical theology.¹¹⁵

The search for a context presupposes that the weight of meaning depends on a textually unsupported and therefore poorly defined context. The search for a context itself partakes of the same circular logic that we saw in the unsupported grammatical approaches, but more importantly, it ignores the data of Baird that suggests the evangelists took great pains to identify and record the exact audience context of the logia.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, Mark 4:1-20 presents some ambiguity of audience—i.e., whether outsiders heard the allegory or not—that may motivate the search for other audience contexts.

Hatina expends considerable effort countering the most conservative explanations, items 5-7 above, primarily because they are so close to his own; that is, they are integrative approaches attempting to interpret this logion in the light of the entire gospel of Mark. They also have the advantage of finding an alternative context in the remainder of Mark's Gospel, rather than in the mind of an inaccessible imagined redactor. Nevertheless, Hatina finds these alternate contexts lacking because they do violence to the Gospel as a whole, and this narrative in particular.¹¹⁷ In Baird's terminology, the logion which includes the Isaiah passage is unequivocally in the language of Jesus, whereas the narrative wrapper reflects the editorial work of Mark or other editors, so *contra* Wrede, we

105 Kermode, p3.

106 For a redactional critic's agreement with Hatina, see H. Raisanen, "The 'Messianic Secret' in Mark's Gospel" p83.

107 Because historical criticism does not modify text it is not as susceptible to feedback and instability, but it is also manifestly more speculative. There is no doubt that the author of Mark's Gospel edited and redacted the text to serve his needs, it is only that the only context we have for this Gospel is what he gave us—the Gospel itself. Everything else—including the identity of the author, the location of the writing, the sources he used, the language he spoke—is speculative. And thus we need to use great caution lest our speculations become another positive feedback instability.

108 See Guelich, Mark 1-8.26, pp199-203.

109 Chilton, "A Galilean Rabbi and His Bible" p 96; V. Taylor "The Gospel According to St Mark" (London: Macmillan, 1959) p255-257.

110 J. Jeremias "The Parables of Jesus" pp14-18.

111 C. F. D. Moule, "Mark 4:1-20 Yet Once More" p 105.

112 W. Wrede "The Messianic Secret" trans JCG Greig; Edinburgh: T&T Clark; Greenwood SC: Attic Press, 1971) pp56-60.

113 C. A. Evans "To See and Not Perceive", pp 101-106.

114 J. Marcus "The Mystery of the Kingdom of God" p 89-100.

115 Schneck "Isaiah in the Gospel of Mark, I-VIII" pp114-123; Rikki Watts, "Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark" pp 185-186.

116 J. Baird, p90ff

117 Hatina, pp 201-124.

cannot assign these Isaianic words to a later redaction, even one by the evangelist himself. In Kermode's terminology, *contra* Marcus, we cannot invent hypothetical scenarios behind the text just because facing the text is too disturbing. If finding another context for Mark 4:1-20 appears to require finding another context for all of Mark's gospel, then the whole purpose of resolving this theological problem is lost in a much greater project of repositioning Mark's gospel with respect to the synoptics. Even these conservative attempts to inject Mark's supposed theology or perspective into this logion either do violence to the words of Jesus, or change the nature of the audience so carefully recorded by all three gospel writers.¹¹⁸ Therefore if there is a solution to the theological problem of inclusion and exclusion, it must lie with Jesus himself, and not with any historical function this logion may have served later on.

We have now addressed the typical responses to the text, and find that its meaning remains paradoxical. Yet Jesus is quite clear that Isa 6:9-10 is the central point, so that our exegesis has found a paradox that it is not capable of being solved exegetically.¹¹⁹

2. Analysis of Problems Raised by Exegesis

In our exegesis so far, we have uncovered several interpretive problems that seem to change the entire meaning of the pericope: if the point of the parable is the allegory, and since the allegory does not fit the genre, it undermines our allegorical hermeneutics; but if the point of the parable is the hermeneutic itself, then the function of the allegory is to demonstrate that it cannot be rationally understood. This interpretive dilemma is a consequence of the structure of the pericope, not a consequence of the words that are used. In the next two chapters, we will pay closer attention to the structure, but first we must address the magnitude of the problem and the significance it holds for interpretation.

a. A Pair of Paradoxes

To resolve the dilemma of two interpretations, we looked at the transitional passage between the parable and the allegory, where we concluded the Isaiah quotation was the telic purpose for the telling of the parable. However, immediately we are confronted with the "*hina . . . mepote*" clause that tells us the parable is intended to have two meanings, one for the insiders and one for the outsiders. Even more disturbing, both Jesus and Isaiah are addressing Jews, who had traditionally been considered insiders, yet are now divided into two groups determined by their response. That is, one only can distinguish outsiders by their inability to understand the parable. Therefore we find the two problems uncovered by our exegesis are linked: the two possible ways to understand the purpose of The Sower—as allegory or hermeneutics—are themselves connected to the two possible ways to respond to The Sower—as insider or outsider. Having been unable to resolve either of these two dilemmas by linguistic, historical or theological considerations, we must address the impact they have on our exegesis. The best approach is

118 Typical of the solutions we reject are Raisanen's: 1) predestinarian ignoring obvious parables; 2) non-predestinarian with theological contortions; 3) higher criticism insertion; and, 4) an internal inconsistency explained historically. H. Raisanen "Messianic Secret" p101.

119 J. Williams ("Gospel Against Parable" Sheffield: JSOT Press, p11, 1985.) points out that there is a deep divide among Biblical scholars. "In the course of the study I shall deal with a crucial issue that often sparks a heated debate and unfortunately hard feelings among biblical critics: the heuristical and hermeneutical value of historical approaches against literary approaches. ...Now I think it is one of the sad and deleterious facts about contemporary scholarship that so many colleagues see these two fundamental orientations in criticism as mutually exclusive. ...It is deleterious because both interpretive approaches have something important to contribute." For example, historical critic H. Raisanen writes "No wonder that interpreters who take this tension seriously have resorted to literary-critical solutions." ("Messianic Secret" p106.)

to enumerate all the possibilities and consider their consequences.

1. Outsider and Allegory

If we are the outsider who does not care whether he is a Christian or not, but is primarily interested in the allegory as a paradigm of the Christian experience, then we can analyze the allegory dispassionately, scientifically, with no regard to personal salvation, and find in it much sociology about the future of the Church and its self-identity. To a large extent, this is the position of most higher critics, who consider the allegory as psychologically driven historicizing, a self-interpretive gloss appended to an ambiguous tradition of the parable.

Yet in seeing the allegory as a self-conscious attempt to justify or rationalize the historical circumstances of the Church, the outsider is propounding a hermeneutical principle for interpreting history as intrinsically circular and unreliable. Such a hermeneutic then undermines the self-same solution he found for the allegory, which is to say, the scientific approach toward texts undermines the historical basis of the scientific method. The text was subordinated to scientific reason, only to find reasonable science was subverted by the text.¹²⁰

Even for the outsider, The Sower causes a crisis in identity.

2. Insider and Allegory

If we are the insider, who truly understands the parable as an allegory of the reception of all parables and by extension, of the kerygma of the NT canon, then we are privileged to understand what the rational outsider cannot. The Sower and all parables hold no mysteries for the insider, indeed, they cannot because Jesus told the disciples that he had made known to them “the mystery of the Kingdom.” This is the traditional interpretation found in most commentaries.

If the insider is confused by the text, however, he is no longer obviously inside, which makes the admission of doubt extremely dangerous. Belief then becomes a self-perpetuating affirmation that he is without any substantive questions about the parables; an affirmation which converts a statement of faith into a statement of intellect, and commits the insider to a form of intellectual martyrdom.¹²¹ For despite his commitment to the text of the allegory, the method of Jesus' allegory destroys his hermeneutical certainty. Historically then, the insider's mapping of faith onto fact results in an Alexandrian allegorizing that demonstrates supposed superior spiritual understanding.

In other words, in the zeal to affirm the text, the insider allows the ends to justify the means, and the text becomes subordinated to the theology. But if, like Julicher, he tries to limit these spiritualizing methods, he ends up appealing to external authorities, making the text subordinate to an outside rationality. In both extremes, the text is subordinated to the response, and the insider is forced, however unwillingly, into a relativistic reader response approach toward interpreting the parable.

3. Outsider and Hermeneutics

If taking the allegory too seriously is a danger to the text or rationality, can an outsider avoid this pitfall by taking The Sower as a critique of method? Perhaps Jesus intends to undermine the analogical method with which meaning attaches to texts. Perhaps he is explaining that the meaning is not a rational rule that can be applied by just anyone, but the meaning is obtained only by revelation, by

¹²⁰ Kermode?

¹²¹ Thomas Aquinas hymn “

an extraordinary application of the Holy Spirit; and without the Holy Spirit, all interpretation is fruitless and barren, not just frustrated but damned. Note that it is the outsider who comes to this conclusion from The Sower, for it is the mirror image of the traditional view that the allegory is the insider's secret.

However if the text undermines our ability to interpret texts, we do not thereby regain rationality, we merely regain our sanity by making the world insane. In effect, we reproduce the critique of Derrida and Foucault, who state that all of Western thought is based on the unfounded faith in texts.¹²² While it is a more consistent approach to The Sower, it nevertheless requires not only that we abandon this parable, but that we abandon all the NT canon as being ultimately unknowable by Reason. As we said in our introduction, we intend this thesis for those who still value texts, and therefore find this solution to be inconsistent with our entire approach, however, even for those who advocate such a radical post-Modern approach, this thesis may still provide a rehabilitation of texts if we do not despair, but continue follow Jesus' parable closely.

4. Insider and Hermeneutics

If we are the insider who recognizes that Jesus teaches an approach to parables, not the allegory itself, then the allegory holds meaning, not as a generalization, but rather as a lesson on the perils of interpreting parables (as well as the benefits of the same). In this view, it is not the response of the hearer that determines whether one is an insider or outsider, but the ability of the hearer to commit, to actively participate in the understanding that determines whether he is an insider; it is the hermeneutic that saves the insider, and not the allegorical interpretation.

Now in order to describe a method as a solution, one usually objectifies it, making it the object of a predicate. But in making it an object, one removes it from being a method, so that the very act of dissection kills it. Compare this to the attempt to discuss grace as a decree abolishing decrees; grace then becomes another rule which must be obeyed. One approach that avoids this pitfall is to describe a textual method by example, by using it. Then the definition is indirect and active, requiring the application rather than the objectification of its principles. The insider, who finds The Sower to be about hermeneutics, about the interpretation of parables, must apply these insights to the text itself in order to extract the meaning by application.

b. Binary Conclusions

In just a few short sentences, Jesus' parable of The Sower carves the audience into two sorts of hearers, and then demands that they sort themselves out. These two related demands produce the four types of response we have listed above. Surprisingly, despite twenty centuries of commentary on this parable, the modern interpreter can still use these same criteria to categorize the modern critical response. The first three of these positions have a voluminous defense, but the last deserves a closer look. What does it mean to have an insider's hermeneutic?

In this chapter on exegesis, we saw how a desire to make the authorial intent of the passage primary was undermined by Jesus' own allegorical interpretation. Instead, it seems that The Sower is inexorably forcing us, the reader, into a response, while simultaneously making that response contingent on our salvation. Given the importance of our response, and the need to examine our hermeneutical approach to it, we need to analyze the passage from the perspective of what was classically called rhetoric—a literary-rhetorical reader response analysis. This is the subject of the next chapter.

¹²² Vanhoozer “Is there a Meaning in this Text?”

Chapter 2 Narrative Criticism¹²³

This chapter will analyze Mark 4:1-20 using some examples of narrative and rhetorical criticism to demonstrate how such an approach can solve several of the exegetical problems discussed in chapter one—principally the dichotomy between insider and outsider—but at the cost of introducing some even larger narrative problems. Several rhetorical approaches will be analyzed in chronological order, not to be exhaustive, but rather to illustrate the development of narrative analyses that confront the *hina/hoti* paradox of The Sower. That is, if the secret of the kingdom of God has been revealed in the allegory, then it is no longer a secret and there are no longer any outsiders, but if today the secret remains obscure, then the allegory expands to encompass the entire gospel, which becomes a secret only known to insiders. Thus we find that narrative analysis can solve the semantic *hina/hoti* dichotomy of The Sower, but only at the cost of dichotomizing the entire gospel of Mark.

A. Why Use Narrative Criticism?

1. Analysis Moves from Lesser to Greater

The exegesis of the parable of The Sower was treated in the first chapter by examining its syntax and semantics, while this chapter examines it as narrative. In the hermeneutical spiral of understanding texts, we generally work from smaller units to larger, since that is both analogous to how we handle complexity in other areas of our thought, and also because it has been found to be more reliable than starting with larger contexts and working backward.¹²⁴ There are two reasons why working backward is less reliable. First, that interpretive systems that begin with the meaning of the text and then work back to the interpretation of the words are engaging in a circular logic.¹²⁵ If we ever hope to find a consistent meaning to the parable of the Sower, we must begin with smaller units of text and work our way up toward larger contexts.¹²⁶ And second, we are told by linguists James Barr and Moises Silva that the meaning of a text rarely depends on the interpretation of a single word, but rather the meaning becomes more and more refined as we consider larger blocks.¹²⁷ If we were unwisely to work backward, from larger texts toward smaller units, the apparent refinement in meaning does occur at single words, when

123 For this thesis, we include Perlocutionary, Literary, Rhetorical, and Reader-response under this chapter heading

124 Osborne "The Hermeneutical Spiral"

125 This is not a consequence of *ex post facto* dislike of the conclusions, or of associating the technique with higher criticism, rather, this is a consequence of the mathematical properties of systems that incorporate positive feedback. Post-moderns argue that the dislike of circular logic (positive feedback) is a cultural artifact, an historical accident that also gave us Aristotle's logic and the definition of logical fallacies. We argue that experience is external and independent of our textual world, and hence there is something "outside the text" that evaluates the usefulness of a logical system, and justifiably excludes feedback. Poythress would redirect us to God as the foundation of both logic and experience, which we concur adding that God also created internal consistency between experience and logic, between mathematics and the world, so that many of the Post-Modern conclusions can be countered without explicit reference to the Trinity.

126 Poythress argues that these larger contexts are often ignored in methods that look only at words and sentences, and therefore we must balance an atomistic reductionism ("particle", "control") with larger and larger contexts ("field", "distribution"). Despite this need for context, one must start the analysis somewhere, and historically the most pedagogically useful as well as most stable, is from words to syntax to semantics to text-linguistics to &c.

127 See for example James Barr " ", or Moises Silva " ". This is not to say that there have never been texts that become more ambiguous as they get larger, or stories that insert an ambiguous ending to an otherwise straightforward narrative, but whenever ambiguity increases rather than decreases with context, we can generally find a metanarrative, an external purpose for this counter-intuitive usage. In other words, there is still a convergence toward fewer meanings, but cleverly disguised.

in fact, we have already implicitly refined the larger texts.¹²⁸ To avoid these pitfalls, the method, the hermeneutical approach, should naturally progress from words to sentences, from paragraphs to stories as the meaning is refined. Therefore our first chapter looked at how the Parable of the Sower used words and clauses, sentences and paragraphs as a first step toward understanding the passage, which we now continue with an exegesis of the pericope at the narrative level.

2. Unresolved *hina . . . mepote* Clause

Narrative analysis is also helpful for understanding this troublesome *hina . . . mepote* clause that emerged from syntactical and semantic analysis. In the previous chapter, we found some ambiguity in the interpretation of the clause, as well as in its relationship to the parable and allegory. Much exegetical ink was spilled over the question of whether the narrative conclusions could be altered by redefining *hina* and whether the exclusion of Jesus' division of his audience into insiders and outsiders could be modified by grammatical or syntactical discoveries. Our conclusion was “No,” which in part was motivated by an aversion to the circular logic of allowing narrative concerns dictate grammatical and syntactical innovations, however this does not exclude the possibility that narrative concerns might still resolve the consequences of the *hina . . . mepote* clause.

This seems a small point, but our narrative analysis is motivated by more than grammatical peculiarities, for we recognize this clause as rhetorically the purpose of the entire parable. The centrality of the Isaiah quote is a bit surprising, since many commentators have instead taken the allegorical interpretation as the purpose of the parable, and hence of the entire pericope. In order to make our case, we demonstrated that the deictic words, the deponent verbs, and the pericope structure deduced from the outline of the paragraphs, have all focussed on the Isaiah quotation as the central theme. Conversely, if the allegory is the main point, then the Isaiah quotation is an interruption, the “mystery of the kingdom” remains unexplained, and the methodology, the allegorical hermeneutic defined by this pericope is undermined, leading to an Alexandrian allegorizing. Therefore to decide between a traditional, allegorical purpose for this pericope and a non-traditional, Isaiah-centric view (which insists on the full force of the *hina . . . mepote*), we need to consider larger contexts than just the pericope itself by including narrative implications that can decide between these two options.

Indeed, this narrative approach toward exegeting texts is highly traditional. Nearly every sermon on The Sower that begins with low-level exegesis and ends with application has a section in between where the exegete asks the question, “What did this text mean for Jesus' audience; how did they respond to Jesus' teaching?” This is the approach of classical Greek Rhetoric. However, the narrative analysis discussed in this chapter is more inclusive than just the rhetorical purpose of this pericope, for it includes hermeneutical and theological insights addressing a much wider audience than either the crowd by the sea or even the church at the time of Mark. That is, if we want to avoid the implicit universalism inherent in interpreting the allegory as “the revealed secret” that makes insiders of everyone, we must enlarge the context of the parable to encompass all potential readers of the entire gospel. The unresolved *hina . . . mepote* clause demands a narrative, not just a rhetorical, treatment.

B. Unity of Narrative Includes *hina* Clause

In order to begin a narrative analysis, which involves delving into the relationship of the pericope to narrative genres and rhetorical intentions, we must first establish if we have chosen a

128 Moises Silva “Biblical Words and their meanings...”

coherent story.¹²⁹ Having rejected on principle the redactors and the historical critics who argue for a patchwork parable, we must still respond to those who deny a narrative unity to the work. Does the shift in location—public lecture, private interpretation, possibly public lecture again—destroy the narrative unity?¹³⁰ Or does the disciple's use of the plural “parables” (v. 10) after hearing only a single parable indicate that the story is not self-contained but clumsily retold?¹³¹ Or does the inconsistency within the interpretation that identifies hearers with seed and then with soil indicate a mangled tale?¹³²

The standards in narrative criticism are different from that of source, form, and redaction criticism, because the small hints of some discontinuity are evaluated for their effect upon the reader. This makes the question of unity a question of reader response. Does the reader get confused by these signals? And who exactly is the reader? Scholars from two different perspectives, M.A. Beavis and J. Marcus, find the narrative to be a unity. Beavis reviews the literary and rhetorical background of first century Greeks, Romans and Jews, concluding that,

All in all, our Graeco-Roman reader would have regarded Mark as a well-constructed book with some nice literary touches to lighten its rough prose style. Mark's rhetorical (persuasive) effectiveness can be gauged by its survival and influence in the early church.¹³³

Beavis argues that not only would a contemporary reader not be confused by discontinuities in the narrative, but in many cases would have seen them as clever rhetorical devices.¹³⁴

What about modern readers, do they find discontinuities confusing? Marcus argues that intentional omissions are “gaps” that are intended to cause us to review a list of options, thereby making the text more interactive. Unintentional omissions he calls “blanks,” which he finds confusing, but he also points out that the distinction is subjective.¹³⁵ Hatina finds it easy for even an average reader to fill these “blanks”, arguing, for example, that Jesus was alone with his disciples during a break in his teaching, or that the plural “parables” refers to his later teachings.¹³⁶ So it would seem that whether we argue for a first century or a twenty-first century reader, the narrative does not present insurmountable barriers to being understood, and in fact, forms a narrative unity.

This narrative unity then, allows us to use the tools of narrative analysis on the theological problem that consumed the latter part of our exegesis in Chapter One—the centrality of Jesus' quotation of Isaiah.¹³⁷ The implications of the Isaianic quote remain so disconcerting that scholars have attempted a literary analysis that can explain this seemingly preordained judgment. Narrative analysis differs from semantic, for example, in looking for a sarcasm that narratively might reverse the meaning of *hina* while remaining invisible to a more narrowly focussed grammatical or semantic analysis. Therefore we turn to a broader narrative approach for help in resolving the harshness of the *hina . . . mepote* clause.

129 Hatina, p214-215

130 J. Jeremias “The Parables of Jesus” p 13.

131 J.C. Meagher “Clumsy Construction in Mark's Gospel: A Critique of Form- and Redaktionsgeschichte” Toronto Studies in Theology, 3; New York: Edwin Mellen 1979. quoted in J. Marcus “Blanks and Gaps in the Markan Parable of the Sower” BibInt 5 (1997) p247-262.

132 Boucher “The Mysterious Parable” p 50.

133 Mary Ann Beavis “Mark's Audience” Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989.p 44.

134 Beavis, pp42-43.

135 Marcus, p251.

136 Hatina, p215.

137 M. Beavis “Mark's Audience” p154., writes “The saying in vv. 11-12 is the glue that holds the parables in ch. 4 together. It is impossible to discover whether the *testimonium* (v.12) was attached to the mystery saying when the evangelist received it (or whether he composed the entire logion himself), but the application of Isa 6:9-10 to parables is, in the NT, first expressed in Mark, and may have originated with the evangelist.”

C. Narrative Approach to Isaiah's hina . . . mepote

Can a narrative analysis give us insight into the difficulties raised by the *hina . . . mepote* clause? We think that it can, because narratives function differently than propositional statements. In the first chapter, when we were exegeting the passage semantically, we assumed that the text was propositional, conveying timeless truths. But as we enlarge our context, we can begin to consider nuances that are invisible at the smaller scale of syntax, the most important being the ability of narratives to carry a plot.

1. Deficiencies of a Static (Propositional) Reading

A static reading of the text assumes that the facts described by the text are unchanged by the recounting of them, that the telling is completely independent of the story. A static view of the parable of The Sower suggests that Jesus was merely noting an existing situation, not actively bewildering the outsider. This requires that *hina . . . mepote* acquire the meaning of *hoti*, which, as we argued in the previous chapter, was an unlikely modification of the lexicon. However, could a narrative analysis, which includes larger contexts than just the immediate text, reveal that this is what Jesus meant? This static solution, typical of the higher critical scholars, is the grudging view expressed by Hooker:

If Jesus used the quotation, the most likely explanation is that he felt Isaiah's words were being fulfilled in his own ministry—that is, that the people were as unresponsive to his mission as they had been to that of the prophet Isaiah.¹³⁸

Based on her wider knowledge of Jesus ministry, Hooker is suggesting that Jesus did not cause the unresponsiveness of the people, but merely revealed a condition that already existed, thereby reading *hina* as *hoti*. The idea, however, that Jesus would be so cynical about his audience this early in his ministry is not very compelling. Furthermore, she is also suggesting that the quotation of Isaiah was inauthentic, which reveals a lack of commitment to the received text. Hatina is a scholar who is more committed to preserving the text but comes to a similar conclusion,

Mark's quotation of Isa. 6.9-10 is used to describe the fate of those who do not accept Jesus' message. They lack understanding because they listen to other voices (4.24). They do not allow the word to take root (4.20) and thus they do not have ears to hear what Jesus teaches (4.23). All we can surmise from Mark's narrative, especially in the light of vv. 21-25, is that the outsiders had an opportunity to accept the revelation, for in the language of the parable the lamp is put on the lampstand so that everyone could see it. Jesus tells the parables not to divide the groups, but as an act of judgment to conceal the mystery of the kingdom from those who are already outside. In other words, the divinely inflicted obduracy is the result of the crowd's already existing disposition, namely its failure to accept the word; it is not the result of a divine fiat.¹³⁹

Hatina rejects any intentional divisiveness of Jesus' words, adopting the *hoti* meaning with a narrative reference to 4:21-25 as support. This reference would be strong support, if indeed it corroborated his reading. But the reference to the parable of a lamp on a stand, which can reveal what is hidden, does not say that the outsiders are being uncovered, unless one thinks that being an outsider is an intentionally hidden position. For if Hatina's interpretation of 4:25 were correct, it would suggest that outsiders know they are outsiders and are attempting to disguise this fact, which Jesus' parable of the Sower reveals. Narratively, however, the seed is developing in the passive soil which cannot intentionally “hide” its ability to nurture seed, so the applicability of 4:21-22 is weakened by this clash of metaphors. Furthermore, the 4:25 conclusion, “even what he has will be taken away,” seems to

¹³⁸ Hooker, p93

¹³⁹ Hatina, p236.

strengthen the *hina* reading, because there is someone who takes away, who actively causes the division. Therefore Hatina's appeal to 4:21-25 seems to aggravate rather than diminish the force of this *hina* clause.

Likewise, when Hatina reads the rest of the gospel in the light of this *hoti* replacement, he finds himself forced to the conclusion that long before Jesus began his ministry, the outsider status of the religious leaders had hardened. He writes,

It appears that the condemnation of outsiders expressed in the quotation from Isa 6.9-10 is permanent. Though there are clear references that the disciples will reveal specific features of the gospel after Easter which have previously been concealed (eg. 9.9), there is no indication that those belonging to the outside group are able to switch their allegiance. In fact, quite the opposite is the case, especially in light of the judgment in 6.11 and the negative side of the parallelism in 4.24-25. The condemnation of the outsiders and especially the Jewish religious leaders throughout the story suggests that the opportunity for moving from one kingdom to the other has expired for those who have witnessed and rejected the message of Jesus firsthand. There are, however, no clear reasons given for this implied inability.¹⁴⁰

Hatina is perplexed because redemption should not be something so easily predetermined in the religious leaders, e.g., Joseph of Arimathea (Mark 15:43), yet this is what the *hoti* interpretation requires. We sense Hatina's uncertainty in the final sentence, when he admits that *hoti* is merely implied, and that it is not supported.

What caused Hatina's confusion? Perhaps it is his too quick defense of the insider's privileged position that leads him to defend Jesus from the *hina* accusation. That is, he may want to avoid the theological implications of "earning" an insider's position, so he adopts a static, preordained view of the status of insiders, and then applies the same status to outsiders, which is the *hoti* solution. However, the static view does not represent the ideas conveyed by the text, which are manifestly dynamic. For the parable does not portray an event in the past, which then must be interpreted for the future; rather the parable presents a story that must be absorbed and interpreted in the present, in the time-frame of the listener.¹⁴¹ Therefore the pericope does not describe a static truth the way a propositional statement might, but a dynamic truth that unfolds like the plot of a story or a seed in the soil.

Williams, defending the literary approach to Mark, writes, I could continue on with this response to a naïve view of the literary as contrasted to the historical, factual, or true account of happenings....This means to study the internal relations of its plot, theme and language. In order to prepare the way for this study I shall first address myself to certain views about Mark which in my view have blinded exegetes to a literary perspective. These are: (1) The position that Mark is more or less a loose collection, shaped rather awkwardly in narrative form, of oral traditions. 'Mark' is hardly more than an editor. (2) The second notion follows from the first point of view: Mark can scarcely have a plot in a strict sense.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Hatina, p237.

¹⁴¹ Ridderbos is at great pains to describe the "kingdom of God" as a present and future reality. Concerning the parable of the sower, he writes: (Ridderbos "The Coming of the Kingdom" p132) "This is why the parable is intended, not only to temper expectations and to open the eyes of the disciples to the provisional character of the dispensation of salvation started with Christ, but also to revive their hopes and to direct their attention to what is coming. It contains a rich promise for the future, also for the future work of the disciples." (p135) "The revelation will bring a much richer salvation and bliss than a man now dares to hope for even by faithful hearing."

¹⁴² J. Williams "Parable" p24-25.

Williams argues that former historical criticism of Mark, which concentrated on the static meaning only, had blinded scholars to the dynamics of the narrative text. For in most narrative works, the plot is the point, not the timeless truths mentioned by characters in the plot, so that analyzing Mark 4:1-20 from a literary perspective puts real emphasis on the action and chronology of the characters as important to the meaning.

The mistake of the static interpretation lies in attempting to force a narrative text to be merely a series of embellished propositions. For the static view sees the purpose of the text as conveying timeless information, so that the only dynamic at work is the declaration, whereas the dynamic view sees the text as recording a process, so that the dynamic at work is the plot. In the static view, Jesus reveals a pre-existing condition of his listeners, whereas in the dynamic view, Jesus' story changes the listener, or provokes a response in the reader. The static view leads to Hatina's perplexity, whereas the dynamic view makes the parable indispensable, and the two views are mutually incompatible.

Why does the dynamic view make the parable indispensable? Since we have argued that the Isaiah quotation organizes the pericope, then the dynamic of knowing Isaiah, of hearing the parable explain Isaiah, of discovering the allegory explicate both, is the process that narratively explains the Isaianic dichotomies. Then the parable becomes more than merely an explication of Isaiah, but the instrument by which Isaiah's prophecy is made manifest.

2. *Superiority of a Dynamic Rhetorical Reading*

Having argued for a narrative dynamic as the explanation for *hina*, we need to examine how it operates on both insiders and outsiders, for if it only explained the inclusion of insiders, it would still not fulfill the requirement that it divide the audience into two groups. We argue that the same dynamic is at work in this division into insiders and outsiders, and that it does not consist in “secrets” or hidden propositional truths, or else the text would have revealed those secrets. Rather, the division operates at the level of understanding, at the level of hermeneutics.

In this context, literary critic Frank Kermode writes from the self-conscious position of an outsider (whether real or imagined we cannot tell).¹⁴³ Without an insider's secret allegory to defend, he sees the debate as a commentary on hermeneutics. He writes,

And I have suggested that interpretation, which corrupts or transforms, begins so early in the development of narrative texts that the recovery of the real right original thing is an illusory quest. Yet we continue to distinguish those within, who know the truth before the parable breaks in and corrupts it, and those without, to whom it is not given to do so. For the former there is nothing in the stories but the appearance of explanations; they look like *hoti*, but they are truly *hina*. Yet to them also the stories are opaque. They may be content that narratives which have the air of open proclamations are in fact obscurely oracular; but in the end they too are prevented from making definitive interpretations.¹⁴⁴

Kermode echoes the conclusions we drew at the end of chapter one, that the insider who is satisfied that he understands the parable as allegory has invested his status in the conclusions and therefore cannot really penetrate the reasoning that led to the allegorical conclusions. Kermode then goes on to list all the contradictory relations that insiders must also claim to understand, which makes the definition of an outsider less rational than what Hatina or Hooker have supposed:

John is associated with public baptism, the public fulfillment of his type, Elijah; Jesus with

¹⁴³ Kermode, p. xii “In the criticism of the gospels I am certainly an outsider,…”

¹⁴⁴ Kermode, p.125.

private epiphany and the private fulfillment of his type, Messiah. Moreover, Jesus accepts a baptism of repentance (suggesting prior uncleanness) and at the same time is called the son of God. The paradoxes continue: unmistakable public recognitions alternate with demands for and withdrawals into silence. Demons infallibly recognize him, disciples do not. The law is now kept and now broken. The canons of purity are challenged; a purity which is itself accused of uncleanness opposes and purges the unclean.¹⁴⁵

If it is not enough for the insider to comprehend these reversals, Kermode continues with the paradox of insider incomprehension. He points out that the disciples, the consummate insiders, are continuously reprimanded for not understanding, whereas the Roman centurion, the complete outsider, is commended for his grasp. Jesus bids the insider, the synagogue leader, Jairus, not to tell what miracle he witnessed (5:43), whereas he enjoins the outsider, the pagan Gadarene demoniac (5:19-20), to announce among the Gentiles what Jesus had done for him.¹⁴⁶ In the light of all these examples of outsiders that understand and insiders that do not, the idea that we, the reader, must be an insider because we have the written explanation of The Sower seems to ring hollow, and in the end we are left pondering the parable as much as if we had no explanation at all. Kermode writes,

What is the interpreter to make of secrecy considered as a property of all narrative, provided it is suitably attended to? Outsiders see but do not perceive. Insiders read and perceive, but always in a different sense. We glimpse the secrecy through the meshes of a text; this is divination, but what is divined is what is visible from our angle. It is a momentary radiance, delusive or not, as in Kafka's parable. When we come to relate that part to the whole, the divined glimmer to the fire we suppose to be its source, we see why Hermes is the patron of so many other trades besides interpretation. There has to be trickery. And we interpret always as transients—of whom he is also patron—both in the book and in the world which resembles the book....World and book, it may be, are hopelessly plural, endlessly disappointing; we stand alone before them, aware of their arbitrariness and impenetrability, knowing that they may be narratives only because of our impudent intervention, and susceptible of interpretation only by our hermetic tricks.¹⁴⁷

Kermode is looking for a narrative key to the insider's extraordinary comprehension, but finds only hermetic tricks.

We argue that Kermode's despair and Hatina's perplexity arise from their commitment to a static solution. If the inability of outsiders to understand was not implied by previous inclinations, but earned by "impudent intervention," and the interpretive ability of insiders is not a "hermetic trick" or a divination but a special accomplishment provoked by the passage, then a dynamic reading of the text can solve the mystery. If the bifurcation of the audience is not a product of the quality of the readership, but a product of the act of hearing the parable, then the *hina* must be respected precisely because it is not a static fixed *hoti*, but a dynamic relationship that bifurcates the audience as it hears. Therefore to avoid both Kermode's critique of Whiggish history¹⁴⁸ and Moule's critique of predestinarianism,¹⁴⁹ we analyze the *hina* as a product of Jesus' words, an intention of the parable of The Sower.

¹⁴⁵ Kermode, p141

¹⁴⁶ Of course, the literary term for this paradox is "irony," which is the topic of the later literary section.

¹⁴⁷ Kermode p. 145

¹⁴⁸ Butterfield 1931 "The Whig Interpretation of History"

¹⁴⁹ C.F.D. Moule " "

D. Rhetorical analysis

The *hina* clause in The Sower is just a special case of a wider theological difficulty explaining why Jesus meant all parables to be mysterious, bewildering, and divisive, a difficulty that has produced a large body of criticism called *Parabeltheorie*, which unfortunately is beyond the scope of this thesis.¹⁵⁰ Without directly addressing this theological question *why*, however, we recognize that much can be learned about motives by studying *how* The Sower bewilders. Rhetorical analysis, despite its focus on audience response, can indirectly tell us something about authorial intent because the results of a method often reveal aspects of the otherwise inaccessible intent. If the purpose of a parable may be observed in its effects, then a rhetorical analysis of the The Sower may provide insight for a better *Parabeltheorie*. Therefore we begin with Aristotelian classical approaches and move chronologically to more modern approaches, to see how rhetorical analysis can illuminate the method, and hence the motives for Jesus' unusual parable. While unable to answer completely the mystery of *hina*, rhetorical analysis can reveal its emotive and motivational character.

1. Classical Rhetorical Analyses

If classical rhetoric was invented for understanding oratory, how can it be applicable to the written, *koine* Greek of Mark's gospel? It is inaccurate to say it only applies to oratory, for Aristotle, who analyzed the playwrights of the golden age of Greece to define how a piece of text can be used to motivate an audience response, worked from written texts. How then does rhetorical analysis differ from the analysis of poetic Greek texts such as Homer's *Odyssey*? Aristotle defined rhetorical texts as those with an external purpose, or heterotelic, that separates it from aesthetic, or autotelic speech more common in poetry,¹⁵¹ so that The Sower is not poetic, but has a rhetorical goal that preceded the text. Since *koine* Greek is no longer a living language, we analyze the parable of The Sower as a written text composed orally, focussing on the aspects of rhetoric common to both.¹⁵² Classical analysis was then expanded by the Romans—such as Cicero (106-43 BC) and Quintilian (35-100AD) in the NT era—to cover all sorts of literary events, and formed the final stage of the core “trivium” of classical education,¹⁵³ which undoubtedly formed part of Mark's upbringing.

The rhetorical analysis of the purpose of The Sower begins at least with Tertullian,¹⁵⁴ but we will look at only two modern scholars who have applied Aristotelian techniques to this parable: Madeleine Boucher and Gilbert Bilezikian. Boucher contrasts the “trite” interpretation taken by historical criticism to the rhetorical “trope” interpretation with The Sower as the paradigmatic mysterious parable.¹⁵⁵ If Mark's gospel is mysterious, she argues, it is because the gospel is constructed of mysterious segments. From a different perspective, Bilezikian argues that Mark's gospel is a Greco-Roman tragedy wherein The Sower is a scene within larger act whose rhetorical connection lies in the affective and instructional aspects of tragedy.¹⁵⁶ Since Mark's goal was to convert his audience, Bilezikian argues tragedy was the appropriate format, and The Sower was a tragic microcosm of the

150 See for example, Raisanen “Die Parabeltheorie”

151 Boucher “The Parables” p.33

152 Bilezikian “The Liberated Gospel” p45 points out that both dramas and oratory were transitioning to a written form of literature in the Augustan period during which Mark's gospel was written.

153 Boucher “The Mysterious Parable” p 11.

154 Some examples are: Tertullian (Philip Schaff “The Ante-Nicene Fathers vol 3: Tertullian” chapter xxxiii), Chrysostom (), Augustine (), Aquinas ().

155 Madeleine Boucher “The Mysterious Parable: A literary study” Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 6, Wash. DC, 1977. And M. Boucher “The Parables” Wilmington: Michael Glazer 1981.

156 Gilbert Bilezikian “

gospel drama. Therefore these two modern scholars present complementary micro and macro analyses of The Sower, both of which reveal ironic aspects of Jesus' mysterious method.

a. Madeleine Boucher: *hina/hoti* as a Two-level Trope

Boucher's analysis is primarily addressed to late nineteenth and early twentieth century work that attempted to redefine parables as non-mysterious, non-allegorical, one-point morality tales having a static, propositional content. Her deconstruction of this static, modernist view is quite effective, and since her views are representative of a considerable fraction of NT scholars, we examine them in some detail. While we conclude that her explanation of how a parable operates is lacking in some respects—her *Parabeltheorie* founders on the *hina/hoti* distinction—we do gain some important insight on how a rhetorical trope can simultaneously perform two functions, which can only be resolved ironically.

Julicher's Mistake

Boucher begins her analysis addressing the rhetorical treatment of Adolf Jülicher, mainly because the modern analysis of parables is universally agreed to have begun with his 1898 book, *Gleichnissreden Jesu*. In his book, Jülicher responded to the Medieval analysis of parables as mysterious allegories (which goes back at least to Augustine) by using Aristotelian categories to claim that parables are single-point similitudes with an obvious rhetorical point. Jülicher recognized parables as persuasive speech but challenged the idea that they were mysterious and allegorical. In terms of *hina/hoti* of our earlier discussion, Jülicher agrees that a telic *hina* is justified for The Sower because parables are Aristotelian rhetoric, but the *mysterion* that outsiders cannot understand is not a property of the original parable (since it was not an allegory) but a *hoti* response of the audience. Insiders experience *hina*, but outsiders experience *hoti* because they misunderstand parables as an allegory.

Even among his many detractors who contested his non-allegorical claim, Jülicher's static assumption for Aristotelian rhetoric—the view that it possessed trite propositional content—was rarely challenged.¹⁵⁷ Boucher decries the specious analysis of both Jülicher and his detractors who think parables are trivially understood, pinning the blame on a category mistake that Jülicher made¹⁵⁸ when he incorrectly applied classical analysis to divide parables from allegory when in fact, the first is a genre and the second a technique that can overlap genres.¹⁵⁹

Boucher's Tropes

To keep the mystery Julicher denied, to justify why outsiders can't understand parables, Boucher argues that an allegory is an extended metaphor in narratory form. The metaphor is “extended” in the sense of consisting of more than one sentence using the same “trope,” where a trope

157 At least, unchallenged until Boucher's “The Mysterious Parable” came out in 1977.

158 Boucher “Mysterious Parable” p1.

159 We disagree with Boucher, because if the categories of genre and technique are equally a product of the analysis as the analysis itself, one cannot make a category mistake any more than one can fail to follow one's own original recipe. Were he able, Jülicher could have responded to Boucher that he had invented his own post-classical literary analysis which had different categories. For Boucher's critique to be persuasive, she would have to show either that the recipe was false, or that it invariably flopped; either that the classical analysis was the only correct analysis, or less persuasively, that Jülicher's approach was inconsistent and inferior. Fortunately for us, most of Jülicher's critics in the twentieth century had already demonstrated the second point, so we do not need reanalyze his defective approach here, but it does caution that we cannot naively accept Boucher's analysis, even if we accept her conclusions.

is a literary term for figurative language, and a metaphor is a trope that has two levels of meaning: a literal and a non-literal one.¹⁶⁰ What makes an allegory mysterious (Mark 4:11 μυστήριον), she says, is the mere fact they are a trope. What makes an allegory a parable, in contrast, is its rhetorical purpose, its religious and ethical persuasiveness.¹⁶¹ Not all parables are extended metaphors, she argues, since they may begin with an extended simile, e.g., “The kingdom of God is like...,” but both are allegories in the sense of being a narratory trope.¹⁶² Finally, some parables are not allegories at all, but “exemplary stories” or extended synecdoche, e.g., “The Good Samaritan.” But whether allegorical or not, the *sine qua non* of a parable is its tropical, or two-level meaning. She says,

The *parable*, then, may be defined as follows: It is a structure consisting of *a tropical narrative, or a narrative having two levels of meaning*; this structure functions as *religious or ethical rhetorical speech*.¹⁶³

Boucher has neatly separated the rhetorical purpose from the allegorical structure of a parable, which then gives her the basis for critiquing historical interpretations. According to her definition, Augustine is guilty of eisegesis when he assigns separate tropical meanings to each character in the parable of the Good Samaritan, because he has mistaken an extended trope for a sequence of tropes. Likewise Jülicher is guilty of reduction when he attempts to collapse a two-level trope down to a single rhetorical point, when many rhetorical points can be made from the same two-level story. The two-level trope is Boucher's explanatory key.

Mysterion as Trope

The real purpose of all this rhetorical clarification, Boucher says, is to address the *hina/hoti* problem of her *Parabeltheorie*. She writes,

In addition, there is the theory of the mysteriousness of parables expressed in the Gospel of Mark, most explicitly in chapter 4. It is now possible to address the crucial question to which much of the research on parables is directed: *why is it that the parables were understood as mysterious in this ancient Jewish and Christian literature?* The answer is that it is precisely because they employ the tropical mode of meaning. The structure of double meaning present in every parable makes possible its functioning as mysterious speech. This effect is achieved when the parable is placed in a social situation, that is, when it is made a means of interaction between two persons, the speaker and the hearer. It requires, that is the three component parts of a speech act (A) The speaker pronounces the parable; (B) the parable itself has two levels of meaning; (C) The hearer may or may not apprehend its indirect and more important level of meaning—thus it is “mysterious.” The mysteriousness, then, consists quite simply in the hearer's inability or unwillingness to comprehend the indirect or tropical meaning of the parable. Or, one could say, that the mysteriousness comprises the two levels of meaning plus the hearer's failure to grasp the second level.¹⁶⁴

Boucher has laid an excellent foundation for analyzing the parable of The Sower, with the goal of solving the *hina/hoti* paradox as a consequence of a two-level trope. The parable is narrative and tropical, forms an extended metaphor, and performs the motivational act of rhetoric since it goes beyond simply informing or teaching to attempt persuasion. Something about its tropical nature makes

¹⁶⁰ Boucher “Mysterious Parable” p20.

¹⁶¹ Boucher, “Mysterious Parable”, p21.

¹⁶² Boucher, “Mysterious Parable”, p21.

¹⁶³ Boucher “Mysterious Parable”, p23, italics in the original.

¹⁶⁴ Boucher, “Mysterious Parable”, p24, italics in the original.

it mysterious, and like Hatina's justification of the *mysterion*, she opts for *hoti* over *hina* to explain the unpredictable audience response to tropical material.¹⁶⁵

This *hoti* response is only for the outsider, who does not understand, despite the fact that Boucher finds most of the parables not mysterious at all. And while The Sower is the most mysterious of the parables, she nonetheless concludes,

In either case [interpretation belongs to Mark or Jesus], the parable was based on the apt metaphor which employs the image of seed for the word (as in Socrates' dialogue; see Appendix); this is close to the use of the image of seed for the law, as in 2 *Esdras*. This metaphor was combined with the idea of various kinds of hearers; as is well known, a good pre-Christian parallel to this notion is found in the *Pirqe Aboth* 5:21, where we have a *masal* on four types of hearers, or four types of students who sit at the feet of sages. This *masal* may have been familiar to many among Jesus' audience.¹⁶⁶

So she says in effect, this paradigm parable was not all that mysterious after all, which suggests, just as Kermode complained, that the insider possessed a hermetic vision. If so, then why did Jesus have a rhetorical introduction, a dramatic interlude, a prophetic condemnation, and a melodramatic exclusion? This requires Boucher to develop another explanation for the mystery, a *Parabeltheorie*.

Boucher's Parabeltheorie

To explain the mystery of Jesus' divisiveness, Boucher abandons literary criticism and falls back on a redaction critical analysis that involves a supposed Semitic influence, a gnostic or apocalyptic emphasis in the word *mysterion* combined with a determinism of the apocalyptic literature of the Second Temple period.¹⁶⁷ She does not explicitly attribute this tension to editorial redaction, but the alternative of attributing this tension to Jesus would make him a man of his time rather than the Son of Man. Therefore she appears to be attributing this *Parabeltheorie* to the editing of Jesus' words by Mark or his source—redaction criticism. She says,

To conclude: the Semitic parallels to the principal motifs which appear in Mark 4 show that the Markan parable theory stays well within Jewish categories. There is in fact nothing in the parable chapter which is not derived from Palestinian Jewish theology of the first century. The Markan theory is quite in harmony with its religio-historical background.¹⁶⁸

In other words, while Jesus may have taught in parables so that hearers would not understand, Mark saw this as fulfilling the apocalyptic determinism of separating the sheep from the goats. Jesus spoke it as *hoti*, but Mark interpreted it as *hina*.¹⁶⁹

Boucher appears reluctant to attribute this tension to Mark, so she attempts to demonstrate that Jesus and Mark really meant the same thing, that Jesus' *hoti* had the force of *hina*.¹⁷⁰ In many respects,

165 Hatina is just the most recent, but a list of scholars who opt for *hoti* is lengthy, Hooker, Marcus?, Beavis, Boucher,

166 Boucher, "Mysterious Parable", p 51. See also J. Marcus "Mystery" p47, who finds parallels to 4 Esdras.

167 Boucher, "Mysterious Parable", p57ff.

168 Boucher, "Mysterious Parable," p58

169 Typical of redaction critics is J. Marcus ("The Mystery of the Kingdom", p 106-7), "This tension [*hina/hoti*] indicates literary layers in 4:33-34 as we have maintained above; in a pre-Markan stage 4:33-34 referred to the disciples and marked the end of the parable chapter, and *kathos edynanto akouein* meant "in accordance with their ability to hear." Mark's redaction of the chapter, however, has changed the addressees in 4:33-34a to the outsiders, and in this new context (because of the contrast to the insiders of 4:34b and because Mark surely intends his readers to see that the two groups of 4:33-34 = the two groups of 4:11-12) *kathos edynanto akouein* can only mean "in accordance with the outsiders' hearing without understanding," i.e. with their inability to hear effectively."

170 This is the standard redaction-critical approach, and arguably, the whole reason redaction criticism was invented by

Boucher's solution is also Beavis' and Hatina's as well, so it bears analysis. She writes concerning Jesus' later (non-parabolic) statement of Mark 7:15, that it is not what goes in, but what comes out of a man that makes him unclean,

It becomes clear why the saying is presented as mysterious, theologically speaking, in the Gospel of Mark. Once again, it is not intellectual inability but moral unwillingness that prevents the hearers from grasping the import of the pronouncement.¹⁷¹

Boucher claims that the mysteriousness is not from lack of clarity, but from abundance of contradiction with accepted Mosaic commands. So it is not that Jesus' parables were not understood; rather they were understood all too well, because they violated the Laws of Moses and therefore the people rejected them.

The insiders, the only ones who would not reject these blasphemous sayings, are those who had already accepted Jesus as something greater than Moses. But of course, this was not obvious until after the Resurrection, so ultimately understanding was an anticipation of a future event, an eschatological vision which explains the *mysterion* of *Parabeltheorie*. The *hoti* arises because the parables contradict Moses, and the *hina* is because some listeners were part of the predetermined elect who knew Jesus possessed the authority to contradict Moses.

Critique of Boucher's Analysis

We must pause and admire what Boucher has accomplished so far. She began by saying that a parable was a two-level story whose mysteriousness was related to the figurative language. But the figurative language was not all that hard to decipher using classical rhetorical tools known since Aristotle. So why did Jesus call it mysterious? Because the answer, the revealed *mysterion*, is itself a trope, a two-level metaphor for something, which on one level is not understood universally while on a second level is revealed particularly. She writes,

The mystery in Mark's Gospel has a dual purpose; it functions in one way for “those outside” and in another for the disciples. . . . The two levels of the mystery are revealed in the account of Peter's confession (8:27-30,31-33); for their failure to grasp the deeper level, the disciples are castigated. . .¹⁷²

Boucher appears to be backtracking, because she now says that the mystery arises not from the two-level tropes but from the two-level theology.¹⁷³ What is particularly intriguing about Boucher's solution is that it remains self-consistent; only those who have attained the second level of theology will find that this explanation solves the *Parabeltheorie*. Unfortunately this means that those who do not need this explanation are precisely those to whom this explanation is given.

Furthermore, Boucher had to stretch her argument all the way to Mark 7 to find an example of a saying that would not be accepted by outsiders. There is nothing in the parable of The Sower that is explicitly contrary to the Law of Moses. So if the *mysterion* applies to the parable of The Sower, there is no obvious indication that it fits the mold Boucher is using. Without the allegorical explanation of Mark 4:13-20, there is nothing in The Sower that is objectionable, and even after the allegory, it is only

Wrede. “All these data add up to the conclusion that, in the parable itself, the primary horizon is the time of Jesus' ministry, while in the interpretation, the primary horizon is the time of the church.” (Marcus, “Mystery” p69)

171 Boucher, “Mysterious Parable” p67.

172 Boucher, “Mysterious Parable” p82.

173 J. Marcus (“Mystery” p45) draws a parallel to Daniel 2, and argues that it is typical of apocalyptic literature that mysteries are given to all, but the understanding (of 2nd level meaning) revealed only to some.

an indirect reference to later objectionable statements of Jesus that could provoke the two-fold response. Thus it seems illogical to accuse the Pharisees of hardened hearts for conclusions that they could only make much later. That is to say, if Boucher makes theology a trope, she has also made logic a trope, inverting the normal direction of causal chains for her exceptional situations.

This assault on logic must be recognized. For if the unelect are predestined, then Jesus did not cause them to reject the message; he merely exacerbated an existing condition. This would then convert everything to *hoti*, and Mark's *hina* remains logically unexplained. Sensing this problem, Boucher writes,

The concept “hardness of heart,” however, is not altogether simple. There is in this idea, as observed earlier, an interplay of the divine and human wills, a tension between determinism and freedom. Who ultimately causes the hardening of heart is not clear. It would be best, perhaps, to say that the parables are the means both by which God judges the hearers, and by which the hearers bring judgment upon themselves. That such speculation is not worked out in accordance with logic should not prevent the exegete from seeing that the notions of the divine plan and human responsibility are in fact brought together in Mark. Any interpretation of Mark 4 which observes either predestination or free will exclusively is not describing everything that is there.¹⁷⁴

Boucher recognizes that there is something in the *hina/hoti* that she cannot explain with tropes, and it has something to do with the activity of the parable, but she is unable to explain it logically. By insisting the effect is real despite the logic, Boucher subsumes logic to rhetoric, inverting the order of the trivium, and ultimately descending into the same circular “predestinarian” solutions that C.F.D. Moule complained about in redaction criticism.¹⁷⁵ Recognizing the limitations of her *Parabeltheorie*, she concludes her treatise by considering some other possible solutions.

Beyond Boucher's Two-level Tropes

Despite her inability to resolve the *hina/hoti* tension with The Sower, Boucher drops some hints at other literary approaches which might be pursued fruitfully. She writes that a two-level or tropical meaning might not be simply figurative as used in metaphor and the extended parable, but also synecdoche (part for whole), metonymy (cause for effect), or irony. Since *Parabeltheorie* is an attempt to resolve the tension of Mark 4:10-12 taken as expository speech, if instead these verses are taken as tropical then the harsh *hina* might be resolved as a literary device without resorting to tropical theology or two-level logic. The secret lies in identifying the proper literary device.

Neither synecdoche nor metonymy seem a promising way to resolve the tension, but some scholars have suggested an ironic trope. Unfortunately irony is one of the more difficult tropes to analyze. Boucher writes,

Irony is a trope in which the literal meaning of the words is contrary to the speaker's intention.

¹⁷⁴ Boucher, “Mysterious Parable” p84.

¹⁷⁵ C.F.D. Moule ““Mark 4:1-20 Yet once more” pp 96,98,104. “To put the matter more specifically, I want to show that there is an unnoticed assumption in Julicher's exegesis which led him to a conclusion which, in its turn, has become the unexamined assumption from which subsequent exegesis has set out. . . Moreover, it is a circular argument to assume that Mark's view is predestinarian and then to exclude from consideration any approach which is not predestinarian; and certain predestinarianism and “the remnant” are very far being all that the Old Testament contemplates. . . .But now we must retrace our steps and look at the interpretation which is most widely current. This, so far as I know, was imposed on scholarship by Julicher's classic study and seems to have had as blinding an effect on subsequent exegesis as the parables, according to the theory which he attributed to Mark, had on their recipients.”

The intention is usually conveyed by such means as the speaker's tone of voice, or the context of the remark. Most often irony uses words of praise or approval to imply blame or disapproval, but the opposite can also occur.¹⁷⁶

Boucher points out that reversal of meaning can be indicated by the oral delivery. But in written texts we lack the oral cues for irony—the roll of the eyes, the deadpan expression, the raised pitch—and consequently have only the context, which is to say, the contradiction to go by. Did Jesus mean to berate his disciples, or was he really praising them when he said “everything is in parables for those outside?”

Several authors have suggested a satirical form of irony in this quote, either due to Jesus or Isaiah.¹⁷⁷ But if it were satiric, would that not change the entire force and meaning of the parable to its opposite? That is, where do the satiric “scare quotes” begin and end, either for vv. 10-12 or vv. 1-20, and how do we know? Some pieces of literature lack scare quotes because they are entirely satiric; Boucher mentions Swift's *A Modest Proposal* as an extended ironic trope.¹⁷⁸ But satire seems inappropriate for scripture despite the existence of verses such as Job 12:2, since it conveys a certain condemnation of the receiver of the discourse, and therefore seems inappropriate as a solution to this particular parable. For if this is the paradigm parable for interpreting all the others, we would then expect more of them to be satirical. Not only does satire strike the wrong mood, it does not serve the bimodal function which appears to lie at the center of this parable and the entire book; it may condemn the outsider, but it does not commend the insider.

Fortunately satire is not the only sort of extended irony. Tragedy functions as a more irenic extended irony, suitable for carrying weighty theological concepts, as indeed the playwrights of the golden age of Greece used it.¹⁷⁹ And there is no doubt that Mark used irony, especially in the tragic passion narrative,¹⁸⁰ but did he also use irony in the parables, in the *kerygma* of Jesus? If allegory can be defined as extended metaphor, then tragedy is extended irony, so the question becomes: “are the parables (part of) a tragedy?”

b. Gilbert Bilezikian: hina/hoti as an Ironic Tragedy

Bilezikian's analysis is concerned with the more general discussion of the purpose of the entire gospel than with Mark 4:1-20 in particular, but we can apply his insights to our text, which forms a subset of the whole. While Bilezikian explains how the gospel has a transformative effect, he does not explain how the parable of The Sower accomplishes its bifurcation of the audience. He does, however, narrow the rhetorical options down to ironic properties of the gospel, and thus, to ironic properties of the parable. If we can understand irony, perhaps we can also understand the *hina/hoti* paradox.

Bilezikian's point of departure is the similarity in style between Mark's gospel and the first century fad in writing literary tragedies that were never expected to be performed on the stage, though

¹⁷⁶ Boucher, “Mysterious Parable” p21.

¹⁷⁷ Carey Moore “Mark 4.12: More Like the Irony of Micaiah than Isaiah” in *A Light Unto My Path* ed. Howard Bream, Temple U Press: 1974, Jerry Gill “Jesus, Irony and the ‘New Quest’” *Interp.* 41 (1980) 139-51, and Bruce Hollenbach “Lest They Should Turn Again and Be Forgiven: Irony” *Bible Translator*, 34 (1983) 312-21, as quoted in Hogatt, p128.

¹⁷⁸ Boucher, “Mysterious” p2?

¹⁷⁹ Greek and Roman society viewed attendance at plays and tragedies as a civic duty, in part because of the serious nature of the topics discussed. (

¹⁸⁰ E.g., Marcus, “Mystery”, p111-112. But even in the seventeenth century, T Hobbes remarked on Mark's irony, as cited by J. Camery-Hogatt, “Irony in Mark's Gospel” p2, Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1992.

read out-loud, making them a proto-novel.¹⁸¹ Bilezikian argues that as a tragedy, the gospel was transformative of cultural artifacts, not *sui generis*, a new and innovative genre of literature never before seen in the first century corpus. This would then change our reading of The Sower. Can the characteristics of a tragedy explain the *hina/hoti* tension in The Sower?

In Mark's gospel, Bilezikian finds the Aristotelian characteristics of tragedy (from most important to least): plot, character, intellectual content, diction, melody, and spectacle. He demonstrates that Mark's peculiar paratactic style with his constant use of "immediately" was perfectly adapted for moving the plot along. Much of the differences from the other synoptics might be seen as an intentional abridgment serving the purpose of an oral presentation in a limited time. The structure of a tragic plot requires use of irony—a knowledge known by the audience that is not known by the characters—which causes them to suffer. That's why we need no help seeing the similarities between the tragic hero and Jesus, whom Aristotle requires to be of greater stature than average. The intellectual content likewise, shows comparable if not greater depth than the tragedies of Sophocles. So in these first three characteristics, Mark is easily a tragedy.

The last two criteria had vanished by the first century, for the Greek chorus or "melody" had been replaced with more characters, and spectacle on the stage had been replaced with graphic descriptions.¹⁸² But it is the fourth criteria that gives us pause. Aristotle valued elevated diction, in which case Mark's *koine* Greek compares poorly with the Attic Greek of the classics. We are tempted to disqualify the Gospel on this criteria alone, but Bilezikian believes that this stylistic deficiency was intentional, that it captured the essence of colloquial, spoken language. He writes,

Long lists of descriptive details have often been compiled to show the finer aspect of the Gospel's style, but their particular character has not always been noticed. The indications of gesture, tone and feeling are unusually vivid because they have a graphic quality. The narration seems to consist of a series of tableaux; the décor and surroundings are soberly suggested; the motions are described with one typical, almost theatrical gesture; the moods are reproduced by meaningful exclamations and conventional reflections. The ensemble results in a narration that is a spectacle of lifelike realism.¹⁸³

Therefore Bilezikian argues that Mark carefully crafted the language not so much to invoke Greek spectacle as Judean realism, and one aspect of that realism was a colloquial speech that could be effectively read aloud. "The definition of Mark as the spoken gospel brings it a step closer to tragedy. Both were written for oral delivery."¹⁸⁴

If so, then not only was the parable of The Sower a spoken message of Jesus, but it is embedded into an even larger spoken work in the format of tragedy. Inverting the order, many have suggested that the entire book is structured as a parable.¹⁸⁵ This ties the theme of The Sower into the theme of the tragedy, and may explain why the book, like the paradigm parable, expends the most ink on the tragedy of failed expectations but ends with the comedy of unexpected bounty. Finding this "reversal of expectations" as the characteristic of both parables and tragedies, some scholars even suggest that The Sower occupies a rhetorical center to the entire gospel, providing the controlling symbol or motif for understanding the *mysterion* of the kingdom of God.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸¹ Bilezikian, p41.

¹⁸² Bilezikian, p120.

¹⁸³ Bilezikian p117.

¹⁸⁴ Bilezikian p119.

¹⁸⁵ Kelber, "Oral and written gospel" p123.

¹⁸⁶ Williams, "Parable" p43.

The literary effect of making a subset a microcosm of the whole works in both directions, permitting the obvious irony of the tragedy form to permeate The Sower, as well as the insider/outsider bifurcation to permeate the Gospel tragedy. This correspondence illustrates the necessity of a narrative analysis by showing the deficiency of static propositional analyses that filter the text to remove all tensions, thereby destroying the ironic tragedy with its rhetorical force.¹⁸⁷

How is the irony of the whole applied to the part? How does the tension of Jesus' passion explain the tension of *hina/hoti*? Bilezikian writes,

Ancient tragedians made frequent use of *dramatic irony* to emphasize the cruelties of fate and arouse the emotions of their audiences. Although irony can take many forms, it usually depends on the characters of the play being ignorant of significant knowledge that is available to the spectator-reader.¹⁸⁸

Bilezikian gives many examples from the plot of Mark's gospel to show that the characters demonstrate abundant dramatic irony. This much has been noted before, but the irony is also found in the microcosm. Bilezikian calls irony not expressed by characters a "nondramatic" irony.

Irony is also found in the dialogue and in the scene-by-scene development of the Gospel. The irony here alternates between three common forms. First, the irony expressed in subtle sarcasm or in almost imperceptible touches of humor, of which some instances follow: ". . . he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes." . . .

The second form of nondramatic irony in the Gospel derives from the use of esoteric language or from utterances that have a meaning intelligible to the audience and select characters but not to the main protagonist. In this category falls much of the teaching of Jesus, delivered in seemingly cryptic sayings and parables that are intended to keep its meaning veiled until after the resurrection. . . .

A third form of irony is that which occurs when the reverse of an expected course of action takes place, or when an effect of paradox or contrast is produced. The cross and the empty tomb constitute the supreme irony, but a number of other instances are also found in the Gospel. A few examples follow: ". . . he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him."¹⁸⁹

The importance of these nondramatic ironies is that they can be extracted from the text without recourse to the extra-linguistic clues that so troubled Boucher. These microcosmic ironies reflect the plot irony, the macrocosmic tragedy of which they are a part. Nevertheless, Bilezikian's description leaves us without much insight into the purpose or function of parables, having merely substituted one label, "nondramatic irony," for another, "parabolic speech." Even if we accept the tension as a part-for-whole, why would Jesus have used this approach to explain the *mysterion*? Is not the usual irony to have the reader know more than the narrator? What kind of irony has the narrator more knowledgeable than the reader?

2. Modern Rhetorical Analysis

Modern approaches can address the non-classical ironies we find in Mark's gospel, because literary analysis did not end with Aristotle's rhetorical categories, but continued to develop the reader-response

¹⁸⁷ J. Camery-Hogatt "Irony in Mark's Gospel" p179-180 Cambridge: Cambridge U Press 1992, writes, "To ignore the tension between these exclusionary strategies and revelations would be to cripple Mark's ironies, and to cripple the ironies would be to flatten out the narrative into a straightforward report, rather than a nuanced and provocative telling."

¹⁸⁸ Bilezikian, p122.

¹⁸⁹ Bilezikian "The Liberated Gospel" pp122-124.

perspective. We look at two modern rhetorical approaches to *The Sower*: an analytical approach that sees irony as a rational mechanism for dividing an audience, and an anti-analytical approach that sees irony as an irrational occasion for bifurcating an audience. The two approaches are complementary, for both demonstrate the insufficiency of a rational, propositional, static interpretation of the ironic parable, though from quite opposite perspectives. Both approaches reveal how irony expands from a narrative to entangle the entire text as well as the reader.

a. Fowler and Hoggatt: *hina/hoti* as Irony

Robert Fowler found irony useful in explaining many of the conundrums he encountered in the later passages of Mark 6-8.¹⁹⁰ Quoting extensively the observations of Wayne Booth,¹⁹¹ Fowler generalized from the plot irony identified by Booth in the passion narrative to the dramatic irony he found in the stories of loaves and fishes. Like Bilezikian, he sees a microcosmic irony in the narrative that mirrors the plot irony of the book. Concerning Jesus' reticence to identify himself in his non-parabolic discourses, i.e., the Messianic Secret (the direct discourse complement to *Parabeltheorie*), Fowler writes,

[W]e believe that careful study of the irony in Mark would go far to explain the elusive notion of the Messianic Secret throughout the gospel. Traditionally, the Messianic Secret has been viewed as a historical or theological problem, but if one shifts to a literary critical perspective, then the observation of the Messianic Secret in Mark may be accurately regarded as the observation of irony in the gospel. . . . Historical and theological concerns have dominated the study of the gospel, so the Markan ironies have been analyzed under these essentially alien categories. The result has been universal agreement that the Messianic Secret is a vital feature of the gospel, but nearly universal disagreement over what it is. "It," we suggest, is a rhetorical device, the use of irony to narrate "the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."¹⁹²

Fowler finds that the intentional obfuscation of Jesus can be explained with irony. Just as our historical analysis of the Isaiah quotation found it to be central to Jesus' message and thought, our literary analysis leads us to the conclusion that this *hina/hoti* tension in *The Sower* is intentionally ironic. Not only did Jesus intend this parable to be wrapped around the Isaiah quotation, but he intended it to have an ironic tension, perhaps only resolved by the ending of the book.

Redefining Irony

Bilezikian and Fowler use narrative irony to explain the tension in *The Sower*, but they are still working with a relatively vague definition of narrative irony as "knowledge possessed by the reader but not by the character(s) of the story."¹⁹³ But irony can involve more than two people, because satire, a type of irony, can be defined as "right knowledge possessed by both the reader and speaker, but not by a listener in the story," which raises the number of actors to three. So although the trope of irony requires at least two levels, a narrative can have many more pairings or triples of reader, narrator, speaking characters, and listening characters. In *The Sower*, for example, and ignoring the distinction

190 R. Fowler "Loaves and Fishes" pp96-98, Chico: Scholars Press, 1981.

191 W. Booth "Rhetoric and Irony" p28-29 Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1974, as quoted in Fowler, "Loaves" p98.

192 Fowler, "Loaves" p98-99. Although some scholars deny the narrower assertion that Jesus was hiding his Messianic calling, (J.D.G. Dunn, "The Messianic Secret in Mark", Tyndale Bulletin, p116, 1970) they are all in agreement that he was paradoxical, indirect, or evasive of some secret.

193 Cicero gives the classical laconic definition "Irony is saying one thing and meaning another" as quoted in Hoggatt, "Irony" p60.

between the disciples and the crowd, we have four levels: the modern reader, the Marcan narrator, Jesus, and his audience. Picking any two gives a total of twelve possible ironic permutations. And as with the three characters in satire, we can nest the irony within another pairing, which gives a total of twenty four possibilities. Should there be irony about satire, as we saw when the soldiers crowned Jesus and called him “King of the Jews,”¹⁹⁴ we may have yet another nested level, which can have forty-eight possibilities.

As it turns out, many of these possibilities are excluded by our inclinations, proclivities and just common sense. Literary conventions train us to trust the narrator, especially if he is presented as omniscient.¹⁹⁵ This would exclude all ironies between the modern reader and the Marcan narrator, which reduces our actor count to three, and simplifies the analysis. On the other hand, if the narrator says something completely outrageous, say, about a resurrection, we may be forced to go back and reanalyze our previous position, rereading the entire text to find ironies that were previously excluded. Irony then, is a global plot quantity with local dialogue effects. It can only be identified from complete knowledge of the text (macrocosm), but has profound effects at the level of individual sentences (microcosm).

This tying together of the microcosm with the macrocosm is precisely the effect of the literary irony to which Bilezikian and Fowler allude, and about which Hoggatt states,

In tragic irony, often the speech (which doubles back and victimizes its unwitting speaker) mirrors the ironic actions of the plot (which double back and victimize the unwitting actant). Where that synonymy is complex, the ironic speech could easily be mistaken for an implicit allegory of the ironic plot. But there are rhetorical potencies in that synonymy which may not be insignificant in the narrator's strategies. Because the speech mirrors the plot, it represents a major clue to the deeper significances which are to be found there.¹⁹⁶

Hoggatt argues that the micro-dialogue mirroring of the macro-story plot allows the narrator to use dialogue irony to make plot conclusions. This global implication is echoed in Jesus' claim that The Sower was paradigmatic for all of his teaching. Rephrasing Mark 4:13, Jesus may be saying “If you properly parse the ironies of The Sower, you will properly parse all my teachings.” Making this parsing our goal, let us look at a number of definitions involving irony to see if we can narrow down the ironic permutations to a manageable quantity in order to analyze the *hina/hoti* paradox.

Parsing Irony

In order to analyze the irony in The Sower, we have to identify it, which is not as straightforward as it sounds, since it requires global understanding.¹⁹⁷ Hoggatt attempts a literary-critical approach following Eco, arguing that there is knowledge that precedes the textual analysis, and knowledge that results from the textual analysis. Since post-knowledge may change pre-knowledge, this requires another pass through the text, which should be repeated until nothing changes and global

194 Booth recognizes this complex irony, writing “The cry “Hail, King of the Jews,” an example cited by Thomas Hobbes, was intended initially to satirize Christ's followers who had claimed him as king; presumably the chief pleasure for the shouting mob was the thought of the victims, including Christ himself. But what of Mark as he overtly reports the irony ironically in his account of the crucifixion?” (Booth, “Irony”, p128 quoted in Fowler, “Loaves” p97).

195 Fowler “Loaves and Fishes” p157-179 “outlines a rudimentary catalog of reliable commentary in Mark”

196 Hoggatt (“Irony” p61)

197 We have all heard the English professor horror stories of classes that thought Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* was non-ironic. More pointedly, there is no consensus on whether *Parabeltheorie* is ironic or not.

understanding is achieved.¹⁹⁸ With a stable reading, Hoggatt then identifies an irony by considering how the reader gains some knowledge that is not possessed by one of the other characters. To find irony, the reader must compare his progress in understanding to that of the characters, so that according to Hoggatt, our second reading of *The Sower* finds Mark 4:13 ironic because our first reading has revealed the interpretation.

Then the production of irony reduces to the narrative challenge of revealing to the reader while concealing from the characters. Hoggatt divides this ironic signature into two broad groups: those that explicitly address the reader or “telling,” and those that implicitly address the reader or “showing.” Explicit methods include prologues, asides, “winks at the reader,” and foretelling, while implicit methods include foreshadowing (or flashback), verbal ironies, and excluding characters from crucial information.¹⁹⁹ These are the obvious flags for there may be still be ironies hiding in the pre-knowledge²⁰⁰ that the reader brings to the text.²⁰¹ Supposing we can identify an irony, we are now ready to parse it as Hoggatt explains,

The difficulty of offering a precise definition is suggested by this opening lament from D. C. Muecke's fine study, *The Compass of Irony*. In an opening statement, Muecke lists nineteen different terms for irony or “types” of irony which are discussed in the literature. Many of these, he tells us, have been invented on the spot by the critic who employs them, with the result that one never sees any ordered relationship between the kinds and consequently never gets a clear picture of the whole range or compass of irony.” (p.4)
How, then, should we proceed? Muecke has provided us with an accounting of irony's three constitutive elements (pp. 19f): 1. First irony requires that there be two or more levels of discourse, one available to the victim of the irony, the other to the observer. 2. Irony requires that there be dissonance or tension between the two levels. 3. Finally, irony requires that someone—either the victim or the ironist himself—be innocent of the tension. In this way, the observer is invited to respond on more than a rational basis. The work of irony is ultimately a work of subtlety and shock.²⁰²

Hoggatt finds three universal characteristics of irony, which he uses for classification. If the speaker is cognizant, but listener not, this is satire, while if the listener is cognizant but speaker not, this is double entendre. In tragedy, the irony usually involves the plot outcome of the speaker, adding an additional layer of plot irony over the dialogue irony, while in comedy, irony has a different relation to the plot, so classical analysis uses the words *ieron* for satirist and *alazon* for victim to distinguish them.²⁰³ Now in Greco-Roman classical theater, the plots were well known since the playwrights wrote within the limitations of shared cultural myths. Therefore the reader has knowledge of the outcome that the narrator might not (if the narrator is not portrayed as omniscient), making the difference between comedy and tragedy a part of the pre-knowledge of the reader.

We sum up these various categories in the following table, where we diagram the relationship with a “+” for knowledge and a “-” for ignorance,

198 Hoggatt “Irony” p59. Note also the similarities to the hermeneutical spiral, or lesser to greater analyses.

199 Hoggatt “Irony” p60.

200 David Amante, “The Theory of Ironic Speech Acts” *Poetics Today*, 2 (1981) p80, as quoted in Hoggatt, p63, writes “Knowledge of the social system, manners, principles governing conversations, shared background and knowledge of speech acts all contribute to our awareness of irony.”

201 And nothing excludes the ironies from being reversed, that the characters know something the narrator does not, and therefore neither implicit nor explicit methods apply.

202 Hoggatt, “Irony” p 61. quoting Douglas C. Muecke “*The Compass of Irony*” London: Methuen, 1969, p4.

203 All cultures make ironic distinctions, one might compare the Yiddish definitions of a *schlamazel* and *schlemiel*.

Reader	Narrator	Speaker	Listener	Type
+	+	+	-	Comedic Satire
+	+	-	+	Comedic Double Entendre
+	-	+	+/-	Comedic Plot Irony
+	-	+	-	Tragic Foretelling
+	-	-	+	Tragic Verbal Irony
+	-	-	-	Tragic Plot Irony
+/-	+	-	+/-	Mark's Double/Triple Irony

Now if the irony lies in some non-dialogue section, say, in the action or the plot unfolding, then the last two columns are extraneous, and the “plot” irony lies between the reader and the narrator. We might also distinguish between a familiar reader and a first-time reader, who has not yet read the conclusion.

A brief examination of this chart will show that this classical reader is always marked “+,” because he is “in the know.” This was Hoggatt's assumption when he identified irony. Such an assumption appears justified, for if the reader is not knowledgeable, then the irony cannot be identified. But in that case, the reader is irrelevant to the discussion of irony, and we could have more easily made it a three-column table. Mark, however, is an unusual case.

Marcan Double Irony

Mark may be writing this gospel for the first-time reader, or even more ironically, for the familiar reader whom he wants to jolt into a “first-time” experience. Therefore the first column might be “-”, and the last row on the chart might be not just possible, but intended by Mark as a double (or even triple) irony. Therefore the *hina/hoti* tension in The Sower might be resolved not in the pericope, but by the conclusion of the book.

This complicates the discussion of irony, because it hinges on whether Mark is intending an irony or not. That is, Mark's intention is a global property, while Hoggatt's rules on spotting an irony depend only on local textual clues, so Hoggatt might not flag *hina/hoti* as ironic depending on his pre-knowledge. Even worse, readers still disagree as to Mark's intentions even after repeated readings, so that Eco's iterations may not converge to a single answer. Thus we find *hina/hoti* dividing the readers just as it had previously divided Jesus' listeners. We have pushed this ironic trope as far as we can, and still find *hina/hoti* paradoxical, but we have learned something significant: the reader is part of the problem.

b. Existentialist: hina/hoti as Paradoxical Speech

The *hina/hoti* paradox could not be solved semantically without destroying the lexicon (chapter one), and it could not be solved narratively without polarizing the entire gospel (ironic analysis), but can it be solved by redefining the paradoxical? The Existentialist solves the *hina/hoti* paradox by radically redefining the rules of grammar: no longer is language intended to convey static concepts, but its purpose is to reshape our way of thinking, our way of talking. This view of parables is a radical rhetoric

that bypasses persuasion and logic to operate at the even more primitive level of grammar. If the approach of narrative irony entangled the reader, the approach of Existentialism entangles the language.

Soren Kirkegaard

Existentialism is a rhetorical critique that began as an attempt to take Scripture, including The Sower, as a radical critique of Enlightenment rationalism. Rather than rationalize the *hina/hoti* paradox to the gospel, Existentialism insists that the gospel be redefined by the paradox. Just as irony is a global property of the text with local effects, so Existentialism sees irony as defining character of the gospel.

The existential critique, begun in 1841 with Soren Kirkegaard's thesis *On the Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*,²⁰⁴ took the ironic as an attack against sophistry and against those in the Danish church whose thought that rationalism made their insider status unavoidable. Instead, he argued, Jesus' parables are not rational arguments for selecting the most productive behavior, but a "leap in the dark" that are risky precisely because irony undermines our ability to rationally decide the meaning, and hence our coveted status as insiders.

The attempt to ground a rhetorical or affective critique in the non-rational grammar of existentialism consumed the scholarship of the first six decades of the twentieth century.²⁰⁵ We compile a few quotes from recent advocates to show how a rhetorical desire to take The Sower and similar parables seriously led to this irrational effort to resolve the *hina/hoti* paradox.

Amos Wilder and Sallie McFague TeSelle²⁰⁶

Amos Wilder argues for a rhetorical role for The Sower that goes beyond persuasion to become a prophetic vision,

The parable of the Sower ... can well be seen as prophetic rather than sapiential. ...It is this revelatory character of Jesus' parables which is to be stressed. Here Jesus is in line with the prophets and apocalypticists as one who uses tropes or extended images to unveil mysteries, but above all to mediate reality and life. This is particularly clear in the so-called parables of the Kingdom like those of the sower and the mustard seed, in which Jesus mediates his own vision and his own faith.²⁰⁷

For Wilder, The Sower "mediates" Jesus' vision, as something that is beyond proposition, perhaps even beyond persuasion, becoming a mysterious function that generates "reality" from "life" or perhaps life from reality. According to the structuralists, this is the function of language, which translates observations into the inner reality of the mind. So Wilder is forming the analogy that The Sower is to Scripture, what language is to mankind. He elaborates,

A true metaphor or symbol is more than a sign, it is a bearer of the reality to which it refers. The hearer not only learns about that reality, he participates in it.²⁰⁸

204 Soren Kirkegaard "On the Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates" transl. H & E. Hong, Princeton: Princeton U Press, 1989 (1841).

205 See Klyne Snodgrass, "From Allegorizing to Allegorizing" in *The Challenge of Jesus Parables*, ed Richard Longenecker, Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 2000, for a review of the history of parable scholarship.

206 Disclaimer: I am distantly related to Sallie TeSelle by her marriage to my cousin-once-removed.

207 Amos Wilder "Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel" pp80, 88, Cambridge: Harvard U Press 1971., as quoted in Reynolds, "Context" p27.

208 Wilder, "Language" p92 as quoted in Reynolds, "Context" p27.

For Wilder, the parable of The Sower becomes a participation, an act, a reality beyond its textual representation so that Jesus' parables are transformative of the apostles, and by implication, us, by changing our entire reality to align with that of the prophet.²⁰⁹ This happens in spite of its informational content and in spite of its rhetorical force, but entirely through its illocutionary power of symbolic reality-bearing.

Likewise Sallie TeSelle takes up the challenge of proving a non-rational function of The Sower, finding a method whereby Wilder's "mediation" can take place. In Reynold's words, She is an advocate of narrative theology—i.e., of doing theology through the imaginative genres 'poem', 'novel' and (somewhat less imaginative, but nonetheless narrative) 'autobiography'. She sees these genres as related to the New Testament 'parable', and makes the point that it was through this imaginative genre that Jesus communicated his message—a message which theology must attempt to appropriate and communicate anew to each succeeding generation. What is new in her argument is her insistence on the function of 'insight' both in fashioning metaphors and in each successive appropriation of their referents. Both Hermaniuk and Wilder had stressed the revelatory nature of parable-as-metaphor, but TeSelle concentrates on the creative imaginative jump which brings the metaphor into being and which uses the metaphor to launch the hearer's imagination to the reality referred to. ...

The two most important points TeSelle makes are: (1) that appropriation of the referent of the parables is not through explanation or paraphrase, but through imaginative insight, and (2) that consequently parables are unexplainable in conceptual terms and are untranslatable. The medium is the message.

These two points give rise to her passive hermeneutic principle that the agent in the interpretive process is the text, not the reader. The reader simply makes it possible for the text to do its job. Since what is sought is not information, but an experience, the reader gives his undivided attention to the text in order to allow it to work on the imagination. The medium is the message.²¹⁰

For TeSelle, this emphasis on metaphor goes far beyond the classical rhetoric, surpassing even Wilder's prophetic vision. TeSelle writes,

In metaphor, knowledge and its expression are one and the same; there is no way *around* metaphor, it is not expendable²¹¹ [The parable] is itself what it is talking about²¹² ... Thus we *move*, through metaphor, *to* meaning; metaphor is a *motion* from here to there. If we say, as I would want to, that Jesus of Nazareth is par excellence the metaphor of God, we mean that his familiar, mundane story is the *way*, the indirect but necessary way, from here to there.²¹³ The totality of all the processes of life and thought in the parable *is* the meaning.²¹⁴ What is being offered is not information one can store but an experience. ... The parable does not teach a spectator a lesson; rather it invites and surprises a participant into an experience.²¹⁵

For TeSelle, the parable is the experience and the medium is the message of salvation.²¹⁶ The paradox

209 One finds in Protestant Wilder a transubstantiation of the parable from the accidents of narrative into the essence of the reality of Christ.

210 Reynolds, "Context" p29.

211 TeSelle, "Speaking in Parables", p4 Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.

212 TeSelle, p5.

213 TeSelle, pp32-33.

214 TeSelle, p67.

215 TeSelle, p78.

216 Or in the title of Marshall McLuhan 's work, "The Medium is the Message"

of *hina* is absorbed into the parable, which becomes an irrational paradox of language that destroys our rational view of reality.

Critique of Existentialist Rhetoric

Typical of the scholarly response to Wilder and TeSelle is Stein's exasperation:

Much of the modern discussion of metaphor and parable is adorned with so much hyperbole and existential terminology that it is difficult to understand what is actually being said or meant. As a result, as Claus Westermann observes, 'the simplicity of the parables is often no longer recognizable in the lofty heights of the abstract language of ...interpretation.' Frequently modern discussions reveal a great deal more about the proponents of these views than about the nature of a metaphor or a parable—or about how the original authors used them. Yet is a parable really able to interpret us? How can an inanimate text interpret anyone or anything?...Are we not, then, explaining one abstruse metaphor (“parables interpret us”), which we have used to explain another metaphor (which in the case of the biblical parables is far less abstruse), by still another metaphor (“personified metaphor”)?²¹⁷

Stein points out the obvious: both Wilder and TeSelle have used another metaphor to explain supposedly inexplicable metaphors. The metaphoric hagiography notwithstanding, the existential critique neither explains the function of parables in general, nor *The Sower* in particular.

Weedan carries out a transcendental analysis²¹⁸ by analyzing *The Sower* using the three identifying characteristics proposed by existentialists that produce this dramatic effect—reversal of expectations, single extended metaphorical form, and anthropological orientation—writing,

The existentialist hermeneutic, particularly in its incorporation of the performative [affective] function of metaphor in its phenomenology, has been quite successful in facilitating access to the meaning of many of Jesus' parables. But there are decided limitations to the employment of an existentialist interpretation for all of Jesus' parables, and especially so when one seeks access to parabolic meaning in a parable such as the Parable of the Sower. Three of these limitations concern us here.

First, while in many of the parables of Jesus the end result is the shattering of continuity by discontinuity, profound expectations dashed by some radical reversal, I do not find that to be the effect intended in all the parables. . . . But more germane to this essay, I fail to find this parabolic principle of reversal and radical discontinuity operating in the Parable of the Sower. From my reading of it, the parable does not reverse the reader/ hearer's expectations but intensifies and confirms them. . . .

A second major limitation of the existentialist approach is its tendency, by virtue of Heideggerian ontology and a Jülicherian prejudice against allegory, to restrict unnecessarily the depth and breadth of the field of parabolic meaning. This imposed restriction truncates interpretation, because it does not allow for the possibility that a parable could contain a number of metaphorical disclosures, related but different, each functioning polyvalently, joining in concert to create a parable's total metaphoric impact. The preference of the existentialist approach for discontinuity also truncates interpretation by bracketing out appreciation of the positive roles which the dramatic elements of coherence and continuity play in contributing to meaning.

²¹⁷ Robert Stein, “The Genre of the Parables” in *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables*, ed Richard Longenecker, p38, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

²¹⁸ VanTil defines a transcendental critique as one that adopts the assumptions but demonstrates incompatible conclusions.

The third limitation of an existentialist interpretation is its inability, hermeneutically, to engage directly the meaning-system explicitly suggested by the semantic structure of some parabolic texts. As long as the semantic structure reflects a meaning-system in the human sphere of interaction, the existentialist methodology is at home and is able to disclose helpful interpretative insights. But when the semantic structure largely or solely reflects a meaning-system associated with the natural environment, the existentialist methodology cannot function until it transforms the signification into a meaning-system of the human sphere. Even to attempt to find meaning in the cosmological sphere would lead the interpreter, from the existentialist perspective, into both the objectification of Being and an avoidance of the existential question directed to the interpreter as person.

Thus, with respect to our present concerns, the existentialist hermeneutic is incapable of disclosing the meaning of the Parable of the Sower.²¹⁹

Weedan finds that the affective or rhetorical effect of parables is properly recognized by the existential approach, but the approach fails to characterize properly: the way this effect is accomplished (not just reversal of expectations); the structure of the parable (not just an extended metaphor); and the philosophical justification (not just an anthropological orientation). Minimizing the difficulties by saying that The Sower is atypical, ignores Jesus' own statements that this is a paradigm parable. If the existential analysis does not apply to The Sower, then it cannot apply to the remaining parables either. This illustrates the danger of making the rhetorical effect primary over grammar and logic, or as Weedan might say, making the personal response the object of its ontological hermeneutic.

Despite this weakness, we recognize that the existential critique has moved us beyond propositional information, even beyond beyond rhetorical reader-response, to consider some mysterious illocutionary force of language itself.

E. Rhetorical Conclusions

The narrative analysis of the parable of The Sower was necessitated by the stubborn problems raised by syntactic and semantic analysis, which revealed how the entire pericope was an explanation or interpretation of the prophecy of Isaiah 6:9-10. This quotation implies that Jesus taught in parables in order that (*hina*) the gospel would be misunderstood. Having eliminated all higher critical approaches that modify the text, we looked at syntactical and semantic methods for softening *hina* to *hoti*, but concluded that all such approaches introduced far more problems than they solved. We then looked at literary analyses of the passage, recognizing that parables are a trope with a two-level structure. The two-level metaphoric language, however, did not remove the tension in the passage though it did point to a possible use of irony. The consideration of irony could relieve the tension, but depended on prior knowledge of the gospel. This entanglement of the narrative with Mark's gospel solved the *hina* tension but at the cost of creating a tension for the entire gospel. Making this process explicit, by demanding the whole gospel to be a working out of the parabolic language, only moved the tension from the gospel to language itself.

Therefore each analysis of the parable of The Sower solved the *hina/hoti* paradox by transferring it to a larger context, while sacrificing some indispensable tool in the process. Syntactical analysis was willing to sacrifice the lexicon, two-level tropes would sacrifice logic, ironic analysis would sacrifice the comprehension of the entire book (or perhaps the objective reader), and

²¹⁹ Theodore Weedan, "Recovering the Parabolic Intent in the Parable of the Sower" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, XLVII/1, 97-120.

existentialist analysis would sacrifice the propositional mode of language. All of these analyses saw with greater and growing clarity the effect of the parable of The Sower, but could neither identify the cause nor the purpose of the effect.

We begin the next section attempting to identify the source of this illocutionary function of The Sower, and how this source resolves both the textual and the rhetorical problems illuminated by the preceding analysis. We must go back to the grammar and logic of speech acts themselves to see how the illocutionary function of the parable arises from the very structure of language. If we are successful, it provides a way to understand the *hina/hoti* tension, and the use of Marcan irony, as well as a solution to the epistemological puzzle of locating the meaning of a piece of text.

Chap 3. The Development of a Critical Tool

In this chapter, we develop a critical tool, which in the next chapter we will use to analyze the parable of The Sower. Since we have considered several traditional approaches and found them all unable to resolve the tension that Jesus presented in his exposition of Isaiah 6:9-10, the tool we need will have to be somewhat non-traditional. Despite our specific application of the novel tool to Mark 4:1-20 in chapter four, a general exposition is still necessary to validate it, making this chapter more philosophical than the previous ones but still pertinent to our exegetical purpose. It may seem that this chapter is overly technical, but a detailed development of the tool is justified in light of the extensive confusion and controversy surrounding both this text, parables in general, and a post-modern literary analysis that denies the validity of our analytic tool.

Our motivation for developing a new tool began with observation that the text of Mark 4:1-20 is multiply self-referential because it is a parable about the telling of parables that explains a prophetic text about the understanding of prophetic texts, making the parable into a set of Russian dolls, and defying classification into the traditional categories of propositional or persuasive speech. Nor can we simply overlook this anomalous text because both Jesus and the author of Mark placed such emphatic stress upon it. Accordingly we looked for an analytical method that had a third option that was neither proposition nor persuasion, and found it in Speech Act theory with its third category of illocutions as developed by Evans and Briggs. Unfortunately, Speech Act theory itself has divided into several camps, with the three-fold analysis of Evans being challenged by a five-fold analysis of Searle and its misappropriation as reductionist linguistics, not to mention the misappropriation by Derrida as deconstructive linguistics. Therefore before we can apply this method to our text, we have to re-establish the validity of the original three-fold Speech Act method and its subsequent development by recent theologians, Briggs, Vanhoozer and Poythress, as well as reintroduce self-reference into its nomenclature. That is, the peculiarities of the parable of The Sower require us to discuss self-reference as more than just another type of illocutionary speech act, but as an essential component of all illocutions, which necessitates some terminology. Once we have validated this three-fold division and incorporation of self-reference, we can make use of Speech Act Theory (SAT) to understand the *hina/hoti* paradox.²²⁰ (In this chapter, we will use *hina/hoti* as shorthand for all the paradoxes raised in the historical exegesis of The Sower, wherein neither persuasion (*hina*) nor proposition (*hoti*) is capable of explaining the text.)

The first refinement to SAT that we need is a “complete” or exhaustive classification scheme that allows us to address the full implications of the *hina/hoti* paradox, without relying on *ad hoc* external contexts or special pleading for resolution. That is, Kermode speaks for many scholars who object that *hina/hoti* can be resolved only through some secret knowledge known only by believers. We show rather that the paradox arises from a commitment to a dualist interpretation, which is superseded by a complete scheme. The scheme relies on some peculiar properties of a three-fold or “Trinitarian” classification, which are implicit in the earlier approaches of Frame and Poythress, but are now made explicit. Applied to SAT, this classification scheme shows the necessity for using Evans' and Briggs' construction over against that of Searle's.

The second refinement to our “Reformed” SAT (RSAT) comes from an application of the first,

²²⁰Each of these three tasks—validating three-fold classifications, reintroducing nomenclature for self-reference, and rehabilitating Speech Act Theory—results in three independently significant tools. The exposition of each tool requires the other two and hence some unavoidable forward references in this chapter. For clarity, our limited treatment will in the most part remain focussed on their application to The Sower while relegating details to the footnotes.

whereby a proper three-fold categorization reveals an underlying necessity for the self as an actor, a self-aware subject, who makes two appearances in the theory. That is, not only is the self the proper subject of religious speech acts such as prayer and worship categorized by Evans and Briggs, but the self is the proper object of all third-category illocutions, for the text must be aware of itself to insure validity of the act. This is particularly noticeable in illocutions that carry ethical force, which are a hallmark of Jesus' parables. That is, the ethical force embedded in Jesus' teaching is not a consequence of appeal to higher authority, nor is it due to some invalid 2nd Temple exegetical method, but is derived from self-reference of the illocution itself. To convey this necessary role for the self, we enrich Evans' description to include explicitly self-referential constructions.

Finally, we test and refine this Reformed SAT by comparing it with three Reformed theologians who have presented similar Trinitarian aspects of a Biblical SAT: Brigg's "British" hermeneutical approach, Vanhoozer's "Continental" theological approach; and Poythress' "American" apologetic approach. With this tool in hand, the *hina/hoti* paradox and the allegory of The Sower will be seen to be the brilliant exegesis of Isaiah 6:9-10 by a master teacher.

1. The Necessity for a Three-fold Classification

Nearly all exegetes have recognized the tension in the *hina/hoti* paradox, attempted to explain it away, and in the end, admitted that they could not resolve it. In some cases, they made it an essential paradox, incapable of resolution in principle, however most exegetes have looked for assistance to a scholar in another field: a linguist, a theologian, or a literary critic. They have sought a broader context to explain or dilute the tension with the result that the implications of the *hina* paradox expand to topics far beyond the original one. As we saw in chapter two, the implications of The Sower expanded to all parables, then to the gospel of Mark, then to the reader, and finally to language itself without resolving the paradox.

Therefore what is needed to replace this infinite expansion of the boundaries of the paradox is a classification scheme that can contain within it the paradox and all its implications. This will allow us to confine the paradox, to examine its contradictory properties or relationships, and hopefully to resolve them without losing focus in some "larger context." Now classifying "all possible implications" would appear to be an infinite task unless there were a way to reach the end of "all." A classification system that can reach the end by including everything is a "complete" system, which might not be achievable except that this seems to be what Jesus had in mind when he said (4:11) "*everything* is in parables" and (4:13), "how will you understand *all* parables." In addition to this hint, we are further encouraged by Poythress' development of a "complete" classification scheme for discourse in his "Framework of Discourse Analysis," which he presents as a remedy to previous *ad hoc* classification schemes. He argues that a Trinitarian theory is complete, and defends it by showing some of its unique properties.

We learn from Poythress the advantages of a three-fold classification, using such a scheme to classify the various critiques of The Sower. Each element in the classification should carry both a definition and a function; it should be able to operate as a perspective on the other members, as well as an object of their perspective. We also learn the advantage of a three-fold classification: the number of relations between categories is the same as the number of categories, so that whether we define categories as three subjects with three relations, or define them as three relations with three objects, we still have the same number—three.²²¹ Each relation is also fully symmetric or bidirectional, permitting

²²¹This "three-ness" is more important than the categories themselves, because all such categories must be bounded or defined, which brings in more external categories! This looks like an infinite regress, unless the definition of a category is contained within the other two. In that case, the system closes in on itself and is in danger of collapsing

each category to be both subject or predicate of the other. This bi-directionality allows them to be simultaneously complete and self-supporting, both defining and being defined by the other.²²²

With these observations in place, we are ready to begin our own classification system with three categories: the text, its meanings, and the people that make them.²²³ While there are three relations between these three categories, we also account for the two directions of a relation, distinguishing between a category as a subject and a category as an object. Therefore we find six relations: how texts get their meaning, how persons get their texts, how meanings get their texts, how meanings get their persons, how persons get their meanings, and how texts get their persons. This classification scheme allows us to understand the various ways interpreters have handled the *hina/hoti* paradox, while providing the tool that may resolve it.²²⁴

A. How Texts Get Their Meaning

How texts get their meaning has been an area of intense debate for the past half-century, in fields as diverse as literary criticism, linguistics and philosophy. Finding some validity in all the different views, we can say without too much controversy that there are three possible ways for meaning to be found in texts, which we abbreviate as ART: the author intended it; the reader discovered it; and the text created it. John Frame and Vern Poythress have developed similar three-fold classifications that wrestle with author, recipient and message as interconnected categories, tuning them for applications in Biblical studies and Reformed theology. However, the ART scheme is the more common one making it more significant to a broader audience, and therefore more important for the broad validation of our textual tools. Since the tool we develop will further modify the third category by adding text-constructions, we prefer to begin with ART than with the Frame/Poythress versions, although in principle, they are functionally equivalent. Then our three-fold classification scheme for meaning includes: authorial-intentions, reader-responses, and text-constructions.

into two or one category unless something else keeps it apart. Once again, that “something else” leads to an external regress unless it too is contained within the system. Thus both the definition and the difference must be within the system, and if these two things are discrete from the category they describe, we have the number three. Finally, if all this is present inside the system, there is a certain amount of fluidity how it self-organizes, making rigid boundaries difficult if not impossible to maintain between categories and relationships, which permits multiple descriptions, all while maintaining its three-ness.

222 That is, if the scheme is both complete and self-supporting, then it is independent of external criteria, and in some sense must be unique. To be both unique and self-sufficient suggests that the scheme achieves the metaphysical status of “necessary and sufficient,” which, if true, would counteract any criticism of *ad hoc* arbitrary subjectivity. If the classification criteria are “complete” in the sense that everything is included in the classification scheme, then we can classify an item by denying its membership to the other two categories. This gives us two ways to classify: by finding a similarity to one category, or by finding dissimilarities with the other two categories. Since relations between categories also result in the same three-fold classification scheme, there are two more methods of classification: identifying the functional similarities of the item, or identifying the two functional dissimilarities of the item. Some combination of these four methods permit both the classification of a new item and the validation of the process. Validation is an important concept, and what we gain from multiple methods of classification is more than simply self-consistency, we also gain self-validation. One criticism of *ad hoc* methods is that the criteria used for creating the categories are external to the system, and often not unique. But in a self-referencing scheme that is also complete, there can be only one such scheme, which excludes all *ad hoc* competitors. This observation is either deeply metaphysical or simply tautological, depending on whether one likes St Anselm's Ontological proof or not, but practically it gives real teeth to Jesus' insider/outsider classification scheme.

223 This is the same three categories suggested by Ferre, “Language, Logic and God” in his independent development of a Trinitarian approach to theological philosophy, which may mean that this division arises naturally and necessarily.

224 The paradox with the unexplored option of a text-constructive, illocutionary, bivalent, ethical, pre-modern, recursive speech act.

1. Authorial-Intentions

E. D. Hirsch, a proponent of the authorial-intent position, argues that the meaning of a text is a function of what the author intended it to mean.²²⁵ Since textbooks are principally this sort of document, and since we are told that Jesus was teaching the people (Mark 4:1), it is often assumed that the meaning of parable of The Sower must be like a textbook. There is much support for such a view, including Paul's admonition that (2 Tim. 3:16) "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness," which is often taken to be a proof-text of the authorial intent of all Scripture. We do not dispute that all Scripture is useful for teaching, or that God is the final author of all Scripture; we only object that this authorial intent exhausts all the meanings the text can bear. Surely the response of the reader to the parable of The Sower contributes toward the meaning of the text, and cannot be captured by a Hirsch's author-intent model.

2. Reader-responses

Stanley Fish, a proponent of the reader-response position, argues that the reader can interact with a text in ways that the author may not have intended and certainly cannot control.²²⁶ Are these readers' meanings significant? Hirsch attempts to separate out a reader "significance" from an authorial "meaning," but the distinction does not hold up well under scrutiny. When we ask, "Is it the intent of the author of the parable of The Sower that makes the meaning opaque, or is opacity only the reader's experience?" we find it is neither one nor the other but both are true, because the author intended the reader to experience opacity. That is, Hirsch's model cannot work if the reader's experience is part of the meaning, because then the meaning refers to itself, entangling the reader in its logical circuit. Since Fish writes about the meaning understood by readers, he cannot avoid entangling the reader and therefore believes that all texts must entangle the reader, making the subjective reader a requirement of any objective authorial intention. But whether the reader is always as active as Fish believes, or always as passive as Hirsch suggests, the reader's response remains a very important aspect of the meaning of The Sower.

3. Text-constructions

Finally, text-construction is a much neglected option, but as J. Austin argues, texts such as contracts, laws, and promises all possess a meaning independent from both author and reader.²²⁷ Fish would make this meaning a subset of reader-response, arguing that the force of a contract is maintained by a society, so that the meaning is not independent of the community. We argue that text-constructive meanings still deserve a separate category, for, in the case of the Bible, the living community is defined by the text, not the text by the living community. Likewise, the fact that the Bible requires literate readers also changed society and became a driving force of the Reformation, so that this independence—the ability of the text alone to transform a community—is what McLuhan recognized when he said "The medium is the message."²²⁸ When Jesus announces that the parable of The Sower divides the audience, there is a

225 E.D. Hirsch "Validation in Meaning"

226 Stanley Fish "Is there a text in this class?"

227 J. Austin "How to do things with words"

228 Marshall McLuhan "Understanding Media" 1964, p4.9 "Western man acquired from the technology of literacy the power to act without reacting. . . But our detachment was a posture of noninvolvement. ...It is no longer possible to adopt the aloof and dissociated role of the literate Westerner." "This fact merely underlies the point that 'the medium is the message' because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action. The content or uses of such media are as diverse as they are ineffectual in shaping the form of human association.

sense in which the parable creates the category of “outsider” rather than merely identifying it, and that “parabolic” speech is as much a part of the meaning as the story it tells. If an author's intent to entangle the reader forces us to consider more meanings than just the author's, then a parable's construction that entangles the language forces us to consider more meanings than just the author's and reader's.

4. Conclusions

While this three-fold ART classification is inclusive, it apparently does not divide the “meaning of the text” into mutually exclusive primary categories but allows for a chromatic scale. It would be more accurate to say that the text has several meanings, and each meaning can be assigned to a primary category, but the number of meanings—like Hirsch's infinite number of significances—is not fixed. Thus finding “the meaning of The Sower” is not a reductionist or logical positivist attempt to paraphrase the parable into a single category, but an open-ended attempt to collect as many perspectives as possible.

B. How Persons Get Their Texts (Intro to Speech Acts)

We turn now to the relationship connecting the person to the created text. This is not trying to read the mind of the author, but a recognition of the many mutually enforced semantic rules that are operational in a text.²²⁹ J. Austin's seminal work entitled *How To Do Things With Words*, which began the study of speech act theory, captures this pragmatic mode we want to classify.²³⁰ We will develop some new aspects of the theory later in the chapter, but here we simply present the theory in the manner of his pupil Donald Evans as a three-fold complete system involving static propositions, dynamic persuasions, and textual creations.²³¹

1. Static Propositions (Locution)

The first and most obvious way to “do things with words” is to convey information. The author or speaker has an idea that he would like to convey to the reader or listener, so that this mode of information transfer is dominated by the propositional content of the text or speech. Nearly always, the informational content is independent of the telling, it is external to the communication method. Claude Shannon began the field of information theory through his analysis of cryptographic texts, which separated the content from the communication channel, a level of abstraction that made possible the invention of the electronic computer.²³² Inasmuch as an author or speaker can be replaced by a computer-digitized signal, by the simple conveyance of information, then this form of communication is under consideration, so that with respect to The Sower, all paraphrases and nearly all commentaries that merely extract information are addressing the static propositional content of the text alone.²³³

Indeed, it is only too typical that the ‘content’ of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium.”

229 We call them semantic, because they operate on a level above the grammar, involving the meaning of entire sentences within paragraphs, rather than at the discrete level of words within sentences.

230 J. Austin “How to do things with words”

231 Donald Evans “A Logic of Self-Involvement”

232 Claude Shannon “[A Symbolic Analysis of Relay and Switching Circuits.](#)” unpublished MS Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Aug. 10, 1937, and “Collected Papers,” Edited by N.J.A Sloane and Aaron D. Wyner, IEEE press, [ISBN 0-7803-0434-9](#)

233 Information theory does not preclude other uses for texts, but logical positivism (or what Ferre “Language, Logic and God” calls verificational analysis) does make the claim that meaning can only be attached to information.

2. *Dynamic Persuasions (Perlocution)*

A second and perhaps even more ancient method of using text is to gauge the effect on the reader or audience. Unlike static propositions that are true at all times and places, the dynamic effect on an audience is specific to a time and a place and requires some action, some change in the reader/listener due to the author's intent or persuasion. With respect to The Sower, the dynamic persuasion is indicated by the present tense, the deictic words such as “Behold!”, and the call to action “those who have ears to hear, let them hear.”²³⁴ But there is also a sense in which the text itself, independent of the author or the original telling, has a persuasive or “perlocutionary” effect, if it encourages a reader to memorize it, to repeat it, or to copy it.²³⁵

A dynamic persuasion does not exclude propositional content, rather it is propositional content with a motivation for the listener to do something. Generally content is essential to persuasion, so this classification scheme is not exclusive, but overlapping and simultaneous. Later in the chapter we will make finer distinctions between static content and dynamic persuasion, but with reference to The Sower, the emphasis on persuasion is exemplified by the Existentialist position of TeSelle—a call to active listening, a call for decision, a call to enter the mystery of the kingdom of God.²³⁶

3. *Textual Creations (Illocution)*

In Austin's Speech Act Theory, it was this third category that was considered his important contribution. He argues that there are types of speech and texts that convey more than information or motivation, being independent of both author and reader. Promises, marriage contracts, and christenings are all examples of texts that do something other than convey information or motivate some action. Though not considered by Austin, Biblical examples of this type of speech include blessings, cursings, confessions, praise, prayer and most worship liturgy, making it a very important category to understand for Biblical scholars.²³⁷ All of these examples demonstrate that speech can create a reality, an entity that persists long after the original author and audience have left the scene, and thus it is a form of “textual creation.” With regard to The Sower, the existence of this third category suggests that the function of the parable can be greater than either the proposition of the allegory or the persuasion of the interpretive method, but include the creation of the categories “insider” and “outsider.” The parable of The Sower constructs a paradigm, which not only is a template for Jesus' other parables (Mark 4:13), but as we saw in chapter two, a template for the entire gospel.

4. *Conclusions*

There has been a lot of confusion over the character and classification scheme of speech act theory, and especially of the third type of text-constructive speech act, which we address later in the chapter, but here we emphasize that a single text can possess all these functions simultaneously, they

²³⁴Classically, this aspect of using texts was known as Rhetoric, which Aristotle began when he analyzed the popular dramatists of the golden age of Greece—Sophocles, Euripedes, and Aristophanes—but this same approach can be found in the pre-literate bards of Celtic and Saxon tribes, or even in Homer's Iliad and Odyssey. Aristotle gave examples of such persuasive speech, and founded the literary-critical field of Rhetoric, but the field was already well understood by the demagogues of Athens several centuries earlier. Today we have expanded this field of Rhetoric using “scientific” methods so that it now includes texts as diverse as propaganda, public relations, Youtube, and advertising.

²³⁵In the ages before archival storage, the only form of literary permanence available was to ensure that a story would be recopied or retold, and so something in the story had to persuade someone else to memorize it, to repeat it, to devote the resources to recopy of it. A text that inspired this work could be said to possess perlocutionary properties.

²³⁶Sallie TeSelle “”

²³⁷See, for example, Briggs “ “

are not exclusive. Rather, the classification scheme of the three functions is exclusive and exhaustive making it a complete system, but the text may have multiple functions. The usefulness of this tool is in showing the overlapping ways that Jesus used the parable of The Sower, sorting out which meaning goes with which function.

C. How Meanings Get Their Texts

We have earlier discussed the relationship between meaning and text, where we looked at how meanings are a function of the text. Now we reverse the relationship to discuss how texts are a function of the meaning. In the first case, we assumed the text and searched for its obscure meaning, but in this case we assume the meaning(s) and search for the text. The first and most important assumption is the number either of intended meanings or of intended relations between meaning and texts. To make this distinction clear, if we count the number of meanings, we call it a “valency,” whereas if we count the number of relations, we call it a “mode.” If “text” is the subject of a relation and “meaning” the object, then valency counts the number of meanings of the object, whereas mode counts the number of verbs (“defines,” “implies,” “provokes,” etc.) that can be inserted between the text and meaning. For example, a double-entendre is polyvalent, whereas a joke used in a sermon illustration to explain predestination would be polymodal.²³⁸ For the purposes of our classification described next, we need only three number categories—one, two, and more-than-two—for which we use the prefixes: uni, bi, and poly.²³⁹

1. Unimodal/Univalent

Most texts are understood as if they contained a single meaning, just as most human communication is univalent. Havoc would ensue if military officers or traffic signs or air traffic controllers deviated from this rule. Since communication involves at least two people, the author and the recipient, unimodal communication connects a single idea in the author's mind to a single idea in the recipient's mind which has been called a one-to-one mapping. There may be many recipients as in a crowded lecture hall or perhaps none at all as in the case of privately written memoirs, but the mapping between ideas remains one-to-one. Certainly propositional truths seem to require just such a one-to-one mapping, especially if they are reduced to their simplest form.²⁴⁰

We have illustrated unimodal communication in the relation between text and meaning, but since it is only counting, we can also use it for any of the relations between the three categories of author intent, reader-response, and text-construction. This universal applicability can be mistaken for universal necessity, especially if propositions are considered the paradigm for truth, as is clearly the tendency in Hirsch and the early Modernists.²⁴¹ In *The Sower* this incipient Modernism would manifest

²³⁸We are aware of several other classification methods including Roman Jakobsen's six-part classification and Dell Hyme's eight part classification, where our “mode” corresponds roughly to Jakobsen's “message channel” and “message form” or Hyme's “instrumentality.” The distinction we make is simply whether we count the noun objects of the relation (valency), or we count the verbal processes as “modes.” Remember, in a Trinitarian classification scheme there is a fluidity between noun categories and verbal relations, which we try to capture with valencies and modes.

²³⁹In many cultures and languages, these are distinct categories. English has only singular and plural, but Hebrew has a “dual” as well, demonstrating that in some sense these are “natural” categories. In English we capture the dual using the phrase “a pair of,” as in “a pair of pants” or “a pair of scissors.” Notice that neither English nor Hebrew has a special term for “three of something,” or “none of something,” indicating that one, two, more-than-two are also a complete classification.

²⁴⁰Compare to the logical positivists, Russell and early Wittgenstein, or with Noam Chomsky's reductionist attempts to simplify language down to a list of basic propositions.

²⁴¹E.D. Hirsch “Validity”

itself as a tendency to see the parable as a single-point story, as is demonstrated by Julicher's thesis.²⁴²

2. Polymodal/Polyvalent

When the communication mode is not one-to-one but polymodal, or when polyvalent meanings are possible, then understanding becomes problematic. Much comedy as well as tragedy hinges on polyvalent texts, beginning with puns and ending with Delphic oracles.²⁴³ More difficult is seeing how polyvalency can be an aspect of textual construction.²⁴⁴ Yet we can find surprising polyvalent interpretations given to prophecy by gospel writers, e.g., Matt 2:15 quotes Hos 11:1 “out of Egypt I have called my son” as referring to Jesus rather than the more obvious Israel. Likewise Mark 12:26-27 interprets the most sacred texts in Jewish literature, Exod 3 and Deut 5, as supporting the resurrection by reattributing the participle “living” to the patriarchs rather than God.²⁴⁵ With application to The Sower, the polyvalency of the parable can be seen directly in its allegorical interpretation as given by Jesus. Even this simple two-level metaphor is expanded by most commentators to include the entire message of the gospel, showing that two levels is a clearly the minimum number of meanings assigned to this parable.²⁴⁶

3. Bimodal/Bivalent

Why is there a need to have a separate category of bivalent texts when we have already established the category of polyvalent texts? Are not they simply the least interesting class of polyvalent texts? No, they are not. Consider these bivalent classes: True/False, Saved/Damned, Alive/Dead, Pregnant/Non-pregnant. The important point is that they have exactly two exclusive members, neither more nor less. Therefore the negation of the opposite is proof of the positive, for to deny being dead is to assert being alive.²⁴⁷ The significance of bimodal communication then, is that it forces the communicants to commit, to choose, to be active, to calculate, because even passively rejecting an option is to actively choose its opposite. Polyvalent meaning may indeed involve a choice from a set of options, but it is still an unforced choice, while in a bivalent set all choices are forced even if they turn out to be the “lesser of two evils.” It is this forcing that makes bimodal communication different from both unimodal and polymodal communication.

Applying this to The Sower, we see several bivalent categories in the parable—good/bad soil, insider/outsider, hearing/not hearing, perceiving/not perceiving—which also imply the use of ethical categories.²⁴⁸ Just as we cannot ignore the differing nature of univalent and polyvalent texts, we cannot

²⁴²Julicher “Gleichnisreden”

²⁴³Psychologists who study these topics have proposed that the success of humor lies in the timing of the human processing of polymodal meaning, with some humor tied to the ability of the speaker to resonate his delivery with the audience's mental processing of polyvalency. Thus polymodal speech or polyvalent statements can be just as much in the author's intent as in the reader's response.

²⁴⁴Can promises or contracts be polyvalent? I think every contract lawyer would agree that they can.

²⁴⁵See “Jesus the Exegete” at <http://rbsp.info/WTS/NT941-ii.pdf> accessed 3/15/2011. Polyvalency is often taken to be a property of Jewish “midrash” exegesis, which we address in a later chapter.

²⁴⁶See Robert Gundry, “Mark”

²⁴⁷All the logical rules of “the excluded middle” that were developed by Aristotle rely on two states, and its successors in today's computer revolution reveal the power of binary mathematics. Likewise, linguistics recognizes these types of categories as “converse relationships,” which emphasizes their mutually exclusive definitions. However since we will be attempting to show a continuity with three-fold categories, we prefer to emphasize their numerical character in our terminology.

²⁴⁸We match our language to reality, and vice versa, or what is often called the fit of “world to word” or “word to world.” (G.E.M. Anscombe “Intentions”) And since there exist natural classes which are binary, it would imply there are texts

ignore the ethical implications of bivalent texts either.

4. Conclusion

This forcing of a choice makes bivalent texts absolutely essential in ethics, which may explain this insider/outsider characteristic of Mark 4:10-13.²⁴⁹ By recognizing the function of bivalent texts to force a decision, we reintroduce the strength of Mark's *hina*, rather than a simple propositional *hoti*. The rhetorical *hina/hoti* debate in chapter two can now be seen as a debate over the valency of the parable of The Sower, whether it had one meaning, many meanings, or two meanings.

D. How Persons Get Their Meanings

We turn now to the relationship between meaning and persons. In the discussion of meaning, we have so far implied that there is some one thing called “the meaning,” which is universally sought by scholars. But in fact there is much debate over the definition because not all scholars agree on the characteristics and nature of meaning. The debate over meaning is the domain of philosophers, who have conveniently used a three-fold classification scheme—epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics—which can be fit into the same three-fold scheme we have been using. The significance is that each philosophical perspective highlights an aspect of how people approach meaning, so that some of the debates over the meaning of The Sower turn out to be well-known philosophical differences between epistemology, metaphysics and ethics.

1. Epistemology

Epistemology understands meaning to be true knowledge, so that the search for meaning becomes “How do we know what we know?” Since knowledge is the object of this search, it has an existence independent of the subject and perhaps even of the search itself.²⁵⁰ If the pursuit of knowledge, the searching for truth and the sifting out of untruth, is the highest goal, if knowledge is perceived as objective and ontologically basic, then epistemology is the most relevant philosophical discipline, and rationality is the most valued human characteristic. In The Sower, this view expresses itself as a demand that the parable “make sense” and “provide an answer.”

2. Metaphysics

If epistemology can be characterized by knowing, then metaphysics can be characterized by being. Metaphysics asks, “What is real? What is the true nature of reality?”²⁵¹ If epistemology

that are necessarily understood as binary as well. But by far the most important class of binary statements are ethical demands. For ethical imperatives assume only two forms, right versus wrong, true versus false, and moral dilemmas involve the conflict of two such demands. If there were polyvalent solutions to these ethical decisions, we would not call them dilemmas, or call the unappetizing options the “horns of a dilemma.”

²⁴⁹Ethics does not impose bivalency on text, but texts that are bivalent, can force ethical decisions. For example, the “shibboleth” text of Judges 12:6 was a bivalent without an attached moral dilemma, yet the life-or-death consequences of bivalency could not have been more moral.

²⁵⁰There are certainly philosophers who would tie the object of the search to the method itself, for example in Kantian idealism, but these philosophers have merely moved “the meaning” to a different, “metaphysical” category of philosophy.

²⁵¹Is reality, as Democritus proposed and Newton believed, made up of small round atoms endlessly ricocheting in the void, or more like Bishop Berkeley's vision of crystallized thought in the mind of God, or as Descartes suggested, some admixture of both? If reality, as Hinduism or “The Matrix” proposes, is certainly not what it appears, then we are deceived by our physical senses when we attempt to know something with our flawed perception, and if our reason

privileges the univalent object of the pursuit of truth, metaphysics privileges the many processes, the polymodal personal approach to truth. If reason is the highest objective value of epistemology, then subjective persons are the highest good in metaphysics.²⁵² In *The Sower*, a metaphysical perspective expresses itself as a deep consternation over the character of the *mysterion* of the kingdom of God. For the metaphysician, the difficulty of knowing whether we are an insider or an outsider is subordinated to understanding what sort of thing we are “inside,” what sort of thing is the “kingdom of God,” for only by first understanding the nature of the destination, the nature of the mystery of the kingdom of God, can he then characterize the process that brings it, and then finally, say something about membership in the class.

3. Ethics

If epistemology is the pursuit of truth and metaphysics the pursuit of reality, then ethics is the pursuit of righteousness. Ethics asks the question, “How then should we live?” If epistemology is about the single-minded search for univalent truth and metaphysics is about the polymodal ways that subjects pursue polyvalent truth, then ethics is all about the bimodal choice between bivalent truth, between right and wrong. If epistemology privileges reason and metaphysics privileges persons, then ethics privileges the will.²⁵³

For *The Sower*, this ethical perspective sees the parable as a choice between bad and good soils, a choice between insider and outsider, a choice between hearing and perceiving. The meaning of the parable is less important to understand than the choice; the nature of the kingdom of God is less important than the choice of desiring the kingdom. The ethicist is less concerned with what the parable means or is, and more concerned with what the parable does—i.e., bifurcate the audience.

4. Conclusions

As we have seen with previous three-fold classifications, the text does not fit exclusively into one category since all three philosophical meanings can coexist. Where the categories are exclusive is in the priorities that persons assign to meaning, privileging either univalent reason, polyvalent persons, or bivalent choices. Historically philosophers have been comfortable treating these as equally valid, so that *The Sower* can be approached equally from all three perspectives.²⁵⁴

E. How Meanings Get Their Persons

We now want to consider the opposite relationship between persons and meaning, where we assume the meaning and look for the persons who are attracted to it. That is, people bring their exegetical toolkits to the text predisposed toward finding some meaning, and like-minded people bring similar toolkits.²⁵⁵ For our purposes, it is useful to classify these like-minded people using historical categories,

itself is susceptible to mistakes, then we can be further deceived by our flawed logic

²⁵²In pre-Socratic Greek philosophy, this difference of opinion was the unresolved debate between the One and the Many, whether truth is singular or manifold.

²⁵³Neither the materialist who values knowledge nor the metaphysicist who values reality see any conflict denying the existence of the will, whereas the ethicist astounds both by declaring some knowledge and some realities to be evil.

²⁵⁴A priority can become so extreme as to become exclusive as with materialists who deny the will in their Sisyphian attempts to scientifically prove that the will doesn't exist.

²⁵⁵As before we are categorizing the object of the relation, the persons, which has been done many times before. An historical classification is most useful because, as we discovered in chapter two, there is an historical dimension to narrative analysis that Umberto Eco referred to as “pre-knowledge,” which influences the the extraction of meaning, in

in part because it takes several generations to produce a consistent and coherent worldview, which by then has acquired an historical classification. Three historical periods most relevant to our exegesis are Modernism, Post-Modernism, and a Pre-Modernism extending from the first to the sixteenth centuries, which we also equate with Post-Post-Modernism.²⁵⁶ In this section, we contrast how people of these time periods extract meaning from the text: authorial-intent, reader-response or text-constructive methods.

1. *Modernism*

The Enlightenment up through the twentieth century saw the rise of Modernism, which valued rational, single-valued, propositional statements over against emotional, polyvalent, persuasive statements.²⁵⁷ Therefore when a Modernist exegetes the parable of The Sower, he is inclined to privilege propositional, single-valued, rational content over persuasion or textual constructions, making it a straightforward, single-point similitude with a well-described explanation located in the allegory of 4:14-20. Julicher is the classic example of a Modernist from the turn of the nineteenth century, but one can still detect the modernist influence in the many twenty-first century interpreters who prefer univalent *hoti* to the bivalent *hina*.

2. *Post-Modernism*

In contrast to Modernism, the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century has espoused polyvalency in texts, distrusting single-valued and propositional statements as disguising a hidden agenda under a veneer of universal truth. In the parable of The Sower, they find the claim that “everything is in parables” is the actual condition of all exegetes, regardless of their claimed status. In order to remove the special status of insiders and transform everyone into an outsider, they remystify the *mysterion* of the kingdom, so that in principle Jesus' disciples could be insiders, but in practice no one actually is. Kermode's perplexity over hermetic divination is a good example of this sort of Post-Modern critique of The Sower.

3. *Pre-Modernism (or Post-Post-Modernism)*

In our three-fold analysis of cultural categories, we now search for one that privileges neither polyvalency nor univalency but bivalency, that neither prefers authorial-intent nor reader-response but textual construction, and that neither emphasizes truth as a knowledge nor as a mystic aspect of reality but as an ethical belief.²⁵⁸ Using all these criteria we found that our search for a Trinitarian category we had tentatively called Post-Post-Modernism was indistinguishable from historical Pre-Modernism, the

the exegesis of Scripture. If we can find an historical classification that remains the same despite temporal changes in cultural attitudes, we may be able to include both the recent and traditional critiques of exegesis.

²⁵⁶Equating pre-modernism with post-post-modernism is obviously an arbitrary and theory-laden definition, but since few have attempted to define post-PoMo much less equate it, we consider it plausible and perhaps predictive. But in order to obtain a complete classification scheme of only three members using historical periods, we are forced into a rather broad time period for the Pre-Modern category, but one which nevertheless captures the differences from Modern and Post-Modern worldviews. If Modernism was a large a break from the past as is claimed by historians, then we are justified in lumping pre-Moderns into a single bin.

²⁵⁷The rise of Romanticism in the nineteenth century is the exception that proves the rule, for it did not so much repudiate the Modernist worldview, as state a preference for the emotional and aesthetic aspects despised by Modernism.

²⁵⁸This search is conducted apophatically, because we are assembling a Trinitarian classification so we consciously construct our third category to be not-A and not-B, therefore C. In addition, we use the hints from previous Trinitarian categories to refine our definition constructively.

worldview present at the dawn of the Enlightenment that was biased toward revealed truth as an ethical matter.²⁵⁹ If the eighteenth century was the age of the Enlightenment, then the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were the era of pre-modern cultural world views. Therefore the Reformed creeds came out of a distinct Pre-Modernism, which continues today in the Reformed community and the confessional churches who hold to the Westminster Standards. In this Pre-Modern worldview, The Sower is a litmus test of belief, a challenge to both autonomous reason and polymodal allegory.

4. Conclusions

As with all our classification schemes, we have attempted a three-fold complete historical classification of persons' exegetical toolkits so that we can find the underlying ahistorical unity. That is, if these historical classifications are exhaustive admitting of no further development,²⁶⁰ then we can extract their validity out of the accidents of history to view them as ahistorical perspectives. This is an important generalization, for once we recognize that these three views are equally valid approaches to meaning, then we can avoid the trap of chronological prioritization, which assigns importance to the historical and temporal ordering.²⁶¹

Finding an ahistorical unity to these historical views, however, goes further than finding an equivalence of validity, for we must also assert that external accidents of history can be separated from internal permanent relations of texts that determine the classification. If we can no longer dismiss a viewpoint by its accident of history—e.g., Pre-Moderns are incapable of rational argumentation because Modernism had not yet been invented—then neither can we argue that interpretation must be limited by its temporal location. So when Jesus exegetes Isaiah in The Sower, it is possible to separate in his exegetical toolkit the historical external categories (second-temple milieu) from the unchanging ahistorical internal relations. By avoiding the trap of chronological prioritization, which is to say, by understanding how we ourselves fall within an historical category, we can observe how Jesus uses the ahistorical internal consistency, the unchanging relations of the text to the meaning in order to instruct the listener and exegete. The historical classifications remain important, not for validating the exegesis, but for justifying the application. And of course, the most important application is self-application, as Jesus makes clear in The Sower.²⁶²

²⁵⁹ This is not a historical discovery, but a theoretical discovery that what we were searching for had already been found.

As evidence that pre-moderns satisfy the criteria that knowledge was viewed ethically, or that texts were viewed as sacred objects, we need only recognize that the wars of religion are evidence that seventeenth century Europe felt knowledge was a moral matter. Neither reason nor mysticism were ignored, but ultimately truth was ethically determined and morally definitive. So important was this ethical dimension to truth that opponents were not so much objects of disputation, but heretics to be destroyed.

²⁶⁰ Contra Hegel, who saw validity as completely embedded in history.

²⁶¹ Earlier historical exegetical approaches are no more correct for being early than late historical approaches are correct for being late. We want to avoid justifications such as “Greek Orthodox views are better than Protestant views because they are older,” or “Islam is a superior religion because it came after Christianity.” CS Lewis refers to these arguments as “chronological snobbery”.

²⁶² The historical background of this thesis is Reformed, with a desire to regard truth as ethically determined. VanTil's legacy was to critique the cultural or historical modes of exegesis as sinfully demonstrating an autonomy of reason, such that ethics affects both epistemology and metaphysics, both knowing and being. In The Sower, the Reformed exegesis focuses on the properties of the parable that bring ethical decisions to the fore, judging the exegete who judges the text. This judgment does not arise because the ethical view is the “correct” or “only” view, for as we have said before, the text is independent of the historical exegesis and can be examined from any of these historical perspectives, rather the judgment arises naturally from the only view that demands choosing. It is not that Modern exegesis is “wrong” but that it needs to include ethics, and likewise Post-Modern exegesis is not “wrong” but needs ethics as well. VanTil's critique and the stance of this thesis, then, is not to deny validity to other historical methods, but to deny their completeness, and hence the force of their conclusions.

F. How Texts Get Their Persons

Finally we come to the sixth and last relation between text and persons, where we assume the text and search for the persons. With respect to the structure of the text, it is convenient to classify persons by their purposes—we want to see how given textual structures are attractive to distinct personal purposes. From Speech Act Theory, we know the form of a text conveys a specific purpose, where each particular speech act has its own unique criteria for success, or what Austin called a “felicitous outcome.” For example, if the form of the text identifies it as a “promise” speech act, then the purpose entails the felicity conditions for a valid promise. Using these speech act definitions for form and purpose, our goal in this section is to draw out the relationship between the structure of a text that identifies a speech act, and the personal purposes necessary to achieve its felicitous outcome. Oversimplifying greatly, words may carry the meaning of the text, but the form relays the purpose of the text.²⁶³ This is the observation in *The Sower* that inspired this thesis, for it is a recognition that bivalent structures in the text are appropriate for an ethical purpose, and that this bivalency becomes the interpretive key for all the other parables.

We are accustomed to describing the relation between a person and his text as that between a cause and its effect, where the purpose determines the form, so the reversal of this relation seems awkward, as if to put the cart before the horse. Is not language a tool under our complete control? How then can it influence our purpose?²⁶⁴ But our control is not complete, for language comes with a set of constraints, a structure that even more than our free choice of words influences our purpose.²⁶⁵ Our goal in this section is to find that classification scheme, which connects one category of forms with one category of purposes. As before, we find such a classification in a three-fold, complete Trinitarian

²⁶³The influence of grammar does not mean that structure controls meaning, as in the thesis of Warf and Sapir, but rather that the choice of a grammatical structure is made from a far more limited menu than the choice of lexical words, and therefore the selection of a particular grammatical construction strongly delimits the function of the utterance. For example, beginning a sentence with an inverted subject verb, “can I” instead of “I can” fixes the purpose of the sentence is a bivalent question. Note that grammar does not fix the meaning, or the information carried by the sentence, but rather the purpose or function of the sentence. When there are many functions for a given structure, the influence is weak, but when there are few or just one function for a given grammar, the influence is well-nigh complete or “determined.”

²⁶⁴ There are times when the text does precede the purpose, as in Jesus' day when the scribes memorized and meditated on the Law, a practice that completely transformed Jewish culture, conforming the world to the word, rather than the more common fit of word to world. G.E.M Anscomb uses these terms to describe how language functions, which will be elaborated in more detail in the next section on Speech Act Theory. We are not arguing Benjamin Warf's thesis that language determines our philosophy, but rather language limits our choices of philosophy to a countable set. And when certain grammatical forms are used, there is a further narrowing or conforming of philosophy to match the grammar choice. The interaction is mutual, convergent, and in some cases, determinative of purpose. Even today, there is a misunderstanding between Christians and Jews as to whether the reason for the Law preceded or followed the giving of the Law, because Enlightenment modernism gives primacy to reason, to meaning, to translations of the Law, while Judaism emphasizes the words themselves, drawing many meanings from the one text. Both Judaism and Islam do not authorize the study of sacred scriptures in translation. Rather, the Jews of Jesus day did not even read a translation of the Law in the synagogue, lest it be given equal weight, but relied on memorized Targum, recited after the (mostly incomprehensible) reading of the Hebrew Law. The language itself is inspired, not the thoughts that may or may not be discerned behind the language. This emphasis on the primacy of text is similar to the view among scientists that the Universe is run by underlying mathematical laws, not by some arbitrary spirit as seen in Hinduism or Animism. In short, the Jewish emphasis on the primacy of Law made possible the Scientific Revolution some 15 centuries later, so that the text did precede and determine the person.

²⁶⁵ Superficially, this looks a lot like the earlier discussion of “how texts get their meaning,” except that a person's purpose is even more obscure and can even be opposed to surface meaning! However at a deeper level, “meaning” is an abstract container for objective information, whereas “purpose” requires a concrete subjective person. Grammar provides us information about the subject or author of the text that is not obtained simply from the meaning or translation of the text.

scheme applied to both forms and purposes.

In order to find a Trinitarian classification for these categories, we adapt two of the three-fold complete schemes we have discussed earlier. Beginning with purposes, we use a temporal classification—either past, present or future—to categorize felicity conditions, which is based on whether a person has a past, present or future orientation or stance towards achieving a felicitous outcome.²⁶⁶ Continuing with forms, we classify texts by the number of modes or ways in which the sentence as a whole may apply a felicity condition. Combining these schemes, we argue that a unimodal form takes a simple future-looking stance towards its felicity condition, since purposes are inherently forward-looking; a polymodal form, like a polyvalent meaning, takes a present stance towards its felicity condition, since it forces a simultaneous disambiguation process; and finally, a bimodal form takes what could be called a “past-future” stance towards its felicity condition because it relies on information in the past to force a decision in the future. Linking these felicity conditions to personal purposes, a univalent future goal is required for a credible promise, whereas a polyvalent present understanding provides a validating process, and a bivalent “past-future” choice is needed for a moral demand.

1. Credible Future Promise (Action)

Having already discussed how texts get their meaning, we now clarify what it means for texts to get their person using Speech Act Theory. A good example is a promise, where the meaning is the content whereas the purpose is the felicity condition that validates it.²⁶⁷ Since the fulfillment of the promise is unavailable for comparison other validation criteria must be employed, which boil down to the credibility of the person making the promise. So when the text is structured as a promise, the purpose of the person using that structure is to establish credibility. In this fashion, the form of the text of a speech act entails a purposeful person.

One of the qualities that affects the credibility of a promise is its univalency, its ability to exclude unwanted future possibilities. To be credible, the author of a promise requires the text to be static, having a univalent meaning, which functions unimodally. The example is more general than simply promises, for the same argument can be applied to prophecy and other textual constructions that require future validation; they all must establish a unimodal communication channel with a univalent outcome to be credible.

Applying this to The Sower, it would seem that when Jesus says in Mark 4:10, “to you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God,” he has used the singular of *mysterion* in order to emphasize a univalent secret. This type of usage is characteristic of those whose purpose is to establish credibility with a promise made under future-oriented felicity conditions.²⁶⁸ This is how the text gets its person, for a promise requires a credible promiser.

²⁶⁶This temporal classification of persons with respect to the text is analogous to our historical classification of persons with respect to meaning where we placed persons at epochs in time. In some sense, this is because both the text and the meaning are atemporal, so time has its greatest effect on persons. More philosophically, this category of persons is found to contain the self, and time is really only defined as a property of self, of awareness of change.

²⁶⁷We can also separate meaning and purpose as the difference between 1st and 2nd order statements, where 1st order meaning statements are of the sort “X is Y”, whereas 2nd order purpose statements are of the sort “1st order statement is Z.” For example, “the sky is blue” is a 1st order statement, whereas “it is true the sky is blue” is a 2nd order statement.

²⁶⁸Even the exceptions prove the rule, for horoscopes are often written in a way that they are multivalent, but gullible readers assign them validity because they read them univalently. For these people, pointing out their multivalency often destroys their validity.

2. *Valid Present Understanding / Hermeneutics (Process)*

As we have earlier remarked, polyvalent texts are not straightforward either for exegetes or logical positivists, nor have they been well-described in speech act theory, for texts that have a variable or polyvalent meaning seem to lack validity, which we know implicitly since we distrust ambiguous speech. Yet polymodal texts not only remain a trusted form of communication, but are frequently employed in daily speech, where they serve a special purpose: to define processes. If meaning were a destination then process would be the directions, or if meaning were a food then process would be the recipe. A text describing a process can have multiple authors with multiple recipients yet remain a unimodal text. That is, to understand that recipe or those directions, we have to generalize from the particular components to make them univalent; we desire a unimodal function that can have precise felicity conditions.

We find our felicity conditions by constructing a univalent text out of a polyvalent set by defining a group unity, e.g., a tablespoon of oil in a recipe can be canola oil or corn oil, as long as it is not car oil. But where do we learn the proper grouping? For univalency is not recovered by a generalization until a procedure for establishing membership in the group is defined.²⁶⁹ Therefore whenever a polymodal communication form with polyvalent meanings is employed, its felicity condition is a credible generalization or a validating procedure that must be immediately grasped.²⁷⁰ And the fact that this procedure must occur becomes the purpose of this type of speech act, which is to say, the purpose is instruction, is pedagogy.²⁷¹

For example, in the pedagogic text “You must understand X,” the meaning lies in the content of X, whereas the purpose is in the comprehension of X. The purpose of “understanding” is more than concluding “X is the case”; rather the generalization that “all things like X are the case,” which is often indicated by using a plural form of X, or a polyvalent X. In the parable of The Sower, Jesus employs both techniques. In the generalization, “How then will you understand all the parables?” (Mark 4:13) Jesus indicates that multiple future parables are mastered in the single process of (current) understanding, i.e., in the hermeneutical method. Likewise in the allegorical interpretation of Mark 4:14-20 Jesus uses a polyvalent “seed,” which can be either “word” or “hearers of the word,” suggesting that Jesus' focus for this allegory includes not only the seed as a noun but the seed as a process.

Now “seed as a process” does not displace “seed as the word,” but rather extends the number of meanings for “seed,” just as the generalization to the hermeneutical method represented by the “all parables” in Mark 4:13 does not detract from the necessity of understanding the single parable of The Sower. Thus the purpose of a polymodal form moves beyond establishing the credibility of the speaker, emphasizing instead the teaching of a validating procedure.²⁷² In this second case, the text finds its person, for a teaching requires an audience and expects disciples.

²⁶⁹Even in the most radical reader-response theory that promotes the polyvalency of texts, there is a univalent procedure for determining whether a text is polyvalent. Clearly, one such univalent procedure is the one in which they define themselves, since the self is always univalent.

²⁷⁰Footnote the Fishian felicity condition...

²⁷¹Once again, the exceptions prove the rule. Khalil Gibran's *The Prophet* is manifestly polyvalent text intended to invoke a rabbinical or pedagogical tone and thereby establish credibility as a prophet. Since Gibran had no other qualifications for prophet (miracles, predictions), the entire enterprise rested on his mastery of pedagogical polyvalency.

²⁷²If unimodal grammar establishes the credibility of the self, then polymodal grammar establishes the validity of the other.

3. Moral Past-future Choices (Recursion)

So far in our analysis of how the form of the text implies a person's purpose, we have argued that a unimodal channel with a univalent outcome of a future event has a felicity condition that lends personal credibility (a univalent felicity condition) whereas polymodal channels and polyvalent outcomes have a felicity condition that entails pedagogy (a polyvalent felicity condition). Now we want to show how bivalent outcomes have a felicity condition that creates a moral demand. We had earlier argued that ethical texts must be bivalent, but how does this work backward, how does a bivalent text acquire its moral authority, the mapping of those two choices onto good and bad? The answer lies in the temporal character of the felicity condition attached to a bivalent text (the bivalent felicity condition).

A univalent felicity condition points to a *future* action that lends credibility to the speaker, and a polyvalent felicity condition entails an *ongoing* validating process that converts the listener to a

disciple, whereas a bivalent felicity condition points to a (*past*) fork in the road requiring a (*future*) ethical choice. For example, Jesus says, “he who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Mark 4:9), through which he establishes a bivalent fact in the past (“he who has ears to hear”) and then in the imperative voice demands a future action or choice (“let him hear”). These are the textual characteristics of a moral, bivalent felicity condition.

We call this bivalent felicity condition “past-future” because both past and future aspects must exist before a forced choice carries the weight of a moral demand. That is, a bivalent “fork in the road” must be established in the past because we normally do not hold a person accountable for a decision where the morality of his choice is determined after the fact. This “after the fact” requirement also means that the forced choice must lie in the future. Therefore a “past-future” bivalent felicity condition requires both the established bivalent option and the forced choice to exist and lie in the right temporal order. We focus next on the types of bivalent options that nuance this compound felicity condition.²⁷³

Since moral demands are the domain of law and the legal system, a courtroom analogy will prove helpful in differentiating the ways in which this bivalent option is established, and the roles it requires of the author, the reader and the text. If the bivalent option is an agreed upon standard, then the moral demand is analogous to settled law, and the text under discussion becomes analogous to a rational debate among lawyers. If the bivalent option is novel, then the moral demand is analogous to judicial pronouncement, and the text under discussion becomes analogous to an authoritarian demand for submission. And if the bivalent option is developed through the text, then the moral demand is analogous to sworn testimony, and the text under discussion becomes analogous to a cross-examination. Therefore in a bivalent felicity condition, the text finds its person in the courtroom, either as lawyer, judge or witness.

a. Static Bivalencies

When a moral fact is well established in the past, so that both speaker and listener acknowledge that it exists, then the bivalent felicity condition (bivalency) is achieved when the choice is forced upon the hearers. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says, “you have heard that it was said” (Matt 5:21), indicating there is a bivalency attached to the moral statement mutually agreed upon by both speaker and listener. Because of this mutual agreement, the dispute becomes one over the nature of the forced choice, for example, whether one is accountable for a choice if he were born defective, as in the story of the man born blind (John 9:1ff). A bivalency could occur either because both parties accept explicitly some moral decree, as when Jesus and the Pharisees dispute about the Law of Moses (Mark 3:4), or because they accept implicitly a moral “natural category.”²⁷⁴ Whether decreed or natural, the morality itself is not in dispute, so we refer to this type of felicity condition as a “static” bivalency. Any dispute over a static bivalencies then, focusses on the interpretation of the forced choice, much like a prosecution in court, so a text using static bivalencies finds its person is a lawyer.

b. Fiat Bivalencies

In contrast, there are some texts that do not have bivalent felicity conditions until after the

²⁷³ There is a long standing philosophical position that morality can only be established by an authority figure, so that “good” is what God does or says, as occurred in Deut 5. Such a view makes morality an intrinsically contingent act of an authority figure. In contrast, there is an alternative view that morality can be determined empirically, that “good/bad” is a natural bivalent class, finding support from Rom 1:18. In this section we argue that both methods are operative, but there is yet a third method that is relevant to The Sower, that dynamically determines the bivalencies.

²⁷⁴ The idea of natural categories comes out of medieval philosophy, and is discussed by Poythress...

speaker declares them so. Continuing with the example of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says, “but I say to you” (Matt 5:22), as a way of establishing a novel moral dilemma with the same force as the preceding static bivalency. The paradigm example is the prohibition in the garden (Gen 2:17) where God divides fruit into edible and inedible categories.²⁷⁵ Once the authority of the speaker is acknowledged, all future fiat bivalencies follow.²⁷⁶ Since all fiat felicity conditions demand submission of the listener to the speaker's authority, a text using fiat bivalencies is not demanding a rational response of equals as in a static bivalency, but an acknowledgment or submission of the lesser to the greater, so the text finds its person is a judge.

c. Dynamic Bivalencies

The commentary of Jesus in the crucial section of Mark 4:10-13 implies a strong moral and ethical demand,²⁷⁷ but when we examine the parable of The Sower itself (Mark 4:3-8) or the allegorical interpretation (Mark 4:14-20), we find only a moral demand that we be “good soil,” which is neither a static nor a fiat bivalency! That is, there is no previous example in the OT of “seed” being used as a moral category, eliminating the possibility that a Jewish audience viewed seed as a static bivalency.²⁷⁸ Nor could “good soil” be viewed as a fiat bivalency because it is in an allegory, which is to say, intentionally polyvalent and incapable of forced choice, since the indirection of allegory allows the necessary decision to be avoided.²⁷⁹

Is there another way for the text itself to establish a bivalent felicity condition and therefore carry the moral demand of Mark 4:10-13? Yes, but it requires the text to be dynamically interpreted. For when a text refers back to itself such that the message is reinforced, the bivalency is dynamically amplified.²⁸⁰ For example, when a legal witness is sworn in, he speaks an oath about his speaking such that any truth becomes quotable “sworn testimony” while any falsehood becomes punishable “perjury.” The self-reference in the oath, which lies in its semantic structure rather than in either the authorial intent or the reader reception, dynamically converts polyvalent hearsay stories into bivalent testimony/perjury.²⁸¹

275 This is by far the most common way of establishing moral felicity conditions, when an authority figure, or a person qualified to represent an authority figure makes a list. It is certainly the most common way of communicating moral felicity conditions to children, and therefore the invention of bivalent felicity conditions is widely viewed as synonymous with creating or establishing ethics.

276 There is a long standing philosophical position that morality can only be established by an authority figure, so that “good” is what God does or says, as occurred in Deut 5. Such a view makes morality an intrinsically arbitrary act of an authority figure. In contrast, there is an alternative view that morality can also be determined empirically, so that “good/bad” is a natural bivalent category, finding support from Rom 1:18. We argue that both methods are operative, and should give the same result.

277 We have earlier called this the *hina/hoti* paradox, or using our new terminology, a fiat/static bivalency paradox. That is, *hina* implies that there is a moral demand which did not exist before Jesus spoke the parable, whereas *hoti* implies that because of a previously existing moral demand, the parable acts as judgment.

278 Rob: Footnote all uses of “seed” in the Hebrew.

279 The best example of this use of polyvalency is the Talmud, in which parabolic and indirect speech is used to debate The Law, just so that the discussion cannot usurp or replace the moral demands of Moses' commandments.

280 In electronics, amplifiers with positive feedback are driven bivalently “to the rails” at either the positive or negative power supply voltage. A feedback loop which does not reinforce would be a negative feedback loop, which univalently drives the output to zero. Negative feedback loops are also present in texts, where they have metaphysical properties, rather than ethical.

281 Some pedant might object that if a witness is lying, then the oath he took “to tell the truth” would be invalid as well, and hence he would have uttered no oath. But this is precisely the point, oaths work the same whether they are uttered in good faith or bad, because the oath does not depend on the content or attitude, but on the structure. It is structured to be self-referential, and that is independent of author and reader—it is a textual form. No matter how intrinsically polyvalent the textual content may be, the result of self-reference structure is to make the text

This textual self-reference is called “recursion” and is demonstrated at two places in The Sower: when the sower is said to “sow the word” and when Jesus says the seed “bears much fruit.” Sowing the word means that the parable is about itself, and bearing much fruit is the farmer's seed reproducing itself. In the first instance, a parable about itself amplifies the division of the audience into two groups of listeners, those who understand parables and those who do not. In the second instance the recursion produces two types of farmers, since one crop provides seed for the next a field will either perpetually enrich or perpetually impoverish its owner. In both cases, recursion forces a two-fold division of hearers or soil types that is dynamically established and then used by Jesus for a moral demand.²⁸² The Sower sustains a moral demand through its ability to create a dynamic bivalency. Since a dynamic bivalency is analogous to a court witness, its use implies sworn testimony, and thus the text finds its person because testimony implies a testifier.

4. Conclusions

We have looked at how a person's purpose is revealed by the felicity conditions of the speech act. A univalent future text focuses on an author, who desires to establish credibility. A polyvalent text focuses on the audience, who aspire to become disciples. A bivalent past-future text focuses on the text itself, in its application to the courtroom as one of three actors—lawyer, judge or witness—who correspond to the three kinds of past-future bivalencies: the “static bivalency” that is agreed on in the past; the “fiat bivalency” that holds for all future applications; and the “dynamic bivalency” that converts text into a bivalency in the active present.²⁸³

This dynamic bivalency is created by the use of textual recursion whose use in ethical texts has perhaps not been given much attention in the past, but we argue that it is essential for establishing the moral demand needed for an ethical interpretation. The parable of The Sower uses all of these textual structures, but most markedly possesses recursion, which means that the person using this construction intends to convey a moral order in a manner analogous to cross-examination in a courtroom situation.

G. Trinitarian Conclusions

We have constructed a three-fold classification tool for texts that is complete, that incorporates everything under its purview without leaving anything out. We have examined the exhaustive linguistic categories of person, text and meaning along with their six interrelations. Within this three-fold linguistic framework, each of the six binary relationships provided another threefold classification. Our purpose in constructing a complete Trinitarian scheme that names all the ways in which text, meaning, and persons can interact was to employ it on the *hina/hoti* paradox.

Now the advantage of a threefold scheme becomes apparent. For a paradox is a two-fold classification which is unable to explain textually the phenomenon under consideration, which in the case of *hina/hoti* is that both hidden knowledge and secret membership are somehow involved yet cannot explain the power of the parable today. But if the two terms of the paradox are represented by

extrinsically and dynamically bivalent.

282 More precisely, positive recursion that reinforces an initial tendency produces bivalency, while negative recursion that reverses an initial tendency such as “This sentence is false” has a more complex, but classifiable, outcome.

283 Each of these categories show characteristics of the Trinitarian schema with univalent, polyvalent and bivalent texts having future, present and past-future temporal conditions, or static, fiat and dynamic bivalencies having past, future and present applications corresponding to lawyer, judge and witness, or corresponding to ART (authorial intent, reader response and textual construction). One might even discern a connection to epistemology, metaphysics and ethics in these categories, because debates over static bivalencies are rational, debates over fiat bivalencies are ontological, and debates over dynamic bivalencies are self-referentially ethical.

two categories within a complete three-fold scheme, then by definition the resolution of the paradox must lie in the third category.²⁸⁴ This solution is an application of the apophatic method described by the church fathers, which defines an answer by specifying what it is not.²⁸⁵ Therefore if the threefold classification system is truly complete (when viewed through the filter of the various relations between text, meaning and persons), and if we can locate the *hina/hoti* paradox in the first two categories of a complete Trinitarian scheme, then the apophatic resolution lies in the third category.

We can now apply this method to our threefold categories above. If *hina/hoti* is not about hidden knowledge (an epistemological interpretation) nor about secret membership (a metaphysical interpretation),²⁸⁶ then it must be about forced choice (an ethical interpretation). If the paradox has neither one meaning (univalent) nor many meanings (polyvalent), then it must have precisely two meanings (bivalent). If *hina/hoti* is considered an insoluble paradox by Modernists (unhappily) and Post-Modernists (happily), then a resolution to the paradox can only be provided by Pre-Modernists. If the meaning of the parable is not exhausted by authorial intent, nor limited to reader response, then the meaning must lie in the construction of a textual artifact. If the function of the textual artifact is not propositional nor persuasive, then it must be illocutionary. If the text does not concern the future state nor the present state of the audience, then it must involve the recursive past-future condition of the listeners.

While formally we have found a place for the *hina/hoti* paradox, we have fragmented our answer into six different relations. We desire, if at all possible, to bring those pieces back together and so provide a strong unitary support for understanding this parable. What are the similarities between text-artifacts and illocutions, between past-future conditions and ethics, or between bivalencies and pre-Modern viewpoints? While the apophatic method differentiates the choices readily, it tells us nothing about the similarities between these choices. For that purpose, we again look to church history for guidance.

After the church Fathers had defined the Trinity apophatically, they settled on the method of *perichoresis* to describe the positive attributes of personhood. In a similar fashion, after the Pre-Modern Reformers apophatically removed the errors of the Roman theology by reference to Scripture, they defined the positive reconstruction of theology as the self-application of Scripture. This emphasis remains in modern Reformed theologians, who insist that exegesis of Scripture is not complete until it results in a personal application.²⁸⁷ Likewise ethics differs from both epistemology and metaphysics in that it requires an acting self, an application. Illocutions differ from propositions and perlocutions in their need to be self-aware constructions. The third option in each of these six Trinitarian categories involves the concept of self-action, of self-awareness, of recursion. Therefore the resolution of the *hina/hoti* paradox requires not only a resolution of the intrinsic duality, but a unified response, a self-action demanded by the text.

Thus in using this Trinitarian framework to understand the paradox, the unitary support we need comes from the “significance of self.” We demonstrate the vital importance of the self in the next section.²⁸⁸

284 Since by definition a paradox is a unhappy choice between two equally poor alternatives, finding a Trinitarian scheme that contains the paradox is to have automatically solved the problem apophatically.

285 They usually applied the apophatic method—knowledge gained by eliminating the antithesis—to the Trinity to eliminate the bias caused by viewing God through a human, finite, depraved filter.

286 Kermode suggested that the *hina/hoti* paradox was either epistemological “hidden knowledge” or metaphysical “secret membership”.

287 John Frame “The Word of God”..Vern Poythress “God-centered Biblical”

288 The task of finding a complete classification scheme that incorporates itself would appear circular, as Post-Moderns

2. *The Significance of Self*

In this section we begin by demonstrating the significance of the self for solving the paradox of *hina/hoti*. We employ two methods complementary to the apophatic one defined above that construct a Trinitarian category from knowledge of the other two: *perichoresis*, which fleshes out the skeletal requirements derived from the apophatic method by considering common elements; and *recursion*, which diagnoses the requirements of the circular logic found in the apophatic method. The first approach looks at the properties of this necessary third category, finding the self to be the subject of the apophatic method. The second approach looks at the effects of the third category, finding the self to be the predicate of apophatic self-reference.²⁸⁹ Because the self is at the same time a commonplace we learn in grammar school and a riddle we cannot solve in graduate school, we need to expend a little extra effort explaining why the self is significant and what special vocabulary or precision is needed to avoid confusion.

A. *Perichoresis as the Presence of the Self*

The self makes its presence known not only by the presence of the explicit “I”, but also by the futility of continuing in its absence. As we discussed earlier, the apophatic method requires a complete system of categories, so that denial of one element or elements, necessarily accepts the remaining one. This is normally assumed in an Aristotelian binary fashion, A or not-A, but in the parable of the Sower, this binary duality fails and a three-fold approach invoking the self is required. We present an example from the Sower, and then generalize our approach to the Trinitarian categories developed above.

1. *An Example of How the Self Arises From Categorizing the Paradox*

Earlier, we had noted the controversial use of *hina* in the Mark 4:12 passage implied that Jesus caused his hearers to misunderstand him whereas the use of *hoti* in Matthew's parallel passage implied that Jesus did not cause their misunderstanding. The idea that both interpretations are true but only appear to exclude each other is the paradox that dissolves when we include the self.

For example, one way the *hina/hoti* paradox arises is in a Modernist or Post-Modernist understanding of texts. The Modernist requires that the meaning must exist external to the text and a reliable text points to the single meaning univocally. A Post-Modernist requires that potentially infinite meanings must exist in the mind of the reader. But the peculiarity of this text is that it has precisely two meanings, fitting neither position. We assert instead that it is the Modernist and Post-Modernist understanding that is peculiar. For the Modernist makes the assumption that at the time of the telling of the parable, listeners fell into one category or the other but not both. Yet because this self-referential parable requires the listeners categorize themselves, it is unclear if the text should be considered in this static sense at all, since each new reader provides a new instance of categorization. If this is true, then the old listeners were probably not intended to be statically classified either. The Modernist cannot handle this self-categorization because he denies the validity of the subjective self, asserting that true

allege, if we did not also realize that circularity itself must be incorporated into a complete classification scheme. So if circularity is already in the Trinitarian scheme, then apophatic examination of this third option should also reveal the nature of its circular logic without making a logical error.

²⁸⁹When the apophatic method says “This is not the case” it is treading on treacherous ground that hinges on what is meant by “this”. For if the “this” includes the theology or belief systems of the audience, then asking the audience to believe something which says “you believe incorrectly” can invoke a circular logic that Wittgenstein said was impossible. The apophatic method then, either inconsistently excludes itself from “things we cannot know”, or it is doing something with recursion that needs more careful analysis. This thesis was attempted in the hope of the latter.

statements only exist objectively. On the other hand, the Post-Modernist cannot handle this self-categorization because he denies the ability of the subjective self to make universally true statements. It is this incompatibility of self-categorization, this interactive dynamics with both the Modernist and the Post-Modernist static concept of texts that generate the paradox. But if we reject both the Modernist and Post-Modernist categories for this paradox (propositional *hoti* and persuasive *hina*), then this third category must be Pre-Modernist. And because both Modernist and Post-Modernist categories are static, it is likely to be dynamic as well. Dynamic implies action, and action implies actors, and the main actor turns out to be our self.

The idea that there is a role for the self is not new; we are merely rediscovering the insight that one has not truly grasped the meaning of Scripture until one has applied it to oneself. But this insight has usually been offered without support, as if it were obvious piety, an addendum to the necessities of knowing and being, a precursor to modernism and post-modernism, or a pastoral concern for application after exegesis.²⁹⁰ That is to say, up till now the role of the self—the role of the conscience—was ethically established. But making the conscience essential to ethics is a circular appeal that relies on an ethical justification for including ethics. This is why those *ad hoc* justifications for including the self removed the ethical force from *hina/hoti*, for by appealing to the self they undermined the proof of the necessity of the self.

The significance of the self is now clear. Not only does its rediscovery resolve the *hina/hoti* paradox, but it rebuilds ethics by demonstrating the necessity of the conscience and the self without assuming that necessity. Thus by apophatically clearing a path through the paradoxes surrounding the parable of The Sower, we can lay a foundation for role of the self built upon perichoresis, as we explain next.²⁹¹

2. A more general prescription for finding the self: perichoresis

Perichoresis, the interpenetration of categories in a Trinitarian classification scheme, arises if, and only if, there are precisely three categories, for when there are three categories, then there are also three relations between them.²⁹² This makes it possible to invert the categories and the relations and still have a Trinitarian scheme,²⁹³ where the peculiarities of a single category are now distributed over its relations to the other two categories, and thus diffused throughout the system. That is, there is no preferred position, no special perspective among the three categories in a Trinitarian classification.²⁹⁴ This lack of a hierarchy and the “interpenetration” of the attributes are often taken to be two identifying

²⁹⁰For example, Van Til argues for the necessity of starting logic from presuppositions which cannot themselves be based on logic, which is another way of introducing the fundamental category of the self. From a logician's viewpoint, it is a way of crossing “Lessing's ditch” or solving Hume's induction dilemma by making the self a primary category. More recently this has been called “foundationalism,” but is just another way of acknowledging the necessity of the self.

²⁹¹The apophatic method is not immune from abuse, for one can easily set up three-fold categories that are invalid in order to arrive at a preordained answer. For example, the game 20 questions begins with the only allowed trifold question “Animal, vegetable or mineral?” which presupposes a material object. If the player is thinking about “Holy Spirit” for example, then the question does not match the category. Another misuse of apophatic method is to “beg the question” and attempt to deny the antithesis of statements which are improperly formed. E.g. “have you stopped beating your wife?” incorporates an improper assumption of X, “beating the wife”, as well as the formal denial of stopping X. One needs to be clear that the category of X is appropriately the subject of the Trinitarian classification scheme before the denial of it carries any apophatic force

²⁹²Two categories would have one relation, and four categories would have six relations, and so forth.

²⁹³If we view the Trinitarian scheme as a triangle with categories as vertices and relations as sides, then the new scheme is “rotated” through sixty degrees so that viewing both schemes together forms a star of David.

²⁹⁴In discussion of the Holy Trinity, this rules out subordinationism, and the tendency to find a hierarchy in the ontology.

features of perichoresis.

For perichoresis cannot be constructed by adding a third category to a dualist antinomy—A and not-A—because the third category must complement without subsuming, without subordinating. That is, it cannot introduce yet another category, B, which would combine the first two categories into not-B and so create an infinite chain of ever-larger dualities.²⁹⁵ The fact that that every category complements without subsuming or subordinating, is the third characteristic feature of perichoresis.

Applying perichoresis to The Sower, if Jesus wants us to understand *hina* and *hoti* as both being true, he must have in mind a category that complements both without denying the truth of either. By contrast, any interpretation that alters the text or the lexicon to get agreement will have subsumed either *hina* or *hoti* by denying the other one.²⁹⁶ Likewise perichoresis requires the interpenetration of attributes, so this third category must interpenetrate the six attributes we discovered earlier, namely, the bivalent, ethical, recursive, pre-modern, text-constructive illocutions.²⁹⁷ By close examination of the similarities among these six we find the common interpenetrating characteristic: they all have a role for the self. For the self is the necessary actor in both bivalent and ethical choices, as well as the necessary participant in pre-modern philosophy, while recursion, text-constructions and illocutions all require that the texts be self-aware. Whether self-actor or self-awareness, the common characteristic of all six abstracted categories is the self.²⁹⁸ Thus perichoresis applied to the *hina/hoti* paradox finds a role for the self that is implicit in both *hina* and *hoti*, and which complements without subsuming, for *hina* produces *hoti*, *hoti* requires *hina*, and both demand the self. We cannot understand the exclusion of “those outside” unless we hear it as ourself.

B. Recursion as the Mode of the Self

The self not only arises naturally out of a Trinitarian scheme as a complementary way to resolve the irreconcilable dualities, but the self is also discovered by its operating mode, by its actions. The principle mode of the grammatical “I” is to refer back to itself, not merely in some objective fashion (what Briggs calls a referential mode) but in a recursive, active mode that acknowledges itself acknowledging (what Evans calls self-involving). As Evans and Briggs recount, many speech acts cannot be performed without involving the self; “I forgive,” “I apologize,” “I confess,” and “I worship” all demand the self-referential “I”. But even when the speech act can be done in the third person, there is a distinct difference between the first and third person performance.

For example, when speaking “baby-talk” to infants, we often refer to ourselves in the third

²⁹⁵ This “solution” was the origin of Hegel's infinite dialectic with its own set of problems, so that perichoresis is the property that prevents a Trinitarian classification from collapsing into a Hegelian one.

²⁹⁶ Perichoresis is the recognition that a Trinitarian way out of a binary paradox is a third category that complements the others without subsuming them the way Hegel's synthesis does. This third category will not be a synthesis if it complements the paradox while incorporating it into a Trinitarian classification, which cannot lead to an endless recursion because it is necessarily complete.

²⁹⁷ The abstract nouns are given as adjectives because of English conventions, though in German we could merely append them as a compound noun. So whether they are written as five adjectives and a noun, or as six nouns is irrelevant to the idea that we have converted verbal relations into subject categories.

²⁹⁸ The implicit self-reference of the complementary Trinitarian scheme requires the recognition and existence (the epistemic and metaphysical character) of the self as the necessary actor who is assumed in all of these relations, so that analysis of verbal relations reveals this noun subject. When combined with an analysis of the original “meaning, text and person” Trinitarian scheme that reveals the self as an object of “third option” predication, we see that perichoresis spreads the attributes of “person” throughout the other categories.

person, “Don't cry, Daddy will come back soon” perhaps to avoid reinforcing the immediacy, the presence of “I”. However, this form of address is less common in ordinary speech, where it may be perceived as a lack of personal commitment, “The company declines your offer.” That is, when we need to emphasize responsibility, to warn or perform ethical speech acts, when we need an immediate response, we find it useful to switch to the self-referential “I”. Why is that? Because the self-referential “I” is capable of things that the third-person is not capable of. The self-referential “I” is immediate, responsible and personal; it is aware of itself being aware; it acts upon itself acting; it is recursively established. This recursion is not simply an objective observation like the description of a snake biting its tail, rather it is the whole point of invoking the self, for the recursion dramatically changes the nature of the speech act and the potential outcomes of the speech act. Therefore we look at recursion in more detail next.

1. An Example of Recursion arising from the Parable

Because recursion is the defining property of the self-referential “I,” the necessary ingredient for self-involvement, we can even identify a “hidden self” that is not expressed in the explicit grammar of the first person singular but nonetheless makes its presence implicitly known through recursion. This is best explained by example.

In the parable of the Sower, Jesus never uses the word “I,” yet the conclusion that he is talking about himself is unavoidable. For when the disciples asked for an explanation of the parable, he explains the seed and all the various types of soil without ever identifying the Sower, instead saying simply, “the Sower sows the word.” But since he is the only one delivering “the word,” he makes it very clear that the Sower is himself, the Sower is the self-referential “I.” So the logical necessity of connecting the meaning of the Sower with the speaker of the parable in a circular fashion results in the discovery of an implicit or “hidden I.”

Is this a distinction without a difference? No, because the implicit self operates differently than the explicit “I”. Many commentators have found it perplexing that Jesus does not present the Sower as himself by using the word “I” in his explanation, but rather forces the listener to derive this relation. While there may be psychological reasons for this indirection, there are also linguistic differences between a third-person reference, the implicit self, and the explicit “I,” each of which affect Jesus' meaning. A third-person reference would destroy the immediacy and personality of the act—it is as much as possible a non-committal, non-confessional, non-self-involving statement, notable by what it avoids. The explicit “I” carries with it an immediacy, a responsibility, a forced confrontation that requires a decision to be made on the spot. If Jesus had said “I sow the word”, he would have been implying a demand to accept or deny his affirmation for which any delay could be construed as denial. However, when Jesus uses the “hidden I,” then the immediacy is forestalled, and the self-involving content can be digested at leisure. It is not that the force of the speech act is somehow diminished, but rather that the immediacy is somehow bracketted out and made less important than the other qualities of the speech act.

Therefore whether implicit or explicit, the presence of recursion defines whether there is a self-involvement, a self-referential subject doing the action who demands a personal interaction with the listener. And this recursion plays an important part in the meaning of The Sower.

2. Recursion and Ethical Force

The self appears as subject when the mode of communication is personal, as we discussed above, but it

must also appear as object if the mode of communication is moral. That is, if the directives “you should” or “you must” are to carry ethical force, they must be heard as “I should” and “I must”, where the object of the command is the self. When Jesus says in Mark 4:11,13, “for those outside everything is in parables. . . How will you understand all the parables?”, the contrast is between “those” and “you,” where in both cases the ethical force derives from hearing “I.” It is easy to shrug off the negative reference to “those,” but it is equally easy to claim the anonymity of a crowd in order to deflect the “you.” Recursion is the mode that peels back these defenses to find the ethical target, the self hiding behind both “those” and “you.”

And this ethical target is the purpose of this parable, for as we argued in chapter two, Jesus placed that Isaiah 6 passage at the heart of the text²⁹⁹ because he is describing *hina*, how it is that God's chosen people can also be rejected by God, even while actively hearing the prophetic message. Now a prophet normally brings a saving message, and if the prophet pronounces judgment, it is because the people have rejected his saving words. So if the crowds or the Pharisees did not ridicule Jesus and John the Baptist but rather flocked to hear them, how then can simply listening bring damnation upon their heads, how can words alone convey ethical force? Does not God require an action—a rejection, a stopping of the ears, a burning of the manuscript—in order to evoke an ethical judgment?

The dilemma cannot be resolved by fiat, as if Jesus declaring them guilty made them so, independently of what they did. Such a view is a correlate of Kermode's “secret saving knowledge” for it supposes a “secret damning knowledge” and acceptance of one is acceptance of the other. Nor can we attribute this judgment to some non-repeatable 2nd Temple exegesis of Isaiah, for that view merely replaces “Gnosis” with “Exegesis”, while keeping them both secret. No, if there is ethical force in this parable, if there is judgment upon the Pharisee, it exists because of something the audience does, because judgment *is* possible through simple listening if that listening becomes active through recursion.

Up till now, the recursion we have noted has been a straightforward reinforcing type, a positive recursion as when Jesus talks about himself talking, where the syntax brings attention to itself, so that if we only suspected that Jesus was talking about himself based on the semantic context, we now have proof in the syntax itself. We had earlier spoken about this form of positive recursion in the context of a courtroom, where the witness swears to tell the truth, speaking about his speaking and thereby amplifying the consequences of his words and generating a bivalent—truth or perjury—result. We now recognize this recursion as explicitly acknowledging the necessity of the self in the testimony. Therefore the two consequences of positive recursion are the explicit introduction of the self and a dynamically generated bivalency.

The positive recursion that creates a bivalent ethical choice, however, does not force the choice; it merely presents it. Positive recursion makes the options bivalent—truth or perjury—but it does not prejudice the witness. Positive recursion may create ethical choices, but it neither creates ethical dilemmas nor carries ethical force. In addition, positive recursion presents only the author's self, directing illocutionary force at the author; it cannot be directed at the audience because it is only capable of referring to the speaker. So how then is Isaiah,³⁰⁰ or Jesus' exegesis of Isaiah, able to direct

²⁹⁹One might argue that if the Isaiah 6:9 verse is at the heart of this parable, then the parable exists only as a sort of rabbinic midrash on the OT verse. Of course, Jesus' parables are a development of midrash, yet there is much indebtedness to the rabbinic method here that is not always acknowledged by NT parable studies, but is made more obvious here by the direct reference to Isaiah.

³⁰⁰It is interesting to note that Isaiah received this condemnation (6:9) as a message from God to the people, so he himself did not have to solve the problem how to pass this message on in a self-incriminatory way. Jesus, however, in exegeting Isaiah explains how Isaiah's prophetic message operated, how despite Isa

ethical force toward—to force a choice upon, to create a dilemma for, to pass a judgment on—an audience without waiting for an action or a response? The answer is negative recursion.

Jesus' exegesis of the Isaiah passage illustrates how hearing alone conveys ethical force through an active process that not only requires the self, but employs recursion in a way that Fish calls self-defeating,³⁰¹ and which we call negative recursion. The presence of negative recursion is revealed not only at the syntactical level, where the sense verbs are repeated, “hearing they hear and not understanding” (or more compactly, “hearing they do not hear”) but also at the semantic level, where the unheard words have to be heard in order for the prophecy to be prophetic. Likewise, the same syntactical structure is repeated with the word “seeing.” Since it is unlikely that a deaf and blind person is the object of this prophecy, we are forced to reinterpret these sense verbs with the secondary definition of “mental perception.” Yet when we reread the text with this sense, we arrive at the apparent nonsense, the awkwardness, the self-defeating idea³⁰² that they have to hear to know that they cannot hear, and they have to understand to know that they cannot understand.

Now the usual way translators handle negative recursion is by dropping one of the repeated verbs so as to make the recursion vanish, “they hear but do not understand.”³⁰³ Although this translation avoids the awkwardness,³⁰⁴ it also changes the meaning, because the special properties of negative recursion are needed to convey ethical force, to make the *hina/hoti* paradox into an ethical dilemma. Yet even if we emphasize the negative recursion, the verbs “hear” and “see” remain third-person so that the audience can refuse to identify with the object of the prophecy and thus attempt to avoid the ethical force by conscious rejection of self-identification: “I'm not one of *those* people.” This imagined response to Isaiah's prophecy reveals the whole purpose of the parable of The Sower: to explain why Jesus' (and John's) audience actually cannot escape either the ethical force or the self-identification implicit in Isaiah's prophecy.

We repeat that this is no fiat judgment that Jesus pronounces as he did in the Sermon on the Mount when he said, “you have heard that it was said...but I say to you”; rather he is exegeting the ethical force already inherent in the negative recursion of Isaiah 6:9.³⁰⁵ And the secret in exegeting negative recursion, in finding its hidden self and its targeted ethical force is to understand, first, why negative recursion involves the self, and second, how two negatives can lead to a positive.

For when we consider the self-defeating character of negative recursion, we also find the

301 In his discussion of Shakespeare's play, *Coriolanus*, Fish argues that speech act theory can explain why the hero will be ultimately unsuccessful because of his self-defeating speech act. Fish, Stanley, ‘How to Do Things with Austin and Searle: Speech-Act Theory and Literary Criticism’, *MLN* 91 (1976), pp. 983-1025, reprinted in Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, pp. 197-245.

302 Using Fish's terminology of “self-defeating” from his *Coriolanus* essay.

303 Anthony Thiselton (“Does the Bible call all Cretans liars?” in *Thiselton on Hermeneutics*, p217, 2006) addresses Paul's quote of Cretan Epimenides (Titus 1:12) “All Cretans are liars” where Paul adds the gloss “What he says is true.” Thiselton uses speech act analysis to demonstrate that the negative recursion has a rational meaning addressing a hermeneutical or second-order concern about how pastors should exegete scripture.

304 There is something deeply disconcerting about recursion, for while we have no trouble identifying it, we often have great trouble describing it. Part of the problem appears to be the difficulty of holding several layers of recursion in our mind at the same time: “She said that he said that she said that he said” presents three layers of recursion approaching the limit of what we are able to intuitively grasp. Perhaps this explains the psychological denial of the validity of circular arguments, the dismissal of “tautologies,” and the desire of translators to smooth out recursion, but if we persevere past this awkwardness, we find that there are many useful things that only recursion can accomplish.

305 We emphasize that Jesus' is not performing eisegesis, nor creating new categories, but is obeying linguistic rules. We reject the thesis that this constitutes some aberration of the historical-grammatical method, or that this was unique to Jesus or to a certain 2nd Temple time period, or incorporated non-Christian rabbinic methodologies.

negation of self-defeat, which turns out to be the positive recursion of the self.³⁰⁶ Unlike positive recursion however, the self that arises out of negative recursion is not the “hidden I,” for this negative self need no longer be the speaker, but only the subject of the mental perception, the thinker. And this thinking self must also exercise its will, it must choose to pass through the fire of mental processing to emerge intact on the other side. Therefore to understand Jesus' exegesis of Isa 6:9, we must first consider each of these two characteristics of the double negative of negative recursion: the emergence of the thinking self, and the targeting of the ethical force.

a. Negative Recursion Demands the Hidden Self Emerge

A persuasive text, a perlocutionary communication conveys ethical force only if it involves the self, so if Isaiah implicates his listeners without their seeming cooperation, how is the self targeted? Where in the text is the implicit identification of the audience with those who “hear but do not understand”? This section will show how the perlocutionary effect that provides the illocutionary force of an ethical speech act derives from the self-involvement of mental processing. For texts possessing negative recursion convert the passive listening self into an active thinking subject, who becomes the recursive self of the speech act, the hidden self needed for a self-involving speech act to produce ethical force.

Recalling our earlier discussion of the three ways texts convey ethical force, we used the analogy of a lawyer, judge, and witness to characterize the application of settled texts, the fiat declaration of novel texts, and the process of examining the text itself. Negative recursion falls into this third category of ethical force deriving from examination of the texts themselves, which is quite distinct from ethical force deriving from appeals to authority or fiat declarations. Jesus did not appeal to authority to condemn the listeners, nor did he invent their guilt *de novo*, rather he gave them a self-involving story that produced a perlocutionary effect on the self. Something in that story, like the swearing-in of witnesses, caused the listener to commit himself, because a self-involving speech act has both recursive subject and recursive predicate; it is both aware of being a speech act as well as aware of itself performing a speech act.

Before we look at how this effect is obtained, let us dispense with the objection that ethical force is purely external to the text, and cannot reside in any perlocutionary response. In his book, *A Theory of Speech Acts*, Searle argues in the last chapter “*Ought from Is*,” that only institutional commitments can produce ethical force out of simple existence statements.³⁰⁷ If we augment his description of the institution to include the self, a process Evans calls “self-involvement,”³⁰⁸ we find that ethical force more essentially arises from the recursive speech act which focusses the illocutionary force back on the self. Nor does this recursion depend strongly on a human community, because there can be a divine presence that functions as an external judge, as Evans reports. It is not the community divine or human that provides the ethical force, it is the presence of self-involving recursion. This is above and beyond the ordinary recursion that all speech acts need, (as we discuss in the next section, one of the requirements for a speech act to be felicitous is the recognition by all parties involved that an illocution has been spoken, a self-awareness necessary for the proper performance of an illocution) for a self-involving ethical speech act requires the self since “I forgive” or “I confess” cannot be done in the third person.

Now a further objection may be raised that if neither of these properties requires an audience, it would seem possible to have completely “private” speech acts known only to God that require no

³⁰⁶One might also think of this as a double application of the apophatic method.

³⁰⁷John Searle, “Speech Acts”

³⁰⁸Donald Evans, “The Self-Involvement”

speech in the performance. How then would they differ in any appreciable way from “meditation” or “not making up one's mind,” actions which do not carry ethical force? We argue that it is not the audience, but the lack of speech that prevents meditation and vacillation from carrying ethical force. For in order for recursion to be defined, there have to be two distinct persons—the speaker and the listener. If the two are collapsed, then there is no true recursion. In exactly the same way, for an act to be doing something, there have to be two distinct states—before and after—separated by the act. Thus the very concept of a speech act excludes such things as meditation and vacillation, which display no recursion in space or time. An ethically useless tautology arrives whenever these distinctions vanish, collapsing the two terms in the recursion and taking the recursion with it. Therefore the recursion in a self-involving ethical speech act requires robust distinctions between subject and predicate, a separation of after from before, but it does not necessarily require an institutional commitment or even an audience.³⁰⁹

A second objection might be that we have proved too much, that it would appear any speech act that involves the self can carry ethical force. This is similar to the view that Jesus arbitrarily assigned ethical force to Old Testament verses that carried no such meaning, either by creative use of 2nd Temple exegesis or invoking his special divine authority. We argue that just as ethical force does not derive from institutional commitments, so it does not derive from naked appeals to authority or arbitrary assignments to the self, but rather is derived from and relies upon the performance of the illocution. It is this performance that demonstrates a distinct “act” has occurred that involved recursion. And this is the key to understanding how Isaiah 6:9 can carry the force of an action because its negative recursion fulfills all the requirements for an ethical speech act: it is manifest by its result; it clearly distinguishes the intent from the act; and it separates the anticipation from the outcome. Therefore the ethical force of Isaiah 6:9 lies in the performance, in the perlocutionary effects of the speech act itself.

If this be so, then we must ask how negative recursion can have the necessary persuasive or perlocutionary effect when we cannot know how the audience will respond or act? We recognize the effect not in physical behavior, but in mental states, first in us, and then in them. The response is somehow entangled with the thinking. Recall that in the positive recursion of identifying Jesus with the Sower, the “hidden I” enabled a commitment to the grammatical “I” to be postponed for mental processing. In the same way, the negative recursion of Isaiah 6:9 brings attention to the process of hearing and seeing, postponing the immediate judgment of the grammatical “I.” Negative recursion leaves us unsure whether we should include ourselves in the category of those who “hear but do not hear” or not, because we are obviously hearing it. In the same fashion, negative recursion brackets the immediacy of the *hina/hoti* paradox, leaving us unsure if we are insiders or outsiders. This bracketing is only superficially like the Modernist's principle of postponing judgment to consider a hypothesis independent of the self, because the Modernist brackets out the self to assure objectivity, whereas negative recursion brackets out the immediacy to bring in the self, to assure subjectivity. Rather than trying to be objective, we are waiting while we process the words to find out if we are the subject of the pericope, if we are the ones Jesus is judging.

Thus the perlocutionary effect, the persuasive effect of an ethical speech act derives from the self-involvement of mental processing, of attempting to make sense of negative recursion, which requires a thinking self. In the next section, we examine where that recursive thinking leads, and what

³⁰⁹ We see that a self-involving ethical speech act has to involve the self and someone else, a before and an after, as well as an awareness that all these are being performed by the self. That performance, that “act” not only requires the existence of the referential “I”, but requires temporality, the change of performing an action, but in a different fashion than non-self-involving speech acts. The reason that private prayer or confession is a self-involving speech act is not merely that God and us are separate beings, but that there is a distinct before and after.

that mental processing entails.

b. Negative Recursion Targets Us

The process of thinking about negative recursion has brought our thinking self to the fore, but we do not yet know how we are being targeted by this process, how Jesus directs ethical force at our thinking self to force a decision.³¹⁰ For if ethical force is to be attached to the mental processing, there must be a logical inevitability that forces us toward the moral choice. Discovering this inner logic is the purpose of Jesus' parable and this section.

Now the defining characteristic of the negative recursion,³¹¹ as observed in Isa 6:9, is the way in which the output negates the input. Isaiah writes "hearing they hear but do not understand" which we might also translate "hearing they do not hear." This negative recursion can be processed logically³¹² with two important answers:³¹³ either the output is nonsense (null), neither hearing nor not hearing; or the output is changing,³¹⁴ first hearing and later not hearing. That is, if we look for an answer that is permanent and static, we find nothing that matches, and so the answer is: nothing or nonsense. However, if we permit the audience to change its mind, then perhaps at first hearing they do hear but later on they do not hear, or vice versa. Change is necessary to make sense of negative recursion. So one of the consequences of negative feedback is that the audience divides into those who change and understand against those who do not change and do not understand.³¹⁵ This is the inner logic of negative recursion, which can take even inaction, the refusal to change, and make it into an ethical choice.

And now we begin to see how this text can carry ethical force,³¹⁶ for instead of simply creating

310 Ethics cannot be a matter of preference, but a matter of logic.

311 The second feature of negative recursion that allows it convey ethical force, is its ability to convert two negatives into a positive. If the only perlocutionary effect were to convince the audience that they could not understand the parable, then the outcome is predetermined, and the ethical force destroyed because no dynamic bivalency was created. Somehow, there must be a real possibility that the audience can understand, but this would require a positive response to a negative stimulus, or an understanding of how negative recursion performs.

312 Or electronically, where it is very important.

313 In electronics, this is modelled with positive and negative feedback on an ideal amplifier, or op amp. Feedback can be observed by putting a microphone in front of a speaker, and the high-pitched whistle is an oscillatory solution. Alternatively, negative feedback (without time delay) is most often used to stabilize a circuit to a fixed voltage (normally zero volts). Time delay introduces poles into the solution, and thus produces a natural frequency. In such a manner, frequency generators are constructed from simple amplifiers and reactive (time-dependent) components like capacitors and inductors.

314 Electronically, this changing solution is called oscillating.

315 In contrast to the binary amplification of a positive recursion, a negative recursion is either unitary or oscillatory. Wittgenstein argues that one cannot say "I believe falsely" because of the impossibility of claiming to believe an unbelief. This "impossibility" or null-result is an example of the unitarity of negative feedback which arrives at the same location independent of whether one started by affirming or denying the statement. But sometimes the result of a negative recursion oscillates between two views. For example, the claim "this statement is false" oscillates between the two possibilities of verity and falsity depending on the number of times through the recursive loop.

316 We are discussing negative recursion in the context of ethical force, but it is quite possible to have ordinary speech without ethical force that still makes use of negative feedback. It is entirely possible to say, "I am not opinionated," where my claim appears to be self-defeating or negative recursion. This negative feedback still carries a real meaning, though perhaps not the one I intended. Fish discusses self-defeating speech acts in his essay "How to do things with Austin and Searle" on Shakespeare's play *Coriolanus*, where pride is responsible for the negative feedback. But negative feedback need not always be the negation of a positive statement: "I am humble" might be argued to be negative feedback despite humility being a positive virtue and the statement expressed without a negation. Then the signature of negative feedback is not found in the syntax of the sentence, but whether the statement is oscillatory in meaning or self-defeating.

an ethical choice, as positive recursion does, negative recursion forces the listener to choose. The choices in positive recursion are static, they remain unmodified by our actions, but the choosing of negative recursion is all about change, and our action affects them. If we do not change our mind, the text is nonsense, the rejection of meaning altogether, while if we allow the text to change us, the text brims with meaning. For it is only the changing solution that allows meaning, that permits both belief and unbelief. If belief and unbelief are seen as the bivalent static choices produced by the positive feedback of a witness (the sower sows the word), then negative recursion is about the coming (or the not coming) to that belief.

Finally, we are able to see in the negative recursion of Isaiah 6:9 the positive ethical force that targets the listener. Through the use of mental processing, Jesus is forcing the audience to make a decision as to whether they want to come to an understanding or remain unchanged. To remain unchanged is to find Jesus' message to be nonsense, and to find it nonsense, is to "hear without understanding." But in order to make sense of this negative feedback, they must focus on the process, on the changing perspective, on the mental processing, on the self doing the listening. Only by being willing to become the subject of the pericope, the recursive self (who is the parable's seed), can they escape meaningless nihilism. Only by rejecting the rejection, by defeating the self-defeating negative recursion, can they become the one who understands.³¹⁷ Jesus' targets the thinking self by challenging it to commit to meaning, to understanding, and yes, even to belief.

C. Conclusions

The self is not only a necessary component of a Trinitarian scheme, and not only a requirement for a self-involving speech act, but also both subject and object of an ethical command manifest through recursion. So important is recursion for understanding the felicity conditions of ethical speech acts, that we use the presence of positive or negative recursion as the signature of self-involvement. Positive recursion is necessary for the production of bivalent ethical choices and uncovering the hidden "I," whereas negative recursion is necessary for the process of choosing and for targeting the hidden self. Far from being the nemesis of logic and the recourse of cheap rhetoric, recursion turns out to be the key that unlocks the role of the self in creating the ethical force of self-involving speech acts.

3. A Reformed Speech Act Theory

We are finally able to collect these insights and reformulate Speech Act Theory (SAT) as a complete Trinitarian system that explicitly includes the self. Since some philosophers have held a reductionist view of SAT, it will be helpful to review a brief history of the theory to show its essential compatibility with a Trinitarian classification of language that provide the tool for understanding the ethical force of Jesus' parable. Likewise, recognizing that the self-reflexive character of SAT provides a role for the self, allows us to analyze Jesus' use of recursion in The Sower. This explicit inclusion of Trinitarian classifications and a role for the self will not only permit it to be used in Biblical Theology, but will also simplify many of the paradoxes of modern SATs.³¹⁸ Therefore the development of a Reformed

³¹⁷Recursion in speech acts is necessary for self-involvement, but can be either positive or negative recursion determined by its result. The characteristic of positive recursion is an amplification toward bifurcation of belief or meaning, while the characteristic of negative feedback is a bifurcation of process into either oscillatory or nonsensical meaning.

³¹⁸For example, Michael Green in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, describes 8 problems in modern speech act theory, of which at least 5 involve recursive definitions that cause him consternation. This is because in the Aristotelian tradition, circular logic is considered illegal. But in SAT, the self is explicit and can make explicit claims, which may not be objective, but are certainly not without force and legitimacy.

SAT will provide a useful tool in the analysis of the parable of The Sower.

A. Brief History of the Origins of Speech Act Theory

Speech act theory began with the Greeks, who taught the three aspects of language in their Trivium—Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric—where the last category is defined by its perlocutionary force. Unfortunately, Aristotle considered philosophy to partake only of the last two categories, and then treated Logic as the only one worthy of rigor.³¹⁹ Therefore it was not until the 19th century that there was a philosophical rebirth in the methods of grammar—that of construction using words. We find traces of this approach in Scotland's Thomas Reid (1710-1796) who contrasted “social acts” with Aristotle's propositions. This is the same term used by Adolf Reinach (1883-1917), who traces his interest in linguistic constructions to the Munich school and phenomenology, and did much to develop the concept of a speech act.³²⁰ But it was Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) who supplied the connection to Oxbridge through his insistence that natural language be studied for its own sake, and not merely as a vehicle for making Aristotelian propositions.³²¹ Wittgenstein saw the impossibility of an anti-metaphysical philosophy incorporating itself, and abandoned his earlier commitment to logical positivism and its “verification principle” by advocating an “analytic” philosophy that classified language use by its own self-understanding, rather than with an external, ideological set of categories.³²² Wittgenstein's influence led to an explosion of British “language” philosophers, that provided a “linguistic turn” to the practice of philosophy,³²³ as shown by J.L. Austin's seminal 1962 work, *How To Do Things With Words*.³²⁴

1. Precursors in the Speech Act Theory of John Austin (1911-1960)

Austin published little in his short career, but his lectures were quite influential, especially the Harvard lectures of 1948 which form the basis of his posthumous 1962 book, *How To Do Things With Words*. What is so different and refreshing about this book is its self-consciously employed self-reference. Rather than asking, as centuries of Aristotelian scholars had before him, “what do the words mean?” he asks the question “what do the words do?” The first question focuses on words as a communication medium that points symbolically at a referent, and emphasizes nominalism, or the view

319 In his *De Interpretatione*, Aristotle writes: “Every sentence is significant [...], but not every sentence is a statement making sentence, but only those in which there is truth or falsity. There is not truth or falsity in all sentences: a prayer is a sentence but is neither true nor false. The present investigation deals with the statement-making sentence; the others we can dismiss, since consideration of them belongs rather to the study of rhetoric or poetry.” (17 a 1-5, Edghill translation)

320 Barry Smith “Towards a History of Speech Act Theory”, in *Speech Acts, Meanings and Intentions. Critical Approaches to the Philosophy of John R. Searle*, A. Burkhardt, ed. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter (1990), 29-61.

321 So this break with Aristotle perhaps could have come sooner, but it was the events of history that forced its development.

The first half of the 20th century was a time of intellectual ferment, as the philosophical juggernaut of Modernism faltered with the military defeat of one Modernist regime (National Socialism) and the rise of another (International Communism).¹ To avoid these logical extremes, Existentialism proposed an alternative irrational approach to philosophy and theology,² which in turn provoked the logical positivist strain of Modernism to modify its “verificational” principle, e.g., Popper's falsification principle.³ The significance was that this new modernist approach was now talking about itself, adding “theorizing” to the world of material observations it was designed to describe.

322 The conversion is acknowledged by the scholarly phrase “early Wittgenstein” versus “late Wittgenstein” and is documented in his lecture notes published as “Blue and Brown” books.

323 See, for example, Vanhoozer's essay “A Lamp in the Labyrinth”

324 It is true that Austin had little respect for Wittgenstein, tracing his intellectual heritage through G.E. Moore. It is also true that some of Austin's students worked closely with Wittgenstein, finding the connection that Austin did not.

that it is the world that is real and language merely derivative when it categorizes or names it. The second question is more pragmatic and focuses self-consciously on the nature of words themselves.³²⁵ In this manner, Austin begins the first truly self-consciously recursive analysis of language, which he emphasizes by putting all his statements in the first person singular form.

I would rather go back a minute and consider whether there was not some good reason behind our initial favouritism for verbs in the so-called 'present indicative active'.

We said that the idea of a performative utterance was that it was to be (or to be included as a part of) the performance of an action. Actions can only be performed by persons, and obviously in our cases the utterer must be the performer: hence our justifiable feeling—which we wrongly cast into purely grammatical mould—in favour of the 'first person', who must come in, being mentioned or referred to ; moreover, if the utterer is acting, he must be doing something—hence our perhaps ill-expressed favouring of the grammatical present and grammatical active of the verb. There is something which is at *the moment of uttering being done by the person uttering*.³²⁶

Thus the “I” of Austin's analyses is not merely a convention, but an essential role for the self that defines the character of his SAT.

The second notable feature of Austin's approach is its Trinitarian classification scheme. While he is not always consistent with the labelling of his categories, he argues for three categories of speech acts—locutions (constative statements or propositions), perlocutions (performatives with effective persuasion), and illocutions (performatives in the act of speaking).³²⁷

We first distinguished a group of things we do in saying something, which together we summed up by saying we perform a *locutionary act*, which is roughly equivalent to uttering a certain sentence with a certain sense and reference, which again is roughly equivalent to 'meaning' in the traditional sense. Second, we said that we also perform *illocutionary acts* such as informing, ordering, warning, undertaking, &c., i.e. utterances which have a certain (conventional) force. Thirdly, we may also perform *perlocutionary acts*: what we bring about or achieve by saying something, such as convincing, persuading, deterring, and even, say, surprising or misleading.³²⁸

Austin acknowledges that these categories are not exclusive in the sense that a single utterance partakes of all three, but then he muddies the waters by exclusively categorizing some verbs by their illocutionary force, which perhaps is the basis of Searle's reductionist SAT. Since Austin's lectures were published after his death, he did not have the opportunity to standardize his nomenclature, but in several of his successors we find a clear expression of the Trinitarian structure and self-reference implicitly contained in his SAT.

325 Note that incantations, prayers, worship and liturgy all require attention to the mechanism of words, not just the meaning of the words. Compare to the “dynamic equivalence” and “essentially literal” debate in Bible translation.

326 J. L. Austin “How to Do Things With Words” p60

327 It is true that in the first half of “How To Do Things With Words” he contrasts constative statements with performatives as if there were only two categories, and in the second half he expands illocutions into five categories. However, none of these other divisions contradict his description of the three categories as locutions, perlocutions, and illocutions, where ill- and per- are two types of performatives—persuasion and constructions—which h Trinitarian classification. Even more intriguingly, he lists the failures of performatives—infelicities—as he gives three categories based on person, text, and meaning.

328 J. L. Austin “How To Do Things With Words” p 108

2. Trinitarian Structure in the Speech Act Theory of Frederick Ferre (b.1932)

Ferre, in his 1961 book, *Language, Logic and God*, develops a philosophical defense of “Theological Discourse” against the attacks of positivists that turns out to be a Trinitarian SAT. It complements Austin's linguistic approach with a more philosophical one using an explicitly three-fold scheme. While Austin showed “how natural language words work” incidentally had three categories, Ferre demonstrated “how theological words work” required precisely three categories. Since Ferre was not a student of Austin, his work is an independent testimony to the significance to SAT of the three categories discovered by Austin.

Ferre's purpose was to respond to the atheistic Modernist philosophy exemplified by Ayer's 1936 *Language, Truth and Logic*, which found theological and metaphysical language to be distracting and meaningless. In order to show that Ayer's reductionist approach does not do justice to philosophy or language, he turns in his final chapter to a threefold philosophy of language, meaning, and persons:

Three factors are present in every “signification-situation” (as we shall call the situation wherein language purports to signify a “fact” of some kind, a state of affairs, or “something that is the case”): first, there is the factor of the language itself, the presence of marks or sounds which serve to signify; second, there is the factor of the language-using agent, or interpreter, for whom the language signifies something; and third, there is the factor the “something” referred to, the content signified.

All three aspects must be present in any genuine signification-situation. If, first, the language itself is missing, then, necessarily, this language cannot signify anything to anyone. When a person is directly confronted with an object or event, without the mediation of language, there is no signification-situation but, instead, a situation of “immediate presentation.” If, second, there is no interpreter (or user-interpreter) present, then the language will fail to signify; it will be no more than one object (marks or sound-vibrations) among many others in our world. . . . If, finally, there is no content signified, no reference made to any actual or possible state of affairs, then again no signification-situation is established.³²⁹

Clearly, Ferre has described a complete classification scheme consisting of language, interpreter, and content, which is functionally equivalent to the “text, person, meaning” scheme we used earlier,³³⁰ and which we now recognize as the characteristic of a SAT. But a Trinitarian SAT must not only have three complete categories, but they must be mutually supportive and perichoretic.

To Ferre's surprise³³¹, he discovers that these are perichoretic categories, for if one aspect is missing, then the other categories of the SAT becomes philosophically inconsistent.³³²

³²⁹Frederick Ferre “Language, Logic and God” p146-7.

³³⁰In a parallel fashion, linguistics has uncovered numerous three-fold descriptions of language usage, that are empirically Trinitarian---. Thus we find many “natural” and empirical categories that all satisfy a Trinitarian schema. So prevalent a scheme cannot be taken as coincidental, but as something fundamental about the nature of reality, language and logic.

³³¹Note how Ferre refers to his observations of completeness (Ferre p. 146) “The points of view from which this remarkable phenomenon may be approached correspond...”

³³²Frederick Ferre op cit. “The points of view from which this remarkable phenomenon may be approached correspond, as Morris points out, to the three essential elements of the signification-situation. First, language may be studied in terms of the endlessly fascinating relationships between the verbal signs themselves. This area of investigation, often called “syntactics,” abstracts from the full signification-situation. It ignores both the referring function of language and the role of the interpreter in order to investigate more fully the “formal” properties of language. Formal logic, with its concern for tracing the systematic structures found within language and for elaborating rules of formation, transformation, implication, and equivalence, is most intimately associated with the syntactic dimension of language-

While each of the three dimensions of language—syntactic, interpretic, and semantic—is an important area for intensive study, it must not be forgotten that each apart from the others is an abstraction. Language as a whole is not understood fully from the point of view of formal logic alone, as modern thinkers are increasingly coming to realize. But without stability on its syntactic dimension language could neither refer nor be of any use to an interpreter. Similarly, language cannot be exhaustively treated in terms of human behavior, although apart from the human beings, their needs, purposes, and responses, there would be no language. And in like respect, while no purely semantic approach to language can tell the whole tale of its nature and uses, discourse which is lacking in reference can lay no claim to a share in the logic of the signification-situation.³³³

Ferre discovers that each dimension of language needs the others in order to be balanced, and that exclusively taking one perspective distorts the meaning. These are precisely the characteristics of a perichoretic unity, which Ferre seemingly stumbles on in his defense against a Modernist reductionism that distorts language through abstraction.³³⁴ And this is also why the study of Jesus' parable of The Sower has been misunderstood by reductionist analyses that do not do justice to language. However, the realization that Ferre's "user-interpreter" plays a much more vital role in the Trinitarian scheme came two years later in the work of Donald Evans.

3. *The Role of the Self in the Speech Act Theory of Donald Evans (b. 1927)*

Like Ferre, Evans developed a SAT to address the Modernist dismissal of theology in his book, *The Logic of Self-Involvement* (1963), but found his key in a role for the self.³³⁵ With Vanhoozer, he finds the three-fold structure of Austin conducive to a Trinitarian categorization,³³⁶ however, he does not like

theory. Second, one may investigate language in terms of the relationship between language and the user-interpreter. Such a study, which I shall call "interpretics," will emphasize the forms of human activity that are associated with the employment of language, the purposes motivating its use, the effects it has on its interpreters, and like questions. Investigation of language in the interpretic dimension would no doubt overlap at many points with psychology, anthropology, and sociology. Third, an approach to language may be made in terms of the relationship between language and its referent. A popular name for this field of investigation is "semantics." How does language refer? If it is successful in referring, how does it describe its referent? What, most crucially of all, are the criteria by which its reference and its description are to be judged "true" or "false"? Are all uses of language to be judged according to the same semantic rules? Since these questions are neither empirical nor purely formal, philosophical investigation of the semantic dimension of language, unlike either the syntactic or the interpretic dimensions, overlaps neither the formal nor the empirical disciplines.

333F. Ferre "Language" p148-9

334Ferre op. cit. "One of the major sources of confusion concerning the analysis of theological discourse is a failure to distinguish the three dimensions of the signification-situation as they arise in the full, concrete functioning of theological language." Ferre argues for this Trinitarian approach "Lest instability, depersonalization, or dereferencing occur," which are all aspects of a Modernist reductionism (his "abstraction") that leads to atheism. Ferre wants to stave off the inevitable consequences of modernism by demanding a role for theological language permitted by his SAT, but his subsequent publications abandon this development of a Trinitarian scheme, e.g. *Basic Modern Philosophy of Religion*.

335Evans, p17 "For various reasons, recent analytic philosophy of religion has been preoccupied with one issue, the positivist challenge: If nothing could count against the truth of religious utterance S, and yet S purports to be a statement of fact, S is meaningless. Many interpretations of religious language have been outlined in relation to this challenge, and to the general contrast between scientific and religious language; but the work of detailed analysis has scarcely begun.

336Kevin Vanhoozer, "First Theology" p 154-155 "The Father's activity is locution...The Logos corresponds to the speaker's act or illocution, to what one does in saying ...The third aspect of a speech act is the perlocutionary. This refers to the effect an illocutionary act has on the actions or beliefs of the hearer...The great benefit of this analysis is that it enables

the way Austin objectifies “illocutionary force” as if it were independent of the speaker and dependent only on the audience. For instance, in *How To Do Things With Words*, Austin apologizes for using the first person singular “I” in his examples, insisting that this is simply for clarity but not essential, while Evans takes this “I” to be essential to those illocutions that convey attitudes. Since attitudes are central to the analysis of theological words such as “belief” (as well as combatting the false objectivity of positivism), Austin's categories must be modified to permit a place for subjective attitudes.

Evans calls his non-Aristotelian, SAT solution to the positivist challenge “a new logic,” which includes a Trinitarian categorization of language that incorporates a role for the self in subjective attitudes, as he describes in the introduction of his book,

Older logics deal with propositions (statements, assertions); that is, they deal with relations between propositions and relations between terms of propositions. Modern biblical theology, however, emphasizes non-propositional language, both in its account of divine revelation (God's `word' to man) and in its account of human religious language (man's word to God). In each case the language or `word' is not (or is not merely) propositional; it is primarily a self-involving activity, divine or human.³³⁷

Evans' goal is to undermine the Modernist claims of completeness and objectivity by showing that in Biblical Theology as in life, statements are speech acts with much richer meanings than Aristotelian propositions, and these speech acts require a role for the self. They cannot merely employ the self, or tangentially involve the self, but they must require the self, for if the self is optional, then belief is cut loose from the believer, losing all of its “illocutionary force.” For faith to regain its central role in Biblical Theology, there must be a requirement, an essential role of the self in attitudinal statements that elevates its language above the banality of “god talk”.

In order to make this role for the self more central to his SAT, Evans provides a different division of his mentor Austin's three-fold SAT:

There are three distinct ways in which language may be used: (a) Performative. (b) Expressive. (c) Causal. . . . So-called `emotive' theories of moral language or religious language cannot even begin to achieve clarity unless these basic distinctions are recognized.

Since there are three distinct ways in which language may be used, and since these uses are not mutually exclusive, three distinct questions may be asked concerning any utterance: (a) What was its performative force? (b) What feeling did it express? (c) What effects in people did it produce?³³⁸

For Evans, “expressive” language shares equal footing with performative and causal, which makes “feelings” as important as proclamations and persuasions, and keeps them Trinitarian without adding a fourth category. Evans accomplishes this by having his “Performative” category include both Austin's “Constatives” (statements of fact) and “Illocutions” (text constructions), whereas formerly Austin's “Perlocutions” (persuasion) combined Evans' categories of “expressive” and “causal,” that is, if Austin

us clearly to relate the Spirit's relation to the Word of God.”

337 Donald D. Evans, “The Logic of Self-Involvement” p13-14.

338 Evans, p109-110

did not merely consider expressive speech to be an inferior constative of subjective fact.³³⁹ By giving feeling an independent category, Evans emphasizes the importance of taking a position, of publicizing a stance toward the speech act, which is not simply an optional coloring, but a necessary component of every speech act.

After presenting a SAT that differs in seven ways from Austin's,³⁴⁰ he elaborates on his new category of expressives or "attitudes" that are descriptions of a relation between a person and another term that could be a person, a thing, or a concept. A special sort of attitude he calls "onlooks," which can be described by saying "I look on x as y ", as in "I look on God as my Father," which is often abbreviated " x is y ".³⁴¹ Onlooks are much like definitions, because they are language about language, but differ in being more subjective. He then divides onlooks into two categories, "analogical" and "parabolic", where analogical x and y are mostly similar, while parabolic are dissimilar enough that one could append "I look on x as y , but x is not y ." This paradoxical feature of parabolic onlooks makes them highly subjective, which is why Evans finds that parabolic onlooks are as much about the speaker as they are about the relation of x and y . Yet it is often the parabolic onlooks that are most significant for Biblical Theology and the parables of Jesus. Therefore the most appropriate language for theology is language about the language user.

A parable provides a *metaphysical parabolic onlook*, 'Look on God as y ' in which one cannot specify the similarity between God and y except in terms of the appropriateness of similar attitudes. ... It is clear that in so far as biblical passages are parables, they are not theoretical, descriptive or analogical; they are not impersonal, flat Constatives. To accept a parable is to *adopt an attitude*, an attitude by which one lives so as to be in rapport with God and thus be enabled to *understand* the parable better in one's own experience. That is, the language of parables is self-involving and rapportive.³⁴²

Evans demonstrates that even the rational understanding of parables requires a "commissive", a commitment of attitude. Therefore it is not just that speech acts occur during speaking, they also occur during the hearing, making them both speech and hearing acts. In his analysis of the role of the self, Evans does not go much beyond the "rapportive" or the identification of hearer with speaker, but as we discuss later,³⁴³ the rapportive takes on a very significant role in the parable of The Sower.

In this fashion, Evans prepares the tools for his theological analysis of self-involvement of Biblical Theology: a Trinitarian model for speech acts different from Austin's, which includes a category for expressive speech with a role for the self. From our discussion above, we recognize this as

339 Evans, p114 "Performative Language: Constative ('state'), Verdictive ('grade'), Exercitive ('order'), Behabitive* ('praise'), Commissive* ('promise')"

340 The first four renamed Austin's categories to be more explicit about self-involvement, while the last three accepted distinctions, which Austin had rejected, making it possible for Evans' SAT to have a role for the self. In the renaming, Evans supports a Trinitarian structure because he finds three infelicities instead of Austin's six, and upon analysis, they are related to Ferre's categories of person, meaning and text. He argues (op cit, p71) that Austin's "Behabitive" category is not an expression of attitude, but is the attitude, thereby removing any pretense of objectivity from the speech act. Likewise, Evans keeps a category that Austin eliminates, because the T/F constative for normal Aristotelian statements makes an objective category that can be distinguished from the role of the self. Finally, Evans keeps the contrast between fact and evaluation which Austin eliminates, in order to separate self-involving roles (evaluation) from non-self-involving roles. So these differences allow Evans to characterize a role for the self which can be distinguished from more Aristotelian statements of fact.

341 On Aristotle and metaphors.

342 Evans, p223

343 We interpret Evans' "rapportive" with "recursive" use of language that implicitly requires a role for the self.

Evans attempt to promote the recursive speech act, one that is aware that it is “making a statement.” Austin's other student, John Searle, however, blurs over these distinctions in a manner that obscures and makes it difficult for performatives to express attitudes, a problem which we discuss next in the context of modern speech act theories.

4. Reductionism in Modern Speech Act Theory Developed by John Searle (b. 1932)

Because Austin wrote little before his untimely death, and because his most complete presentation was riddled with contradictions, Searle's great contribution was to clarify Austin's SAT through careful definitions of illocutions and the institutional facts that support them. He expanded the last chapter of Austin's *How To Do Things With Words* to eight categories of illocutions in his 1969 description of Speech Act Theory,³⁴⁴ which by 1975 was reduced to five exclusive categories.³⁴⁵ Yet despite his stated desire to counter the reductionist approach to language of positivists such as Russell, his SAT paradoxically excluded the same religious use of language as Russell's theory! Russell had said that religious language had no content because it was not propositional, and Searle argues that it only has content because it is institutional, but both solutions deny any meaning to Evan's expressives, to non-institutional, non-propositional language such as private prayer, confession, worship, or praise.

Briggs argues that Searle goes astray when he replaces Austin's Trinitarian “utterances” with “propositions”, adopting the tools of Russell to analyze all language use.

The potential problem is then that these abstract entities assume a life of their own, and start to dictate terms[attempting] to get away from the mistaken methods of syntactic-semantic approaches [positivism] but without necessarily eschewing the goals of such theories.³⁴⁶

So whether it was the methods or the goals, Briggs argues that Searle appropriated too much from Russell, which doomed his SAT to the same limitations. We attribute this limitation to Searle's omissions as much as his appropriations, for he abandons the three-fold categories of Austin in elevating propositions, neglecting perlocutions in the process, and absorbing the role for the self into an antecedent “sincerity” condition.³⁴⁷ Each of these changes make it difficult for his SAT to achieve what his fellow graduate student Evans accomplished six years previous. For Searle begins by setting illocutions against propositions, rather than incorporating propositions as a type of illocution.

I am distinguishing between the illocutionary act and the propositional content of the illocutionary act. . . . From this semantical point of view we can distinguish two (not necessarily separate) elements in the syntactical structure of the sentence, which we

³⁴⁴ John Searle “A Theory of Speech Acts” 1969.

³⁴⁵ John Searle “A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts” in Keith Gunderson (ed.) *Language, Mind and Knowledge: Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, Minneapolis: U of MN Press, 1975.

³⁴⁶ Briggs p 49

³⁴⁷ For example, Searle incorporates the self into preliminary conditions that make an illocution “felicitous”, as seen in his table (p. 67) in which he lists eight speech acts: Request, Assert, Question, Thank, Advise, Warn, Greet and Congratulate. In each speech act he characterizes their felicity as Propositional Content, Preparatory [conditions], Sincerity [of speaker], and Essential [characteristics]. Using our Trinitarian categories ART or person/meaning/text we see that propositional content is the text, preparatory conditions along with Essential characteristics are the reception/meaning, and sincerity is the author/person. In his emphasis on rules and institutional facts, Searle completely neglects to develop sincerity, and seemingly views it as an optional criteria for the validity of some illocutionary acts, not including “greeting.” I would argue that even there, sincerity is required, as an angry greeting is rarely accepted as such. This chart captures both Searle's reductionist approach, his minimization of self, and his false objectivity.

might call the propositional indicator and the illocutionary force indicator.³⁴⁸

By defining illocutions as having “force” and setting them against objective “content,” Searle effectively excludes “expressives,” which made up one of the Trinitarian categories suggested by Ferre and Evans. Since illocutionary force will be found to depend on “institutional facts,” Searle has effectively re-objectified what Austin discovered through the subjective phrase “I promise,” thereby eliminating a role for the self. Very telling is his treatment of Austin's perlocutions, which show up in Searle's book only to be denied any important role in his SAT.³⁴⁹ Searle dislikes perlocutions because they focus on the actions or consequences of the self, while minimizing the importance of institutional facts.

If we could get an analysis of all (or even most) illocutionary acts in terms of perlocutionary effects, the prospects of analyzing illocutionary acts without reference to rules would be greatly increased. The reason for this is that language could then be regarded as just a conventional means for securing or attempting to secure natural responses or effects. The illocutionary act would then not essentially involve any rules at all. . . . I think this reduction of the illocutionary to the perlocutionary and the consequent elimination of rules probably cannot be carried out. It is at this point that what might be called institutional theories of communication, like Austin's, mine, and I think Wittgenstein's, part company with what might be called naturalistic theories of meaning, such as, e.g., those which rely on a stimulus-response account of meaning.³⁵⁰

Here Searle argues that illocutions are not based on force or effects but only on institutional facts, thereby denying the Trinitarian development of Ferre and Evans that do not privilege the conventional rules of language and culture over the subject of the speech act.

The purpose of this suppression of the subject becomes apparent when Searle derives ethics from his SAT in his final chapter: *Deriving “Ought” from “Is”*.³⁵¹ Searle argues that institutional facts bridge the chasm between fact and value, which had been opened up by the positivist claim that descriptive statements of fact could not produce the ethical force of value. But in Searle's derivation, he has no use for either absolutes or a role for the self.

We have thus derived . . . an “ought” from an “is”. . . . Note also that the steps of the derivation are carried on in the third person. We are not concluding “I ought” from “I said” “I promise”, but “he ought” from “he said “I promise”. The proof unfolds the connection between the utterance of certain words and the speech act of promising and then in turn unfolds promising into obligation and moves from obligation to “ought”. . . . Thus, by presenting the quoted expressions . . . we have as it were already invoked the

348 Searle, p30.

349 Searle uses the word “perlocution” and derivatives only 18 times in his book. The first two repeat Austin's definition, the next 13 deny that Grice's perlocutionary effect actually exists. The last 3 indicate that some illocutionary verbs are defined by their perlocutionary effects, but this does not eliminate the necessary institutional fact.

350 Searle, p71

351 Searle makes it clear that the Russell scheme for converting language into symbolic logic, or the Fregean approach to language is the object of his analysis in this chapter. In these positivist schemes, there is a great chasm between fact and value, between descriptive language and evaluative morals. Searle shows that this gulf is easily spanned by constitutive rules, by institutional facts that carry both description and evaluation in their baggage.

institution of promising.³⁵²

Searle is very clear that this ethical force is independent of the speaker, of the “I,” since he says it can be derived from third-person speech invoking an institutional rule.³⁵³ Ethics, according to Searle, is an arbitrary function of a community, which in the end, provides no more absolute guidance than the positivist separation of fact and value.

But Searle is not consistent, for his ethics actually does involve more than institutional facts, when he invokes a role for the self while fending off several vigorous critiques.³⁵⁴

The notion of an obligation is closely tied to the notion of accepting, acknowledging, recognizing, undertaking, etc., obligations in such a way as to render the notion of an obligation essentially a contractual notion.³⁵⁵

Here Searle is arguing that an illocution is a contract, which means that it is not merely that the speaker is “sincere” but that the self is recognized and authorized to make a covenant. One sees in this admission the potential for a covenantal view of all illocutions, especially with regard to ethics.³⁵⁶ Likewise, Searle finds self-commitments are necessary to answer critics who put “scare quotes” around an ethical illocution so as to deny it of any ethical force,³⁵⁷ concluding his book with a screed against Derrida's post-modern critique,

But the retreat from the committed use of words ultimately must involve a retreat from language itself, for speaking a language—as has been the main theme of this book—consists of performing speech acts according to rules, and there is no separating those speech acts from the commitments which form essential parts of them.³⁵⁸

For if Searle's speech acts are essentially connected to commitments, which is the same word Evans uses, then they require a role for the self, and are not simply a product of institutional facts. Searle does not resolve this inconsistency, nor do the many modern SATs that followed upon Searle's exposition; they all failed to grasp the ethical force inherent in Jesus' parable of The Sower.³⁵⁹ Thus the

352 Searle p181-182.

353 This manner of deriving ethics, however, ultimately becomes a capitulation to positivism, because it results in the same outcome--an ethical relativism that depends only on culturally determined constitutive rules.

354 The positivist attempt to deny ethical force has been often argued as the fundamental purpose of all forms of materialist reductionism, going back to Lucretius' (50BC) *De rerum Natura*, wherein the power of the gods is denied. So it is not surprising that Searle's attempt to reintroduce ethical force into illocutionary acts is likewise resisted.

355 Searle p189.

356 It is most peculiar that Searle, a junior graduate student of Austin's to Evans, neither cites Evans nor attempts to address positivists with Evans critique, nevertheless, ends up using exactly the same terminology in his parenthetical defense of personal commitments. One almost senses that Searle is aware of Evans approach and its importance for theology and is carefully stepping around this issue so as to arrive at his “institutional fact”-only conclusion.

357 Searle emphasizes the personal commitment involved in language (p. 197) “The fact that one can adopt a detached attitude toward anything at all is irrelevant to the validity of deductive arguments involving the committed use of the words involved. If it were really a valid objection to the derivation in section 8.1 to say that by reinterpreting the words in a detached anthropological sense we can produce an invalid argument, then the same objection would refute every possible deductive argument, because every valid argument depends on the committed occurrence of the terms crucial to the derivation.”

358 Searle p197-198.

359 The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on Speech Act Theory has a brief introduction by Green that includes

development of a more self-consistent SAT languished for thirty years until several theologians began to modify it for use in Biblical Theology.

In the next section we discuss the important reformulations of Speech Act Theory by Richard Briggs, Kevin Vanhoozer and Vern Poythress who have separately addressed the need for Trinitarian categories and a role for the self.

B . The Speech Act Theory of Richard Briggs, Kevin Vanhoozer and Vern Poythress

Biblical exegesis has become increasingly sophisticated as the insights of linguistics have penetrated the field,³⁶⁰ and among the many approaches, the work of Briggs, Vanhoozer and Poythress stand out in their use of speech act theory, their reliance on Trinitarian categories, and their involvement of the self. In addition, there is an overt commitment to a Reformed perspective in both Vanhoozer and Poythress, and a more implied commitment to Anglicanism in Briggs that gives all three of them a common worldview. Therefore we consider their work as an integration of a classical Reformed perspective with modern exegetical approach, which partake of very similar presuppositions as this thesis.

The first challenge that all three theologians have had to face is how to incorporate a Speech Act Theory that has been hijacked by Searle's reductionist view of language, which is too limiting to carry the power of Evan's expressives, of the self-involving language of Biblical Theology. In their response, Briggs, Vanhoozer and Poythress arrive at a remarkably similar consensus that reductionism is avoided by invoking a complete, Trinitarian scheme that in some manner, involves the self. A second related challenge is finding a way to respond to the opposite challenge of an explosion of perspectives that denies any general truths. In their response to the post-modern critique, all three theologians rely on a unity of the text, and the ability for language to perform reliable speech acts. A third related issue is their response to the post-modern critique that all exposition and exegesis is a projection of the self, an intellectual power-play that imposes one's view on others, making it impossible for exegesis to convey absolute ethical demands. Our intent in this section is to show the coherence and versatility of all three views, both in providing a non-reductionistic understanding the parable of the Sower as well as a critique of the post-Modern interpretation of this parable.

Despite these similarities, there are also several differences which perhaps have prevented these theologians from seeing a commonality in their exegetical approach. Richard Briggs, following in the footsteps of his advisor, Anthony Thiselton, and living in the long shadow of Ludwig Wittgenstein, develops a British analytic adaptation of SAT to Biblical Theology. Kevin Vanhoozer, taking a more theological stance, follows the Dutch tradition (as modified by Scottish Realism) of using a Reformed framework to adapt SAT to Biblical Theology. Vern Poythress chooses a decidedly Evangelical slant to the Dutch Reformed tradition (as represented by Cornelius Van Til) in his application of John Frame's pragmatic and Trinitarian SAT to Biblical Theology. These three approaches to Biblical Theology demonstrate the three basic perspectives discussed earlier: Briggs following a British emphasis on empirical epistemology; Vanhoozer demonstrating a Continental emphasis on metaphysical constructs; and Poythress expressing a pragmatic American concern for ethics, apologetics, and evangelism.

Our goal in this section is not to create barriers or distinctions between these various

some areas of disagreement and current study. Everyone of these areas seems to involve a role for the self that is improperly handled by the theory. Thus it would seem that Searle's failure to incorporate the self has permeated the field.

360 See for example James Barr “ “, Moises Silva “Biblical Words and their Interpretation”

approaches, but rather to show how they all have the same critics, the same goals, and employ the same tools, albeit with differences of emphasis that complement and enrich the interpretation. As we put together our interpretive tools for understanding the Parable of the Sower, we incorporate the insights of Briggs, Poythress and Vanhoozer into a common approach that we call Reformed Speech Act Theory (RSAT).

Reformed Speech Act Theory is the bridge that has the potential to bring together three different strands of Biblical Theology into a common framework, combining Briggs linguistic concerns with Vanhoozer's theological interests and Poythress' evangelical emphases. For example, evangelical concerns have often been an addendum to Biblical Theology, much as the sermon application has been an independently motivated appendix to the exegetical portion. But RSAT has the ability to make the ethical force of the text an integral part of the exegesis, so that in addition to information and persuasion, the text also supports ethical demands. This means that RSAT is the only approach we are aware of that can at the same time and without contradiction, discern the general meaning, find its particular application and apply moral force, integrating empirical, philosophical and evangelical approaches to Biblical Theology into a common framework.

Can such a tool remain coherent and unified without the different emphases conflicting? In the next three sections, we look at some of their differing responses to Modernist and Post-Modernist critics, attempting to show how our addition of recursion to RSAT is the bridge that unites all three emphases—enabling an approach to certain knowledge, delineating the properties of certain metaphysical constructs, and making ethical demands more powerful.

1. *The Trinitarian Nature of RSAT*

We said that one of the uniting features of Briggs, Vanhoozer and Poythress was their use of a Trinitarian construction in overcoming the Modernist limitations of Searle's reductionist SAT. In this section, we endeavor to show how each theologian approaches and incorporates Trinitarian categories into their SAT and how this is truly a single, unified approach deserving of a single, comprehensive title of our RSAT.

It is not coincidental that both Austin and Briggs have adopted a Trinitarian structure of locutions, illocutions, and perlocutions. Like his compatriot Austin, however, Briggs argues that this is merely a practical division, without the metaphysical significance attributed to it by Vanhoozer,³⁶¹ because the metaphysics of language play little role in his empirical understanding of hermeneutics. At the same time, Briggs finds much inspiration in the work of Evans, who does attribute significance to this three-fold division, and indeed, goes to great lengths to keep three categories while extensively modifying Austin.³⁶² Briggs also affirms the work of Sadock, who found that a Trinitarian structure arose in all 23 languages he analyzed.³⁶³ So we see in Briggs a more than practical, but an implied

³⁶¹ Briggs, p26 Powerful and suggestive as his analysis is, it remains largely at this level of theological conceptualisation and does not engage with particular interpretive issues in biblical texts. Not all will be persuaded that "Speech act theory serves as a handmaiden to a trinitarian theology of communication?" and nor is it entirely evident that there need be a clear correlation between the Father and the locution, the Son and the illocution and the Spirit and the perlocution, as is suggested both here and elsewhere.

³⁶² Note how Briggs and Sadock both criticize Searle for attempting a 5-fold categorization.

³⁶³ Briggs p57, He [Sadock] labels these INF, AF and EF, and proceeds to demonstrate how various of Austin's insights into the peculiarities of performative utterance work out in this schema, as well as providing sample analyses of stating, requesting, promising, apologising, asking, accusing and criticizing." "Each speech act can be primarily any one of these three types of act, with aspects of the other dimensions also possibly present. In considering any particular speech act, therefore, a key question is: which dimension is primary?"

necessity for a three-fold structure that confirms our claim for a unifying Trinitarian approach.

In contrast to Briggs, Vanhoozer finds it a highly theological statement that language is constituted on Trinitarian foundations. Since language is not merely a creation of man, but a gift of God to man, it must reflect the divine communication of the Trinity. This is why he attempts to identify locution, illocution, and perlocution with the Father, Son and Spirit. While perichoresis causes a diffusion of attributes that makes all such mappings problematic, (which is perhaps why Briggs remains unconvinced,) Vanhoozer's principle purpose was to show how a three-fold approach to Scripture can enlarge a two-fold interpretation to include illocutionary force in addition to content and persuasion. This inclusion of a third category demonstrates the importance of Trinitarian categories to his SAT.

Poythress' views are more complex, since his background in mathematics preclude him from the easy empiricism of Briggs. Nor is he apparently comfortable applying theoretical constructs from systematic theology to the metaphysics of reality as Vanhoozer does, because metaphysics should be God-made, whereas theological constructs are often man-made. Nevertheless, from the very beginning of his career he has remarked on the empirically observed Trinitarian structure of reality, and his own hermeneutical method is three-fold.³⁶⁴ But when asked to defend his three-fold system, he is noticeably reticent to declare it metaphysically or epistemologically necessary, relying instead on its efficacious nature for changing us³⁶⁵. Along with his mentor Frame, he argues that right models derive their validity from right results, and a Trinitarian structure produces the best result.

Regardless of how Trinitarian categories were discovered or defended, they are an essential distinction of their respective SATs. Briggs' concern for linguistic function has a much deeper rooting in the nature of complete categorization schemes, so that in ways neither theological nor pragmatic, language must of necessity be Trinitarian, which is apparent in his quotation of Sadock's discovery of a Trinitarian scheme in 23 different languages. Nor is Vanhoozer's analogy between the three speech acts and the Trinity merely coincidental, for in the same way that the Trinity is complete yet perichoretic, so also language requires complete yet complementary (not exclusive) categories.³⁶⁶ Even Poythress' ethical force is a consequence of the Trinitarian structure of language so that it is not just that right exegesis is known by its fruits (perlocution), but that its method must possess ethical force (illocution).

All three of these theologians have constructed Trinitarian SATs, which have greater utility than perhaps they have envisioned. The Trinitarian character of language is not merely a hermeneutical artifact, as Briggs would argue, nor simply an ontological reality necessitated by theology, as Vanhoozer says, nor even a single requirement for directing ethical force, as Poythress suggests, but the foundation for a three-fold classification tool that properly includes a role for the self.³⁶⁷ Trinitarian categories are therefore a robust property of the RSAT.

2. *The Meaning of RSAT.*

The second challenge faced by all three SATs, which inspires a common response, is the post-modern argument that all perspectives on Scripture are equally valid, so that the parable of the Sower is

³⁶⁴ Poythress, "[Newton's Laws as Allegory](#)", 1983, *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 35/3:156-161., "Why Must Our Hermeneutics Be Trinitarian" 2006,

³⁶⁵ Poythress, "Christ the Only Savior of Interpretation" 1988

³⁶⁶ While Vanhoozer may insist that the Trinity is known only by revelation, there is also a sense in which language discovers these truths the same way that mathematics discovers its theorems.

³⁶⁷ The ontological requirements of a complete scheme coupled with a role for the self and its recursively directed ethical demands necessitate the three-fold character of RSAT.

expected to be multivalent and without a fixed meaning. This criticism has the converse that all generalizations about the meaning of the parable must be false to some degree, since all claims to exclusivity, all pronouncements of absolutes, must be denied. Applying this criticism to their respective SATs, the question is whether a SAT is merely another biased tool for exegeting the text so as to arrive at a pre-ordained outcome, or whether it is a general philosophy for understanding all texts without prejudicing the result. In the first case, SAT is merely an optional exegetical method on a par with other methods, whereas in the second case, SAT is the universally valid exegetical method.

Briggs responds to this post-modern criticism by demonstrating the objectivity and utility of SAT for finding meaning in places where post-Moderns could not, so that for all their vaunted polyvalent richness, they have drawn a hermeneutical circle around nothing. Vanhoozer argues that polyvalency is expected in Biblical language, for as soon as the meaning includes our response and our interaction with the text, the result must be polyvalent. But rather than grant us license to allow every meaning, the polyvalency is instead serving a single purpose. Poythress picks up on this single intention, and argues that it is this single purpose that unites the polyvalent or “multiperspectival” meanings of Scripture. Each of these views opposes the post-modern critique, but uses a different role for RSAT in the response: a rational, illocutionary, or perlocutionary role, respectively.

In the preface to his book, Briggs says that he does not want to argue for SAT as a worldview or as a general philosophy but is merely presenting a useful tool for understanding the text in its local context.³⁶⁸ Perhaps because of the British empirical tradition, Briggs is predisposed toward practical and empirical exegesis with an emphasis on clarity and simplicity, which in terms of the parable of the Sower, would analyze the text by what it says in its local context, allowing for a philosophical perspective only when it provides precision tools for the analysis.

In contrast, the Continental tradition of Vanhoozer attaches more significance to the global character of Scripture, finding universal truths and support of a comprehensive worldview.³⁶⁹ In terms of The Sower, Vanhoozer would ask how the parable contributes to Biblical doctrine in an essential role,³⁷⁰ and not simply as a pedagogic prop for the listeners by the lake. This question is often recast in terms of context, whether local context is more important for exegesis, or whether global context is more significant. In terms of the parable of the Sower, is the purpose *hina*, as the local context suggests,³⁷¹ or is it *hoti*, as the global context might demand?

Poythress with the Evangelicals rightly dismisses the apparent inconsistency, arguing that both approaches should find the same unifying truth,³⁷² yet when confronted with real irreconcilable differences between *hina* and *hoti*, there is apparently no consensus among commentators.³⁷³ Supporting whichever view is most useful³⁷⁴—*hina* for church members and *hoti* for evangelism—is implicitly a concession to cultural norms, which would appear to adapt exegesis to pragmatic temporal concerns.

We argue that both contexts are correct, if we understand *hina* and *hoti* to lie not on the horns of

368 Briggs, p17...

369 Vanhoozer, “First Theology” p200...

370 Vanhoozer entitled a subsequent volume “The Drama of Doctrine” expressing his SAT worldview.

371 The debate often takes the form of Biblical Theology versus Systematic Theology, with some arguing for the precedence of one over the other, or for a temporal progression that begins with one before the other.¹ This divide is exacerbated by the tendency for scholars to divide into one camp or the other, using different tools and jargon and academic standards. In more concrete terms,

372 Poythress “Symphonic Theology” calls it multiperspectivalism

373 See for example, “Context in booktitle”

374 This is Kermode’s criticism of most commentaries on the verse.

a dilemma, but on the vertices of a Trinity that includes the self. When the self is recursively invoked by the text, then both of these functions become real and actual, for the text operates on our reception of the text (*hina*), in order that our motives can be revealed (*hoti*). The text is localized for each person who hears it, in order that global truths, universal doctrines can be revealed. For those who want to hear, the text produces belief, making it an evangelical text—not from its form or beauty or logic—but from its incisive judgment upon ourselves. Its evangelical value lies not in its appeal, but in its lack of appeal, or more precisely, in its ability to force a decision.

Thus the local contextual application to meaning desired by Briggs, the global worldview advocated by Vanhoozer, and the evangelical emphasis of Poythress all contribute to the meaning of the text in ways that complement and enhance the others, in a manner described by the RSAT. This is not the polyvalent contradiction claimed by post-Modernists, for all these meanings coinhere as a single language act properly analyzed by a single approach. For the RSAT is at the same time a method of exegesis as Briggs would assert, a definition of exegesis as Vanhoozer insists, and a result of exegesis as Poythress desires; it is Trinitarian model that contains all three SATs in a propositional, illocutionary, and perlocutionary speech act.

3. *The Ethics of RSAT*

The third challenge faced by all three theologians is the claim that subjectivity destroys the ethical force of exegesis, of any SAT. The Modernist would argue that subjectivity destroys morals because ethics only has force if it is externally determined, if it apply equally to all people. So if the tools of exegesis are to have ethical force, they must be value-neutral, because then the objective attitude and pure approach of the informed user will convey ethical power. The Post-Modernist insists that all tools are merely weapons in the power-play of intellectual conquest which can never be pure or objective so it is the end result which validates the tool.³⁷⁵ The Pre-Modernist sidesteps subjectivity by transferring the problem to a higher authority, so that exegesis can carry ethical force whenever it is applied by an ordained user. Which of these views constitutes the proper use of RSAT: the means, the end, or the authorization? Who is permitted to exegete ethical force, and what validates the results?³⁷⁶

We argue that it is possible to restore ethical force to exegesis even in the presence of subjectivity, if that subjectivity is properly addressed by the method. Since the RSAT tool is capable of self-examination, it can escape the Modernist and Post-Modernist critique of arbitrary subjectivity, as well as the Pre-Modernist critique of unauthorized authorization.³⁷⁷ In order for RSAT exegesis to carry valid ethical force, the exegete must be willing to allow his own words and authorization to be analyzed in the same fashion as he analyzes others, he must be self-consistent. Since neither the Modernist, Post-Modernist nor Pre-Modernist critique is capable of this, the RSAT immediately sets itself apart from other exegetical tools. In the SATs of these three theologians, we see how they self-consistently

³⁷⁵For example, today's courts argue that discrimination against minorities must have occurred if the results show any bias, independent of whether the process was fair or not.

³⁷⁶If this seems an odd question to be asking, consider how many rules there are regarding the proper use of "grammatical" versus "metaphorical" exegetical methods. Or consider the post-modern critique that says we can interpret the interpreter's interpretation as intending to impose his views, and therefore all interpretations are recursively deconstructed into power politics. Rules about the use of rules are unavoidable, and arise from ethical demands inherent in the tool itself. What sort of demands does the tool of RSAT present to us, and are they consistent with previous work?

³⁷⁷Unlike the Modernist critique of subjectivity, the RSAT has a role for the self, so that it can address subjective ethics and potentially validate the self. Unlike Post-Modernists, the self can be the object of the RSAT having its own words analyzed in the same fashion as it analyzes others. And unlike the Pre-Modernist, even the deputization, the vows of ordination, are likewise subject to the same tool.

address the subjectivity problem.

Briggs responds to the critique of subjectivity by focussing on the externals of the text as supporting a rational meaning, yet without advocating a return to objectivity. Unlike Vanhoozer, he does not embrace subjectivity, nevertheless in pointing out the illocutionary force of textual statements, he is drawing attention to the unavoidable participation of the SAT exegete in the meaning of the text. His response solves the problem of subjectivity by authorizing the SAT tool to find ethical force in the text.

Vanhoozer, in embracing subjectivity, argues that the proper exegesis of the text requires an interactive component, much as Existentialists argued that the necessary point of the parable was to change our reality. For Vanhoozer, the controlling metaphor of exegesis is that of a drama that incorporates our words and actions into the emotional catharsis of Aristotle's literary theory. The SAT carries ethical force because of subjectivity, by involving the practitioner into the action of the text itself. The subject of the text has been authorized to receive ethical force.

For Poythress and many Evangelicals, the exegesis has an ethical purpose, which is discovered by its fruit, the productivity of the soils. Therefore the text is neither simply rationally nor emotively understood, but persuasively understood by its ability to produce fruit in spite of subjectivity.³⁷⁸ This purpose cannot be removed from its meaning, and the evangelical point of using SAT is found in its actualization, in the present effectiveness of the text to change hearts. The purpose, the object of the text has been authorized to demand ethical force.

We see in these categories the same constative, illocutionary, and perlocutionary divisions that reflect how all language operates, but now the SAT provides the ethical force on the self that emerges from the text. For in the RSAT it is not that the words contain simply a rational truth, or that they primarily function to persuade us of an action, or even that they construct a new reality or drama that includes us, but that all of these actions engage the self. Subjectivity is not a bad thing, if the text has a role for the self.

The critiques of Modernism, Postmodernism and Pre-Modernism can be turned to strengths once we have a procedure to validate subjectivity. The Modernists are correct in finding that the text conveys truth, but stop short of finding that it is about the self. For the truth conveyed is about the eternal destiny of the self; the persuasion desired is a change in that self's eternal destiny; and the reality constructed includes the invisible certainties of the self: its role, its purpose, and its final end. The Post-Modernists are correct in seeing that the end, the result of an exegesis, can support a purpose, but stop short in seeing that this purpose can be inherent in the text, a requirement for us. And the Pre-Modernists are also correct, for authority can only be bestowed through self-referring words. For ordination is an explicit submission to the authority of words, and therefore an implicit rejection of autonomy. This implicit agreement is what validates the RSAT exegete, for the results are only valid when they are sincere, when they show willingness to submit the self to the authority of the text itself.

Thus the RSAT overcomes the critique of subjectivity and carries ethical force by permitting the parable of the Sower to engage the self in a significant and real way, validating its value as doctrine, its power of persuasion, and its capability to construct reality, because it is a self-consistent, self-propagating, self-ordaining method.

³⁷⁸Philippians 1:18 Paul argues that the attitude is less important than the result, which is evangelism.

C. Conclusions

In this section, we have shown how the Speech Act Theory has developed into a general purpose tool that is useful for Biblical exegesis. Despite some historical detours, it has been adapted into a powerful Trinitarian scheme to confront both the Modernist and Post-Modernist critique. We have shown how our RSAT combines the emphases of three SATs composed by different biblical theologians into a single tool that can respond to the reductionist Modernist and the polyvalent Post-Modernist without neglecting the ethical concerns of the Pre-Modernist Evangelical. It accomplishes this task by using a complete three-fold scheme that includes a role for the self, which permits the RSAT practitioner to self-consistently (and recursively) allow his own analysis to be analyzed without contradiction.

With this RSAT tool in hand, we are now ready to engage the text of the Parable of the Sower, finding in it not only the solution to the paradox of Isaiah, but an illustration of the remarkable new instrument Jesus perfects for conveying his gospel message.