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Selected Avenues to Emotion-Oriented Interpretations of Ancient Religious Texts: Review and Outlook

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*For Professor D. Francois Tolmie's
65th birthday with appreciation*

Abstract: After sketching the difference between secular and religious texts regarding emotions and briefly scanning the role of psychology in the history of exegesis, the essay discusses five avenues to research on emotions that are coded in and evoked by religious texts (focus on the text as well as the recipient). Methodological issues are raised and impulses for research questions given. Avenues: (1) Definition issues regarding emotions are reflected. (2) Text-internal emotions: Within historical psychology, emotions can be studied from different angles (detecting emotions coded in historical texts; identifying conceptualizations and valuations of emotions across history and cultures; universality versus cultural dependency of emotion concepts and valuations; ethics of dealing with emotions from antiquity onward; historical psychology versus cross-cultural analysis of emotions). (3) Constructivist exegesis: Emotions are one of the sources of evidence that render religious propositions plausible and "true." (4) Emotions external to the text: Specific text factors steer the emotions of text recipients. The so-called "cognitive approach" (cognitive science of religion; cognitive narratology) is presented and empirical research advocated. (5) Emotions influence decision-making and behavior, which has implications for ethics.

Differing research tendencies challenge scholars to integrate them or to choose by exclusion (interest in historical psychology as supplement to the historical-critical

methods versus purely hermeneutical interest; theoretical emotion models generated by either empirical sciences or liberal arts; inductive versus deductive method).

Facing this book's interdisciplinary exchange, the role of my sketch is that of a can opener, not of a cook. Neither will I present a comprehensive history of research regarding our topic. Others have already described large parts of this history skillfully, including, e.g., Tanja Dannenmann in her excellent 2019 book *Emotion, Narration und Ethik*.¹ Nor will I systematize the diverse attempts to investigate emotions in relation to religious texts. Too much is still in flux. I will rather single out some topics deemed suitable to trigger methodological reflection, with methodology being a principal focus of this volume.

As a starter, some preliminary thoughts about our object of investigation – *religious* texts in their relation to emotions – are called for. What is the difference between secular and *religious* texts regarding emotions? Of course, there is the normative character of these texts for a community of believing text recipients who are grasped existentially by the texts. Much could be said about this. However, I am singling out something else: Religious texts circle around the notion of at least one (or more) higher beings, often called god, who is considered a personal being in many religious traditions. This god, empirically seen, is a mental construct, and I say this *without* making a statement about the ontic reality of such a higher being. Whether god “exists” on the ontic level or not is irrelevant for the moment, because in any of these two cases this god is a mental construct – no matter whether this construct

¹ Dannenmann 2019, especially 15–54. For literature focusing especially on the relationships of emotions/ethics, emotions/language & rhetorics, emotions/cognition as well as on historical psychology and on emotions in the process of the reception of texts, see 482–500. For the relationship emotions/rituals, see the collective volume edited by Al-Suadi, Ascough, and DeMaris 2021. For emotions especially in Biblical literature, the collective volumes edited by Black and Koosed 2019 and Spencer 2017. For modern religiosity and emotion, the recent volume edited by Bray and Moore 2020.

came into existence by self-revelation of an ontically existing god or merely by mental human activity. What happens in the reception process of religious texts is quite amazing: Human beings adhering to a religious tradition develop *emotions* and *sentiments*² toward their mental construct, even though it may not even have an equivalent on the ontic level and certainly cannot be seen or proven empirically. Yet, religious people “love” this mental projection, considering it to depict a being with personal qualities. They develop affection and the sentiment of love for this personal god. At times also anger with this god.

Of course, one can develop a crush on a human character in a secular novel, which also is an affective response to only a mental construct, but I dare say that the affection toward a god proclaimed by religious texts is more intense and long-lasting; it is a sentiment and thus of another quality than the crush on a literary figure.

As obvious as this affection toward divine mental constructs may seem, in antiquity, it could not be taken for granted as, for example, the official cults organized by the Roman state demonstrate. People did not express love towards these gods whom the state encouraged citizens to worship and whose cultic rituals the state asked them to follow, aiming to stabilize the world the worshippers lived in. Affection toward a deity was rather developed in the mystery religions with their initiation rituals for the individual – far from the collectively oriented state religion – as well as in early Judaism and early Christianity. It is still a desideratum to better study the affective side of god worship in especially Roman antiquity. Is there “love” toward the pagan gods, do they “love” their worshippers back? We ought to explore these questions more thoroughly to understand the religious contexts of ancient Jewish and Christian god worship. What we marvel at here is the amazing capacity of

² For these, see below.

humans to develop – and verbalize – affection toward imagined beings that cannot be seen and may not even “exist” ontically.

One would think that psychology had a lot to offer to the analysis of such religious verbalizations of affection. However, psychology in Biblical exegesis has long been taboo. It is true that already in the first half of the 20th century some liberal theologians such as Albert Schweitzer, Martin Dibelius, Carl Schneider and Karl Iver Madsen attempted to add some psychological categories to their historical-critical exegeses. But dialectical theology attacked this as despicable psychologism, prevailing over liberal theology.

In the 1970s, however, *secular* literary studies started to flourish focusing on psychological interpretation of literary texts. The student protests of the late 1960s blew fresh wind into people’s minds and led to the development of methodological toolboxes. This was also true for the exegesis of religious texts. In the late 1960s and in the 1970s, exegetes were emancipating from the dialectical theology of Barthian or Bultmannian provenance, which had claimed that psychology and sociology were not needed to understand Biblical texts. This methodological reductionism was soon overcome especially by *socio-historical* studies of early Christianity, using sociological theoretical tools to investigate the social world of the early Christ believers. However, also *psychological* interpretation was sprouting. Already in 1968 Kurt Niederwimmer and in 1975 Hanna Wolff published Jesus monographs using categories of depth psychology. In 1983, Gerd Theissen’s psychological interpretation of the apostle Paul, *Psychologische Aspekte Paulinischer Theologie*, was a milestone, created in cooperation with his wife, Christa Theissen, a trained psychologist, who has been averse to psychoanalytical approaches. Yet, psychoanalytical and depth-psychological approaches were not off the table, on the contrary. At the same time, in 1983 and 1986, books by Wayne Rollins and Gerald Slusser in the United States explored the application of C.G. Jung’s depth-psychological insights to the

interpretation of the Bible. In 1984/1985, Eugen Drewermann became well known with his two-volume *Tiefenpsychologie und Exegese*. His special depth-psychological approach to Biblical texts (and fairy tales) dealt with affective phenomena such as fear or guilt feelings and, focusing mainly on the modern text recipients, attempted to grasp the emotional elements within the process of understanding texts. His work has been very popular but also highly debated. The latter is also true for Gerd Lüdemann's book about Jesus's resurrection from 1994, which tried to build on the liberal theologians of the first half of the 20th century, claiming that the apostle Peter's psyche elicited the early Christian illusion that Jesus rose from the dead. Other players were Walter Rebell with his insightful sociopsychological study on Paul (1986), Martin Leiner, a student of Theissen, with his *Psychologie und Exegese* from 1995, and Michael Reichardt, who explored the possibility that Paul's vision at Damaskus can be explained psychologically (1999). He also offered a history of the relationship between psychology and exegesis, going back to even the 18th century.

All of this, reduced to a few selected glimpses, was part of a larger cultural context out of which emotion research emerged. In Biblical studies as well as in other disciplines, it has not been easy to establish this branch of research. After all, in the Kantian *Œuvre*, emotions were of little value³ until, for example, psychologists discovered that gut feelings play at least as much a role in decision making as the cognitive apparatus, the *ratio*.⁴ Often we are irrational beings, *contrary* to enlightenment anthropology.

In psychology, ethology and other academic disciplines, emotion research has gained significant momentum by now, particularly after the turn of the millennium. Already in 1980, the psychologist Paul Ekman, a pioneer in the study of emotions, together

³ Opposing the so-called *cultivation view* in Kantian studies, Thomason 2017 points out Kant's ambiguous stance on emotions. However, as a bottom line, she holds that, for Kant, emotions "disrupt the mind's composure and serve as a surrogate for reason." According to her, Kant thus does not recommend the cultivation of emotions.

⁴ Gigerenzer 2007 gives a fascinating first overview of these studies.

with coauthors, carried out experiments where subjects were asked to judge the emotional states of other persons. Since 1986, Martha Nussbaum has worked on rehabilitating emotions in philosophy, probably making Kant turn in his grave – at least halfway. In ethology, the science of animal behavior, to name another discipline, at first negative emotions but recently also positive emotional states in animals have been explored. We are not alone as emotional beings. Our evolutionary cousins, not just primates but also rats, for example, are able to sense pain as well as enjoyment, as can be observed by looking at proxy measures such as play behavior or specific vocalizations, but also by using more invasive biochemical analyses if ethically appropriate.⁵ Looking at our emotions, we look at our animalistic side – which often is not easy to control. Why do I mention ethology at all? Because it shows that a ripple of emotion research goes across most scholarly disciplines, from natural sciences to cultural studies.

In view of this wave of emotion research we talk about an “emotional turn” in scholarship, a term that Harald Euler and Heinz Mandl already used in 1983 in their handbook on *Emotionspsychologie*. In the new millennium this turn has been fueled significantly by the progress achieved in the neurosciences. Now even the cultural sciences have no longer been able to sleep through the noises of brain research. Literary studies, including exegesis, experienced their own emotional turn.

I will look at several avenues to emotion research in literary studies of religious texts, trying to focus on methodological issues and on *research questions* around which studies cluster or may cluster in the future.

1 Definitions

First, we need to define what the objects of our research are. Let me first propose a distinction between internal and external emotions regarding religious texts. The

⁵ See, e.g., Bekoff 2000, 861–870; J. Lampe 2017a, b; J. Lampe et al. 2019.

internal ones are coded emotions that these texts offer by, for example, mentioning emotions of the literary figures or the narrator(s) directly or hinting at them indirectly by showing their expressions (e.g., gestures/arm motions; see below). The external ones are emotions that these texts *evoke* in the text recipients by steering them by means of various literary techniques. What do you feel, as reader, when you read the description of a certain setting, such as a dark thunderstorm cloud over a field of a harvesting farm family? Or when the text steers you toward identifying with a literary figure? Thus, we deal with emotions internal and external to the texts, or more simply said: described and evoked emotions.⁶

Second, in a more basic way, we need to define what we mean by “emotion.” I propose a definition inspired by Michael Mendl and other ethologists:⁷ Emotions are inner psychic states, which correlate with somatic processes and affect an individual’s decision to perform a certain behavior that generally aims at procuring advantages/resources/rewards or at avoiding disadvantages/damage/punishment for the individual.

→ approaching behavior: advantages/resources/rewards
 Emotions → decisions → behavior: → survival
 → avoiding behavior: disadvantages/damage/punishment

What is intriguing in this definition is that it includes decision-making about behavior, so that – *a priori* – a bridge to ethics is built in, something many religious texts are concerned about. Furthermore, the somatic correlates of emotions are

⁶ Similar distinctions were made by scholars such as Silke Jahr 2000 and Simone Winko 2003, who differentiated between the perspectives of the author and the recipient, that is, between author-centered and reader-centered analysis (yet, also between text-centered and context-centered analysis). As literary critics, for a long time now, have been critical of the availability of auctorial intentions (see already Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946), let alone intentions of ancient authors, I will rather stick to a text-centered and reader-centered approach, with the latter being able to be investigated empirically if we deal with present readers (see below).

⁷ See, e.g., Mendl et al. 2009; Ortony et al. 1988; Cabanac 1992; Jenkins and Oatley 1996; Cardinal et al. 2002; Rolls 2005; Russel and Barrett 1999.

considered. They include biochemical, endocrinological processes as well as macroscopic somatic correlates of emotions such as facial expressions.

What is missing in this definition is to specify the relation between *emotion* and *mood* ("Stimmung") as an inner state lasting longer than an emotion, while a *sentiment* lasts even longer than a mood. Sentiment is a lasting affective attitude towards an object, for example, love towards one's child or towards a god. For a short time though a sentiment can be accompanied by expressions of opposing emotions: I love my teenaged children even while, for a short interval, I can be angry with them; they even can cloud my mood for a few days, but not my love. The same pertains to the relationship with God as, for example, the Lamentations in the Hebrew Bible demonstrate, with the *sentiment* of human love toward God temporarily being paralleled by *emotions* of disappointment and sadness. It would be advantageous for religious studies to use such definitory distinctions instead of perpetuating terminological confusion.

Are there more features that distinguish *emotion*, *mood* and *sentiment* from one another – besides duration? For example, the relatedness to a specific trigger event, with mood (e.g., elation or melancholy) being unrelated to a trigger event? I leave this open for discussion.

In addition, how does the term *feeling* relate to the three affective phenomena just mentioned? The psychology of emotions reserves "feeling" to the *subjective* experience of an emotion, thus focusing on the experiential aspect of emotions. Manfred Holodynski's intriguing contribution to this volume will clarify this further. He also offers a differing definition of "emotion," and I purposefully chose one inspired by Michael Mendl and other ethologists to demonstrate the challenges of definition we face when working across disciplines.⁸

⁸ For additional definitions of "emotion", cf. the contribution by Peetz in this volume.

2 Text-Internal Emotions: Emotion Research in Historical Psychology

Besides definition issues, the next avenue to our topic is to investigate emotions in ancient religious texts. First, how are they verbalized, especially in narratives? Are they directly mentioned or only hinted at indirectly, for example, by staging their expressions such as somatic correlates (e.g., a gesture or a motion of the arms) or speech acts (e.g., a curse) or interjections (e.g., *ouch*)? Furthermore, is the association of a certain somatic expression with a particular inner psychic state of an emotion culturally determined, thus varying across cultures?

Second, a history of concepts of emotions: Is an emotion termed in one linguistic-cultural context identical with an emotion in another one? For instance, is the Greek λύπη the same as "Trauer" in German?⁹ [The answer is no (see below)]. The historians' task is to explore the history of what people of various historical periods and cultures thought about emotions. How did they conceptualize and categorize them? Thus, a *history of concepts of emotions* is of interest. Are there certain developments across time periods?¹⁰

Third, to single out one aspect of concepts of emotions: how did ancient religious texts evaluate specific emotions? Behind the emotions coded in texts there are usually *culturally dependent valuations* of these emotions.¹¹ Were certain emotions seen as negative or positive in the text and/or its surrounding culture? Was it appropriate to show them or rather hide and suppress them in self-censorship? The same can be asked about the external, evoked emotions in text recipients. Views about what a "correct" reception of a religious text should be are culturally dependent. To give a drastic example: Reading that King David observed a naked Bathsheba bathe, had sexual intercourse with her, and got rid of her husband, the

⁹ Cf. von Gemünden 2009, 13–33; van Wolde 2008; the contribution by Grant about hate in this volume.

¹⁰ For this question, cf. the contribution by Barth in this volume.

¹¹ Cf. also the contribution by Bauer in this volume.

text recipient is expected to have a culturally acceptable emotional reaction: indignation, disgust as well as anger about a cruel and macho David and his abusing power structures. Or is the reader allowed also to have a spark of voyeuristic joy? Hardly, following the slant of the context. Thus, emotions evoked in the reception process also underlie positive or negative valuations.

Fourth, these valuations of emotions lead to the question: What did ancient texts say about how people should deal with various emotions such as anger, fear, pride, envy, guilt, or sadness? How should they use them, cope with them, regulate or control them, and to what extent? From Aristotle¹² to the Stoics to an abundance of religious, often ascetic, authors, there is much to say about ancient authors' ethics of dealing with emotions, from antiquity onward.

Overall, the historical approach is intriguing. One simple example of conceptualization of emotions was already mentioned. The Greek word λύπη means *pain* of the body or psyche, and then *grief*. However, the semantic range of λύπη is wider; in Greek it can even encompass aspects of anger. Both sadness and anger could be conceptualized as *one* emotion if they occurred together. In other words, in modern concepts that keep sadness and anger apart (e.g., in the model by Russell and Barrett 1999), λύπη would overstep the definition lines. This insight into an ancient concept of a particular emotion directly impacts our understanding of historical texts.

Petra v. Gemünden (e.g., 2009) has done remarkably insightful work on historical concepts of emotions.¹³ Others discussed emotions coded in ancient, particularly Biblical, texts as well. The authors of a volume edited by Scott Spencer (2017), for example, investigated grief, disgust, hate, and joy in Biblical literature from

¹² Cf. the contribution by Lienemann in this volume.

¹³ In this volume, she widens the angle using Greco-Roman artifacts.

perspectives of various scholarly disciplines. Matthew Elliott in 2006 explored what he called “faithful feelings” in the New Testament. Gerd Theissen and Petra v. Gemünden in 2007 edited the multi-author volume *Erkennen und Erleben*, which also contained work on emotions in historical texts. In 2015, Melanie Peetz expertly analyzed the emotions coded in the Hebrew Bible’s Song of Songs. Andreas Wagner in 2014 edited a volume on emotions in concepts of the divine in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East. In Pauline studies, Ian Jew (2022), Renate Egger-Wenzel and Jeremy Corley (2012), Thomas Olbricht and Jerry Sumney (2001), as well as Terrance Callan (1990), to name a few, focused on emotions. I myself investigated the interface between emotions and rhetoric (Lampe 2010a, b, c; 2007) and, from a constructivist perspective, examined emotions as one of the sources of evidence that guided early Christians in constructing their reality (Lampe 2012; 2010d; 2006; 1997).

Overall, the historical approach is akin to cross-cultural analyses of emotions. The latter have become oriented toward the *components* of emotions, as Manfred Holodynski in this volume illustrates, using the eight-component theory by Shweder et al. (2008). Although not all eight components can be identified in historical sources (e.g., heart rate reactions), such theories and their application offer stimulating heuristic tools to historical psychology.¹⁴ They are part of the Co-Constructivist Emotion Paradigm delineated by Holodynski (below), which deals with emotion as a socially constructed psychic function. According to this paradigm, emotions are culturally and collectively acquired reaction syndromes. It reminds us again that we as historians need to be cautious not to project our concepts of emotions onto ancient authors and text recipients, but to reckon with the fact that they conceptualized, regulated, and evaluated certain inner psychic states we call emotions quite differently.

¹⁴ The following components may well be applicable: (1) situational cause of the emotion, (2) appraisal of the cause in terms of its personal significance, (3) communication of the emotion through expression and language, (4) emotion-specific urge to act, (5) verbalized subjective feeling, (6) normative evaluation of the emotion by the social community, (7) social management and regulation of the emotion.

3 Constructivist Exegesis

I consider constructivist exegesis part of historical psychology, but the research question is different, which justifies dedicating an extra paragraph to it. On this third avenue to emotion research on religious texts we may ask what makes religious statements *plausible* to those people who accept them as truth for their lives and as guidance for their existence. The research question thus is: How did the Christians' construction of reality come about in the first century as an alternative to other conceptions of the world in the Roman-Hellenistic culture? An impressive achievement of reality construction is laid down in the New Testament. Was there something like "general rules" for constructing reality? I used a constructivist sociology-of-knowledge model to approach this question (Lampe 2012). In short: There are basically four sources of evidence that make us accept propositions as plausible and "true" for us.

- (1) The first is cognitive construction. It underlies certain norms to be able to generate plausible propositions, norms such as consistency, coherence, or comprehensiveness.
- (2) Second, empirical interaction with the external world is a source of evidence and plausibility. Sensory perception, however, is reliant upon concept-dependent categories of perception previously made available – thus on a priori categories of perception, as Kant already held – and therefore is dependent on culture. Empirical input is especially relevant for humans (a) if it can be repeated, (b) if it is widely spread, that is, many individuals can be exposed to it, so that intersubjectivity can be generated, and (c) if there is an institutional frame for it catalyzing intersubjectivity.
- (3) The third source of evidence is social confirmation, for example, by experts or peers; the consensus with others is important for our reality construction, also in scholarship.

(4) The fourth source of evidence is emotional experiencing. The role of emotions in the construction of reality cannot be underestimated. Already the Greek Sceptics knew that our perception is subjectively colored by our current emotional states, with us never perceiving an object in itself (καθ' ἑαυτό; Sextus Empiricus, *Phyrrhonianum* 1.100f.124; Lampe 2006, 77). Interpretations of something present or past – or expectations aiming towards the future – arouse emotions such as joy or repugnance. If these emotions are positive, plausibility is more likely to arise. If negative emotions are stirred up, repression processes can come into action. A troublesome insight, for example, into the scientifically proven danger of SARS-CoV-2 – although it is based on various sources of evidence – often is banished from the construct of reality and denial sets in. Or to name two simple historical examples: that God acted and brought about salvation through a crucifixion – on the “electric chair” of antiquity, so to speak – aroused disgust in antiquity. Therefore, such a teaching was not plausible for many and was not considered a building block for *their* construction of reality, as the apostle Paul admits (1 Cor 1:23). On the other hand, that pagan sympathizers on the fringes of the synagogues were no longer considered second-class believers but fully valid members of a congregation *without* the cost of circumcision aroused positive feelings towards the Christian variant of monotheism and opened up this group of pagans on the fringes of the synagogues for the Christian mission.

All in all, if we want to explain why and how early Christ believers constructed their view of the world the way they did, it does not suffice to look at traditions and written sources from which they could draw. We also need to explain why they chose certain traditions and rejected others. The mentioned sources of evidence help us understand a little better how the early Christ believers' world view came together. Emotions, as far as we can identify them in the ancient texts, played a significant role in this process.

4 Emotions External to the Text: Steering the Emotions of Text Recipients – “Cognitive Approach” – Empirical Research

A fourth avenue to emotion research of religious texts is to ask which emotions readers develop when being exposed to certain text factors. The question of how certain text factors steer the text recipients' emotions – and thus also behavior – has been tackled in various literary studies, e.g., in Kathrin Fehlberg's interpretive work on Arthur Schnitzler (*Gelenkte Gefühle*, 2014). I investigated this question regarding the apostle Paul's rhetorically canny letter to Philemon, which is an ancient masterpiece of steering the emotions of an addressee (Lampe 2010a). Fritz Breithaupt in *Kulturen der Empathie* (2009), for example, observed how narratives generate empathy and identification processes in the recipients, and a host of other studies¹⁵ analyzed the evocations of emotions in recipients of movies.

Under the heading of steering emotions, the so-called *Cognitive Approach* to religion, a relatively new field of exegetical research, needs to be introduced. In this field,¹⁶ two scholarly endeavors are relevant for Biblical studies: *CSR* (*cognitive science of religion*) and *cognitive narratology*. Both have in common that they use empirical findings and theories from neurosciences and psychology for their analysis of religious phenomena. In doing so, they draw not only, as one might misunderstand, on findings concerning human cognitive abilities, but on the entire spectrum of results from brain research and psychology, including, for example, research on motivation, volition, and emotions.

The difference between CSR and cognitive narratology is that cognitive narratology focuses specifically on biblical or religious *narrative* texts, their production and

¹⁵ E.g., Eder 2005; Ryssel and Wulff 2000; Wulff 2005; Groß and Morsch 2021.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Barrett 2000; Barrett 2007; Czachesz 2017; Finnern 2010, 36-45; Finnern and Rügemeier 2016, 174-175; Jung 2018; Lawson and McCauley 1990; Schüler 2012; Theißen, Chan and Czachesz 2017; Zerweck 2002. All with further literature.

reception. CSR, on the other hand, is concerned not only with texts but with all religious phenomena – such as rituals and cult practices, art products, forms of socialization, power structures, but also language (for instance sociolects or jargons), ways of thinking, or behavior. In the special case of Biblical studies, these religious phenomena are inferred from the Biblical texts as well as from early Jewish and pagan documents in the environment of the Bible, that is, not only from literary texts but also from epigraphic and papyrological documents as well as from archeological findings.¹⁷ In a next step, these religious phenomena are then illuminated from the perspectives of psychological and neuroscientific findings. Especially relevant for biblical studies are, for example, two CSR-oriented books from 2017, authored by Czachesz, and by Theißen, Chan and Czachesz.

As approaches of diverse theoretical provenance have come together under the umbrella of CSR, cognitive narratology can be conceived as part of CSR, with CSR being the superordinate term. To discuss cognitive narratology in more detail, I use one of its lines of inquiry as illustrating example.

In literary studies, narratology in its classical, structuralist phase focused on purely text-immanent aspects. Since the outgoing 20th century, however, also the real authors and especially the real, that is, historical text recipients and their ancient contexts have become increasingly important in narratology, for example, the prior knowledge of the historical recipients and their possibilities of understanding. In this way, the functioning of a narrative in a historical situation can be understood more clearly. Questions such as these are asked: How does a narrative play with preconceptions of the recipients, or how does a narrative direct the recipients' sympathies and empathies by shaping the literary characters in a certain way?

¹⁷ Cf. the contributions by Sonik and von Gemünden in this volume.

Only in recent years has Biblical exegesis taken up this post-classical, so-called “cognitive” narratology from literary studies. The Korean New Testament scholar In Jung (2020), for instance, showed that Luke's two books, his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, guide the readers to develop empathy and identification not so much with the Jesus figure, as one might expect, but especially with the literary figures of the apostles. Various narrative factors in Luke’s work steer away from the Jesus figure towards the apostles as objects of empathy. This has consequences for Luke’s Christology, with the Lukan Jesus being more removed from the readers, positioned back in history, so that his radicalism, e.g., his radical renunciation of possessions, is not propagated by Luke as a direct model for imitation by his readers.

Based on *contemporary empirical research* on the reception of narrative texts, literary scholars currently discuss which narrative factors steer the recipients’ empathy (see Jung 2020). Numerous factors to be considered include:

- the setting, including the so-called spatial filtering,
- representations of the internal views of the literary characters and the narrator,
- comments by the characters and the narrator,
- the way narrators and characters are shaped,
- similarities to life situations of the recipients,
- linguistic distances (that is, direct, indirect, or only reported speech),
- narrator participation (first-person versus third-person narrator).

All these factors appear to steer the empathy of the text recipients. More empirical research is needed to explore the relationship between certain narrative factors on the one hand and the steering of recipients’ empathy on the other, or more generally speaking, the relationship between certain narrative factors and the steering of emotions of recipients. Theorems regarding this relationship can only gain robustness if they can be backed up with empirical results. That is, the reactions of present-day recipients to certain narrative factors in texts need to be investigated by

drawing up empirical study designs with, for example, text readings in front of audiences and questionnaires. Otherwise, these theorems remain mere speculation based on intuitions of individual scholars and their own reading experiences.

Admittedly, we run the risk of anachronism when applying such results to ancient texts and try to infer ancient readers' emotional responses to these texts. But what choice of method do we have? We need to *combine* what we know about the ancient readers, their mindsets, and cultural horizons, with insights from present-day empirical work on reception processes.

The – maybe questionable – axiom behind such a method is that the human psyche has not changed significantly in the last two to three thousand years, with the evolution of this psyche having taken so much longer. Moreover, the same problem of anachronism has always shadowed interpreters of ancient texts, because to a certain extent they always let their own contemporary experiences seep into their interpreting processes, even if they consciously try to avoid this. This is a major methodological crux of all interpretation of historical texts.

Empirical investigation of not only empathy with literary figures but also readers' emotions in general is called for. For a pilot study that is still in progress, Heidrun Mader and I developed a questionnaire to screen the emotional responses to narrative texts using the questionnaire on students to whom selected Jesus parables were read aloud and who, at the same time, record at every step of the story what they feel as a reaction to the text. The large variety of emotional responses was surprising, much larger than expected. People's emotional responses to narrative texts, such as the parable of the Prodigal Son, differed significantly, depending, for example, on the subjects' emotional states at the beginning of the reading (baseline), on their age, gender, or personality type that they had to self-assess, as well as on previous life experiences, similar to those in the text. The texts apparently were more

open to varying reactions than predicted, offering more possibilities for recipients' emotions than rational historical-critical exegetes may be willing to admit. Many more samples of subjects still need to be added to the study before it makes sense to analyze the results statistically. The bottom line is that, as literary critics, we need to integrate more empirical exploration in our desk work – parallel to the current, albeit cautious, empirical turn in practical theology.

The diversity of recipients' emotional responses that surfaced in the pilot study leads to an additional empirical research question: Are there – despite the finding of diversity – *collective emotions*, triggered by collective rituals? When listening to the passion narrative together (or Bach's *Matthäuspassion*), individuals' emotions may converge. Furthermore, do collective emotions create more cohesion and solidarity among the text recipients – and if yes, for how long?

5 Emotions, Decision-Making, Behavior, and Ethics

As already indicated, emotions are related to decision-making and behavior, thus to ethics. In her 2009 book *Affekt und Glaube*, Petra von Gemünden, as a representative of historical psychology (see above), explored the relation between emotion and behavior. The same is true, e.g., for Matthew Schlimm (2017), focusing on anger, fear, and love. Using psychological emotion research, Tanja Dannenmann (2019) offers an innovative detailed method to analyze the emotional elements in the text *and* the text recipients, on the one hand, and the text-pragmatic, behavioral repercussions on the other, focusing on Matthew's Gospel. In this volume, the articles by Eckstein and Bauer impart further insights.

6 Closing Remarks

Coming to an end of this walk across a construction site, we perceive different interests: on the one hand, those scholars – a majority – who want to establish a historical psychology that better illuminates the experiences, norms, and behaviors of

historical Jews, Christians, and Muslims and the emotional impact that the ancient texts had on these groups in the past. They aim at supplementing the historical-critical and narratological methods with psychological tools. On the other side of the spectrum are those with purely hermeneutical interests without historiographical ambitions, focusing on the ancient religious texts' application to the existence of present-day readers – maybe even with a therapeutical effect as Drewermann wanted. Also here, of course, empirical investigation could be helpful, bordering practical theology, or rather sliding into it.

I end with a challenge to us scholars working in the *Geisteswissenschaften* (humanities, liberal arts). I am proposing that theoretical emotion models developed by contemporary, empirically based sciences should have precedence over models of emotions that were created in our past intellectual history in the liberal arts.

Regarding emotions, I believe that the *Geisteswissenschaften* can learn more from the empirical sciences than vice versa. Why? Because ingenious concepts of our liberal-arts intellectual history often were based on the experience of individual authors only, which is a random entity, while modern empirical research tries to discover theorems that are more representative of our human species. Therefore, it seems wise to use these empirically based recent insights as heuristic tools when approaching our historical material and literary texts.

We might deplore that an empirically based model is not complex enough compared to models developed during the history of philosophy. As historian and exegete, do I then choose the complex philosophical model as heuristic tool or rather the empirically based one? I vote for the latter, listening to Aristotle as he emphasizes the value of looking at the basic things that most creatures – humans and animals – have in common *before* our objects of research demand more complexity. According to Occam's razor, often the less complex model explains what we are trying to investigate.

Nevertheless, some liberal arts scholars will refuse to use a theoretical model as heuristic tool at all, preferring a strictly inductive method, while others will use the entirely opposite approach, starting with a model from the neurosciences as heuristic tool and then approaching the historical texts. Both the inductive and deductive approaches are presented in this volume.¹⁸ The intriguing question for me is: Would their results look different if they exchanged their respective methods?

The volume fills a gap by finally bringing various fields of religious and theological studies and other disciplines such as psychology and philosophy to the same table to reflect on how to investigate emotions coded *in* religious texts and evoked *by* them. For research on emotions in relation to religious texts, interdisciplinary cooperation is as vital as for other religious studies, that is, Jewish and Christian Biblical as well as Qu'ran studies. At various points of this article and this volume, the contextualization of ancient religious texts within the horizon of other documents and findings (literary texts, epigraphs, artifacts/images, and other archeological remains) is addressed as well as the use of various *methods* including empirical/statistical ones. Today's expertise lies in collective intelligence.

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¹⁸ Cf. the contributions by Grant and Oesterreich in this volume, respectively. However, often authors also blend the two methods.

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