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THE HORTATIVE AORIST

The final section on the aorist indicative in Goodwin's *Moods and Tenses* identifies the following usage: 'In questions with τί οὐ ['why not'], expressing surprise that something is not already done, and implying an exhortation to do it'.[1] Other scholars identify urgency or impatience in these questions. Albert Rijksbaron writes: 'Questions with the 1st or 2nd person of the aorist indicative, introduced by τί οὖν οὐ or τί οὐ, often serve, especially in Plato and Xenophon, as *urgent requests* [original emphasis] … The aorist indicative is more emphatic than the present: the speaker observes that a state of affairs which he apparently wants to occur has, in fact, not occurred, and he asks his interlocutor why it has not.'[2] Kühner and Gerth explain it as follows: 'Der Redende wünscht in seiner Ungeduld gewissermassen die begehrte Handlung als eine schon geschehene zu sehen' ('the speaker impatiently wants, as it were, to see the desired action as one that has already been done'). They contrast allegedly less urgent examples in the present ('der Ton der Frage ist alsdann ruhiger', 'the tone of the question is thereby milder').[3] These scholars stress the pastness of the aorist tense in communicating urgency and impatience: 'Why have you not …?'. This remains the dominant view, regularly repeated in commentaries.

A minority of scholars deny that these aorists refer to past time, and compare them to 'instantaneous' uses like ἥσθην or ἀπέπτυσα. E.S. Thompson found 'the same momentary or exclamatory force', and remarks it 'was not felt as a past tense', since we find it with primary sequence at Pl. *Prt*. 317d and *Prm.* 136c.[4] Thompson suggests that the present is more a question, while the aorist is more a command, contrasting English 'Why do you not tell him?' (question) and 'Why not tell him?' (command). He is certainly correct that these aorists have directive force, but so do many similar questions in the present (for example Xen. *Mem.* 3.1.10, Ar. *Eq.* 1207–8 and several other presents discussed in more detail below). Arjan Nijk, in a recent discussion (from which the term 'hortative aorist' is adopted here), takes a rather different view of the aspectual distinction between present and aorist.[5] He rightly criticizes the traditional view that the pastness of the aorist communicates impatience or urgency, observing that many of these

[1] W.W. Goodwin, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses of the Greek Verb* (corrected impression; London, 1912), §62; cf. H.W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, Mass., 1920), §1936.

[2] A. Rijksbaron, *The Syntax and Semantics of the Verb in Classical Greek* (Amsterdam, 2002[3]), 31.

[3] R. Kühner and B. Gerth, *Ausführliche Grammatik der griechischen Sprache* ii (Hanover and Leipzig, 1898–1904[3]), 1.165–6. Cf. P.T. Stevens, 'Colloquial expressions in Euripides', *CQ* 31 (1937), 182–91, at 184–5 ('in impatient questions, equivalent to an imperative or an exhortation'); he does not discuss this usage in *Colloquial Expressions in Euripides* (*Hermes Einzelschriften* 38) (Wiesbaden, 1976), so presumably decided that it was not colloquial after all.

[4] E.S. Thompson (ed.), *The Meno of Plato* (London, 1901), 189–90 (note on 92d).

[5] A. Nijk, 'How to control the present: a unified account of the nonpast uses of the aorist indicative', *JHS* 136 (2016), 92–112.

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questions are not particularly urgent, and that any hint of impatience would import an element of impoliteness which would clearly be at odds with the context (for example Pl. *Prt.* 317d, Xen. *Cyr.* 2.1.4). 'These problems disappear if we take the aorist in these questions as a present tense. The difference between the present and the aorist is then purely aspectual; the aspectual variation in hortative questions is fully parallel to that in the hortatory subjunctive (for example καλῶμεν versus καλέσωμεν).'[6] Nijk's explanation is theoretically plausible in linguistic terms, but is only illustrated by two contrasting pairs of passages, neither of which supports it. A number of counter-examples are also overlooked.

The present discussion will adopt a more inductive approach, beginning with a detailed examination of a reasonably wide range of hortative aorists, and then contrasting them with some examples of the present tense in similar constructions.

(1) Socrates goes to see Protagoras in the house of Callias, in order to introduce Hippocrates, a young admirer, to him. Protagoras explains that he would prefer to talk to him in public rather than privately, and Socrates continues the story as follows (Pl. *Prt*. 317d): καὶ ἐγώ—ὑπώπτευσα γὰρ βούλεσθαι αὐτὸν τῷ τε Προδίκῳ καὶ τῷ Ἱππίᾳ ἐνδείξασθαι καὶ καλλωπίσασθαι ὅτι ἐρασταὶ αὐτοῦ ἀφιγμένοι εἶμεν—**τί οὖν**, ἔφην ἐγώ, **οὐ** καὶ Πρόδικον καὶ Ἱππίαν **ἐκαλέσαμεν** καὶ τοὺς μετ᾽ αὐτῶν, ἵνα ἐπακούσωσιν ἡμῶν; 'And I—for I suspected that he wanted to put on a performance in front of Prodicus and Hippias, and show off that we had come as his admirers—"**Why then**", I said, "**do we not invite** Prodicus and Hippias and those with them to listen to us?".' Socrates has no reason to be impatient, as Protagoras has only just agreed to talk to Hippocrates in public, and there has therefore been no reason until now to consider inviting Hippias and Prodicus to join the audience. Socrates stresses his own tact, although his auditor and the reader may note some irony at Protagoras' expense.

(2) The young Socrates responds to Parmenides setting him a difficult task (Pl. *Prm.* 136c): ἀμήχανόν γ᾽, ἔφη, λέγεις, ὦ Παρμενίδη, πραγματείαν, καὶ οὐ σφόδρα μανθάνω. ἀλλά μοι **τί οὐ διῆλθες** αὐτὸς ὑποθέμενός τι, ἵνα μᾶλλον καταμάθω; 'It is a very difficult inquiry that you describe, Parmenides, and I do not entirely understand it. **Why don't you put forward a hypothesis and go through it yourself**, so that I might understand better?' When Parmenides refuses the task because of his age, Socrates turns to Zeno: ἀλλὰ σύ, … Ζήνων, **τί οὐ διῆλθες** ἡμῖν; '**Why don't you go through it** for us, Zeno?' The company then prevails on Parmenides to give a demonstration. Socrates is represented as an earnest young man who is eager to learn from these great thinkers, and the tone cannot be other than respectful.

(3) The Stranger suggests taking the discussion slowly, after Theaetetus has been unable to answer the previous question (Pl. *Soph.* 251e): ΞΕ. **τί οὖν οὐ** καθ᾽ ἓν ἀποκρινόμενος ἐφ᾽ ἑκάστου τὰ συμβαίνοντα **ἐσκέψω**; '**Then why don't you** answer the questions one at a time, and **examine** the consequences in each case?' Theaetetus responds positively to this patient and sympathetic proposal. Hortative aorists are used in four other passages by Socrates when suggesting a new line of philosophical discussion, and taken as a group it is difficult to see

[6] Nijk (n. 5), 103. Cf. N. Denyer (ed.), *Plato: Protagoras* (Cambridge, 2008), 67 (note on 310a2): 'the aorist of the indicative … has the same import as the aorist of an imperative'.

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them all as urgent or impatient. **(4)** Socrates to Alcibiades (Pl. *Alc. 1* 114b): πότερον δὲ ταὐτά ἐστι δίκαιά τε καὶ συμφέροντ᾽ ἢ ἕτερα, **τί οὐκ ἀπέδειξας;** '**Why don't you prove** whether the just and the expedient are the same or different?' Socrates is willing to drop an argument which fails to interest Alcibiades, and indulgently tries him with another one. The tone is cajoling rather than impatient. **(5)** Socrates begins a typical investigation (Xen. *Mem*. 4.6.14): **τί οὖν οὐκ** ἐκεῖνο πρῶτον **ἐπεσκεψάμεθα**, τί ἐστιν ἔργον ἀγαθοῦ πολίτου; '**Why then don't we examine** first, what is the function of a good citizen?' Xenophon is illustrating Socrates' dialectical method, and the stress is on his patient and effective method of persuasion. **(6)** Socrates challenges Callicles, who has said that some politicians make the citizens better (Pl. *Grg*. 503b): εἴ τινα ἔχεις τῶν ῥητόρων τοιοῦτον εἰπεῖν, **τί οὐχὶ** καὶ ἐμοὶ αὐτὸν **ἔφρασας** τίς ἐστιν; 'If you are able to name one of these politicians, **why don't you tell me** who he is?' This example could certainly be interpreted as impatient, but it is equally possible that Socrates' tone is one of ironic politeness. **(7)** Socrates to Callicles again (Pl. *Grg*. 509e): **τί οὐκ** αὐτό γέ μοι τοῦτο **ἀπεκρίνω** … ; '**Why don't you answer** me this …?' There is a notable contrast between Socrates' politeness and Callicles' abruptness and impatience.

(8) Socrates suggests to Critias that they examine Charmides' soul (Pl. *Chrm.* 154e): **τί οὖν … οὐκ ἀπεδύσαμεν** αὐτοῦ αὐτὸ τοῦτο καὶ **ἐθεασάμεθα** πρότερον τοῦ εἴδους; '**Why don't we strip** this part of him and **examine** it before his body?' This is clearly a proposal which requires a degree of tact when addressed to the guardian of a beautiful boy, and nothing could be less appropriate than for Socrates to give the slightest hint of impatience. Critias seems well disposed, and Socrates follows up with yet another hortative aorist: ἀλλὰ **τί οὐκ ἐπέδειξάς** μοι τὸν νεανίαν καλέσας δεῦρο; '**Why don't you** call the boy over and **show** him to me?' Socrates is at pains to emphasize that there is nothing improper (αἰσχρός) about him talking to Charmides so long as Critias is present.[7]

(9) Hiero replies to Simonides' request to compare the lives of the tyrant and the private citizen (Xen. *Hier*. 1.3): **τί οὖν** … **οὐχὶ** καὶ σύ, ἐπεὶ νῦν γε ἔτι ἰδιώτης εἶ, **ὑπέμνησάς** με τὰ ἐν τῷ ἰδιωτικῷ βίῳ; '**Why then don't *you* remind *me*** of what happens in private life, since you are still a private citizen?'[8] Simonides proceeds to do so. The conversation is very polite, with much mutual respect. Several of these examples are invitations of the kind 'Why don't you do it yourself then?'. This is the case with **2**, which is undoubtedly very respectful. Compare also the following two passages: **(10)** Protarchus suggests to Socrates that he answer his own easy questions (Pl. *Phlb.* 54b): **τί οὖν οὐκ** αὐτὸς **ἀπεκρίνω** σαυτῷ, ὦ Σώκρατες; '**Why then don't you reply to** yourself, Socrates?' **(11)** Anytus replies to Socrates' question who should educate Meno (Pl. *Meno* 92d): **τί** δὲ αὐτῷ **οὐ** σὺ **ἔφρασας**; '**Why don't you tell** him yourself?' The dialogue is fairly polite at this early stage, and Anytus is well brought up (90b).

(12) Cyrus makes a request to Cyaxares, who has told him that he is certain that the enemy are approaching (Xen. *Cyr*. 2.1.4): **τί οὖν** … **οὐ** καὶ τὴν δύναμιν **ἔλεξάς**

[7] Cf. J. Davidson, *The Greeks and Greek Love* (London, 2007), 85.

[8] For the force of καί, see J.D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles* (Oxford, 1954[2]), 320, comparing Pl. *Phlb.* 25b (σὺ καὶ ἐμοὶ φράσεις, '*You* shall tell *me*', instead of vice versa), *Resp.* 573d; Xen. *An.* 7.7.10.

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μοι, εἰ οἶσθα, πόση τις ἡ προσιοῦσα, καὶ πάλιν τὴν ἡμετέραν, ὅπως εἰδότες ἀμφοτέρας πρὸς ταῦτα βουλευώμεθα ὅπως ἂν ἄριστα ἀγωνιζοίμεθα; '**Why then don't you tell me**, if you know, how great is the force which is approaching, and also ours, so that knowing both we may plan in response to this how best we may fight?' Nijk reasonably observes: 'It is unlikely that the young Persian Cyrus would strike an impatient tone with the Median Cyaxares, the supreme commander of the collected armed forces.'[9] He thinks that the aorist 'signals that Cyrus would like a *complete* account of the armed forces'.[10] He contrasts Xen. *Cyr.* 4.1.11, where an anonymous soldier makes a suggestion to Cyrus, who has just explained their superiority over the enemy who have run away during the night: **τί οὖν οὐ διώκομεν** ὡς τάχιστα, καταδήλων γε οὕτω τῶν ἀγαθῶν ὄντων; '**Why then do we not pursue them as quickly as possible**, since the advantages are thus so obvious?' Nijk argues that the present is used 'because the desired chase is naturally presented as unbounded; it is unclear how long it will take and whether the enemy will be caught'.[11] This seems rather an unlikely nuance for the soldier to import into an urgent suggestion. Why would anyone making such a proposal want to imply that it is unlikely to have any useful effect? Cyrus rejects the idea, and the soldiers then make an alternative proposal: τί οὖν … οὐκ ἐλθὼν Κυαξάρῃ λέγεις ταῦτα; '**Why then** … **do you not go and tell** Cyaxares this?' There is nothing 'unbounded' about the present λέγεις, and it does indeed seem identical from the point of view of aspect to the request of Cyrus to Cyaxares with the aorist quoted above (**12**). Conversely, there are examples of the aorist in these expressions which really do seem unbounded (for example **17**).

(13) Socrates has just told an unnamed friend that he has been talking to Protagoras (Pl. *Prt.* 310a): ET. **τί οὖν οὐ διηγήσω** ἡμῖν τὴν συνουσίαν, εἰ μή σέ τι κωλύει, καθεζόμενος ἐνταυθί, ἐξαναστήσας τὸν παῖδα τουτονί; ΣΩ. πάνυ μὲν οὖν· καὶ χάριν γε εἴσομαι, ἐὰν ἀκούητε. ET. καὶ μὴν καὶ ἡμεῖς σοί, ἐὰν λέγῃς. ΣΩ. διπλῆ ἂν εἴη ἡ χάρις. 'FRIEND: **Why then don't you describe** the meeting to us, if there is nothing to prevent you, moving the slave out of the way and sitting down here? SOCRATES: I certainly will; and I shall be grateful to you if you listen. FRIEND: And we to you, if you speak. SOCRATES: The gratitude then would be double.' This passage, like the next two to be discussed (**14, 15**), dramatizes the polite negotiations involved in someone agreeing to give a lengthy verbal performance. Such a dialogue potentially threatens the negative face of both parties, as neither wants to impose on the other.

(14) Apollodorus is on his way from Phaleron to the city when he is asked by Glaucon to tell the story of Agathon's party (Pl. *Symp.* 173b): **τί οὖν** … **οὐ διηγήσω** μοι; πάντως δὲ ἡ ὁδὸς ἡ εἰς ἄστυ ἐπιτηδεία πορευομένοις καὶ λέγειν καὶ ἀκούειν. '**Why then don't you describe it** to me? The road to the city is very convenient for travellers both to speak and to listen.' Dover follows the traditional explanation of the aorist as impatient, translating 'Well, go on, tell me',[12] but the context does not suggest impatience. The point is

[9] Nijk (n. 5), 102.
[10] Nijk (n. 5), 103.
[11] Nijk (n. 5), 103. Nijk's other alleged contrast, between the aorist at Pl. *Prt.* 317d (**1**) and the present at Ar. *Lys.* 1103–4, is open to a similar objection.
[12] K.J. Dover (ed.), *Plato: Symposium* (Cambridge, 1980), 78.

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rather that the walk from Phaleron to the city (three or four miles) allows suitable leisure for the story.

(15) Menexenus asks Socrates about Aspasia's funeral speech (Pl. *Menex*. 236c): ΜΕΝ. ἦ καὶ μνημονεύσαις ἂν ἃ ἔλεγεν ἡ Ἀσπασία; ΣΩ. εἰ μὴ ἀδικῶ γε· ἐμάνθάνον γέ τοι παρ᾽ αὐτῆς, καὶ ὀλίγου πληγὰς ἔλαβον ὅτ᾽ ἐπελανθανόμην. ΜΕΝ. **τί οὖν οὐ διῆλθες;** 'MENEXENUS: Would you remember what Aspasia said? SOCRATES: If I am not very much mistaken; for I learned it from her, and was nearly beaten because I kept forgetting. MENEXENUS: **Why then don't you recite it?**' Menexenus treats the older man with considerable respect, and it is only when Socrates expresses mock reluctance that Menexenus presses him somewhat harder.

(16) Socrates responds to the objection of Simmias (Pl. *Phd*. 86d): εἰ οὖν τις ὑμῶν εὐπορώτερος ἐμοῦ, **τί οὐκ ἀπεκρίνατο**; 'If any of you is more resourceful than I am, **why doesn't he answer**?' Burnet writes: 'the aorist in such questions expresses impatience',[13] but Socrates is so far from impatient that he postpones his reply to Simmias and encourages Cebes to make his objection first. He politely gives the others the opportunity to respond, but the introductory conditional does not encourage them to do so.

(17) The courtesan Theodote is impressed by Socrates' advice about snaring lovers (Xen. *Mem*. 3.11.15): **τί οὖν οὐ** σύ μοι … **ἐγένου** συνθηρατὴς τῶν φίλων; '**Why then do you not become** my helper in hunting for friends?' Each tries to entice the other.[14]

The passages discussed so far are all from Plato or Xenophon, and mostly involve Socrates as either speaker or addressee. This may suggest that the hortative aorist was a feature of his idiolect, or more broadly of the urbane conversation represented in the dialogues of these two authors. There are also some examples in other authors.

(18) Mardonius challenges the Spartans before the battle of Plataea (Hdt. 9.48.4): **τί** δὴ **οὐ** πρὸ μὲν τῶν Ἑλλήνων ὑμεῖς, ἐπείτε δεδόξωσθε εἶναι ἄριστοι, πρὸ δὲ τῶν βαρβάρων ἡμεῖς, ἴσοι πρὸς ἴσους ἀριθμὸν **ἐμαχεσάμεθα**; '**Why don't we fight** with equal numbers on both sides, you on behalf of the Greeks since you have the reputation of being the bravest, and we Persians on behalf of the barbarians?' Flower and Marincola, in their note on the passage, cite Smyth's view that the aorist is used 'to express surprise that something has not been done', and is thus 'equivalent to a command',[15] and this has some plausibility here since immediately before the quoted passage Mardonius said that he expected that the Spartans would already have challenged the Persians. On the other hand, Mardonius is no longer complaining about the Spartans' prevarication, and is now issuing a highly complimentary formal challenge.

(19) Hyllus challenges Eurystheus to single combat in order to spare the Athenians having to fight the Argive army (Eur. *Heracl.* 805): ὦ στρατήγ᾽ ὅς Ἀργόθεν | ἥκεις, **τί** τήνδε γαῖαν **οὐκ εἰάσαμεν** …; 'General, who have come from Argos, **why do we not allow** this land …?' A lacuna follows (Kovacs in his Loeb edition suggests: '… and Mycenae be once more at peace?'), but the

[13] J. Burnet (ed.), *Plato: Phaedo* (Oxford, 1911), 86.
[14] On the dialogue in general, see J. Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes* (London, 1997), 120–9.
[15] M.A. Flower and J. Marincola (edd.), *Herodotus: Histories Book IX* (Cambridge, 2002), 196, quoting Smyth (n. 1), §1936.

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construction seems clear, as well as the formal tone. The similarity of context to **18** is striking.

(20) Lysistrata to Lampito (Ar. *Lys.* 181–2): **τί** δῆτα ταῦτ᾽ **οὐχ** ὡς τάχιστα, Λαμπιτοῖ, | **ξυνωμόσαμεν**, ὅπως ἂν ἀρρήκτως ἔχῃ; '**Why then don't we swear an oath** on this as quickly as possible, Lampito, so that our treaty is unbreakable?'[16] Lysistrata has answered two objections from Lampito about the feasibility of a truce, so now is the right moment to proceed with it. Henderson suggests that this is 'virtually an imperative',[17] but that seems quite the wrong tone. The request is indeed urgent, but the urgency is not communicated by the aorist: ὡς τάχιστα ('as quickly as possible') is used with the present at Xen. *Cyr.* 4.1.11 (quoted under **12** above). 'There is now no further reason to delay' is not the same as 'This is overdue'. This is a formal proposal to a representative of another city, comparable to **18** and **19**.

(21) Cinesias pleads with Myrrhine (Ar. *Lys.* 906): φιλεῖς; **τί οὖν οὐ κατεκλίνης**, ὦ Μυρρίον; 'You love me? Then **why don't you lie down**, my little Myrrhine?' Cinesias may be impatient, but the tone of this line is ingratiating, as is shown by the diminutive Μυρρίον. Cf. **4, 17, 22** for the hortative aorist in ingratiating contexts. Cinesias tries different forms of the verb κατακλίνω: compare κατακλίνηθι ('lie down!', 904) and σὺ δ᾽ οὐ κατακλινεῖ; ('will you not lie down?', 910).

(22) Xanthias to Bdelycleon, when there seems to be a moment's respite from Philocleon's attempts to escape (Ar. *Vesp.* 213): **τί οὐκ ἀπεκοιμήθημεν** ὅσον ὅσον στίλην; '**Why don't we go to sleep** for just a tiny little while?' MacDowell thinks that the aorist has the sense 'It's high time that …',[18] but that would not be an appropriate way for a slave to address his master. Xanthias employs the common negative-politeness gambit of minimizing the imposition.[19]

(23) Dicaeopolis taunts Lamachus (Ar. *Ach.* 591–2): **εἰ δ᾽ ἰσχυρὸς εἶ,** | **τί** μ᾽ **οὐκ ἀπεψώλησας**; εὔοπλος γὰρ εἶ. 'But if you are strong, **why don't you peel me**? For you are well equipped.' There is a humorous contrast in this passage (572–92) between Dicaeopolis' mock respect and the increasingly offensive content of what he says.

(24) A woman addresses Kerdon the cobbler (Herodas 7.77–8): **τί** τονθορύζεις **κοὐκ** ἐλευθέρῃ γλάσσῃ | τὸν τῖμον ὅστις ἐστὶν **ἐξεδίφησας**; '**Why don't you** stop mumbling, and **search out** the price and tell me clearly?' Kerdon has been prevaricating about the price of his wares, but the woman's assumption is that he really wants to name it, as indeed he does in the next line. The woman uses two very obscure words, and the overall effect may be somewhat pretentious.

[16] On the 'logical connective force' of δῆτα in questions, see Denniston (n. 8), 269.

[17] J. Henderson (ed.), *Aristophanes: Lysistrata* (Oxford, 1987), 90.

[18] D.M. MacDowell (ed.), *Aristophanes: Wasps* (Oxford, 1971), 160; similarly Z.P. Biles and S.D. Olson (edd.), *Aristophanes: Wasps* (Oxford, 2015), 154.

[19] See P. Brown and S.C. Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (Cambridge, 1987^2), 176–8. The concept of 'negative politeness' is useful for analysing the conversational strategies in these passages, although we might be inclined to describe **21** and **22** as ingratiating rather than polite. It is an issue in politeness theory that Brown and Levinson's treatment of politeness as a universal human phenomenon does not always capture what is actually regarded as polite in particular societies: see (e.g.) R.J. Watts, *Politeness* (Cambridge, 2003), 4. Native-speaker intuitions are in any case unavailable for ancient Greek.

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(25) An isolated line from Aristophanes (Ar. fr. 482 K.–A.): **τί οὐκ ἐκέλευσας** παραφέρειν τὰ ποτήρια; '**Why don't you order** the drinking cups to be set out?' There is not enough context to gauge the tone.

The remaining three examples are often quoted to illustrate the hortative aorist, but seem significantly different from the passages discussed so far. It is possible that these striking passages from well-known works influenced the interpretation of the hortative aorist elsewhere.

(26) Creon cries out in despair (Soph. *Ant.* 1308–9): τί μ' οὐκ ἀνταίαν | ἔπαισέν τις ἀμφιθήκτῳ ξίφει; Jebb treats this as a request: 'Is there none to strike me to the heart with two-edged sword?'[20] Moorhouse adopts the traditional view: 'a question showing impatience or surprise', translating 'why does no one (immediately) strike me …?'[21] This impassioned lyric outburst has little in common with the hortative aorists discussed so far, although **16** provides a parallel for the third-person singular.

(27) Io cries out in despair (Aesch. *PV* 747–8): τί δῆτ' ἐμοὶ ζῆν κέρδος, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐν τάχει | ἔρριψ' ἐμαυτὴν τῆσδ' ἀπὸ στύφλου πέτρας …; 'What use is life for me? Why don't I immediately throw myself from this rugged rock?' Another lyric outburst. **28** is the only parallel for first-person singular.

(28) The Corinthian messenger addresses Oedipus, who has just said that he left Corinth through fear of the oracle (Soph. *OT* 1002–3): τί δῆτ' ἐγὼ οὐχὶ τοῦδε τοῦ φόβου σ', ἄναξ, | ἐπείπερ εὔνους ἦλθον, ἐξελυσάμην; 'Why then have I not freed you from this fear, lord, since I came with good will?' Moorhouse translates: 'why don't I (at once) deliver you from fear?',[22] but he does not begin to do so for another fourteen lines which hardly suggests any sense of urgency.

These hortative aorists, apart from the problematic **26**–**8**, are often in explicitly polite contexts, or otherwise in contexts which can plausibly be interpreted as polite or related to polite modes of expression. On the other hand, all these passages involve a threat to the negative face of the addressee. This is not because of any impatience implied by the aorist but rather by the other element of these expressions, the question τί οὐ ('why not?') or τί οὖν οὐ ('then why not?'). Any directive threatens the negative face of the addressee, and the face threat is exacerbated when there is an explicit statement (by means of a connective particle such as οὖν) or implication that a particular course of action is required by the situation. It should be stressed that this does not imply that the action in question is overdue.

In five passages (**2, 9, 10, 11, 17**), the directive is in the form 'Why don't you do it yourself?', which offers the double face-threat of refusing a request and implying that there is an onus on the addressee to perform the requested action. Three further examples (**13, 14, 15**) are requests to someone to tell or story or make a speech. The speaker needs to steer a path between seeming uninterested and implying something like 'Go ahead and tell me, since you obviously want to'. Something of the same sort seems to be present in **8**, where Socrates needs to put on record Critias' willingness for him to examine Charmides' soul without saying anything so crass as 'since you obviously want to show him off …' (also **23, 24**). In some other cases (**1, 12, 18, 19, 20, 22**),

[20] R.C. Jebb (ed.), *Sophocles: Antigone* (Cambridge, 1900[3]), 231.
[21] A.C. Moorhouse, *The Syntax of Sophocles* (*Mnemosyne Suppl.* 75) (Leiden, 1982), 196.
[22] Moorhouse (n. 21), 196.

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the point is that the situation in general requires the addressee to behave in a particular way. For example in **12** Cyrus says that now they know that the enemy are coming it is the precise moment to discuss how to fight them; this is different from suggesting that such discussion is overdue. Several of the examples in philosophical dialogue (**3, 4, 5, 6, 7**) initiate a new line of discussion on the basis that the addressee has made insufficient progress with the previous one.

There are many polite ways of making a request, but the social challenge in these cases is to mitigate the negative face-threat of pointing out to someone that the desired course of action is required by the situation. One way is to use an inclusive first-person plural (**1, 5, 8, 18, 19, 20, 22**). This is a common politeness gambit,[23] and genuinely cooperative activity is in any case being proposed in these passages. τί οὐ; with first-person plural present can be adequately polite (for example Ar. *Lys.* 1103–4; Pl. *Prt.* 310e; Xen. *Mem.* 3.1.10). On the other hand, τί οὐ or τί οὖν οὐ with the second-person present is clearly face-threatening. The chorus of Acharnians reluctantly agrees to Dicaeopolis' proposal to defend himself (Ar. *Ach.* 358–9): τί οὖν οὐ λέγεις … ὅ τι ποτ', ὦ σχέτλιε, τὸ μέγα τοῦτ' ἔχεις; 'Why then, wretch, don't you say … whatever this great thing is that you have got?' The Sausage Seller addresses Demos (Ar. *Eq.* 1207–8): τί οὐ διακρίνεις, Δῆμ', ὁπότερός ἐστι νῷν | ἀνὴρ ἀμείνων περὶ σὲ καὶ τὴν γαστέρα; 'Why don't you decide, Demos, which of us is the better man for you and your stomach?' Callicles does not want to answer Socrates (Pl. *Grg.* 504c): τί δὲ οὐκ αὐτὸς λέγεις, ὦ Σώκρατες; ('Why don't you say yourself, Socrates?'), clearly less polite than **2** and other similar passages with the aorist discussed above. Socrates' repeated τί οὐκ ἀποκρίνῃ; ('Why do you not answer?') to Polus (Pl. *Grg.* 468c, 468d) is face-threatening. Ctesippus says to Socrates (Pl. *Lysis* 211d): τί οὖν … οὐκ ἐρωτᾷς; 'Why then don't you ask him?' Ctesippus has just butted rather unceremoniously into the conversation, and the dialogue as a whole is rather lacking in social graces.

It seems, then, that questions introduced by τί οὐ; or τί οὖν οὐ; tend to threaten the negative face of the addressee, and this face threat can be mitigated by use of the inclusive first-person plural. This is obviously not possible in cases where the second person is unavoidable, which include most of the ones discussed here. Second-person present seems always to be impolite. On the other hand, τί οὐ; or τί οὖν οὐ; with hortative aorists generally occur in polite contexts. The only conclusion to be drawn from this is that the aorist itself serves to mitigate the face threat. This is the opposite of the traditional interpretation of the hortative aorist, which is that the aorist itself expresses urgency or impatience. The explanation suggested here is that it is the τί οὐ; question which is face-threatening and the aorist which is polite.

A polite use of the aorist of this kind would be comparable to the 'attitudinal past' in English, used to make verbs expressing volition or mental state more tentative or polite.[24] Brown and Levinson explain how this is polite: 'As the tense is switched from present into past, the speaker moves *as if* into the future, so he distances himself from the here and now', quoting as an example 'I was wondering whether you could do

[23] See M. Lloyd, 'Sophocles in the light of face-threat politeness theory', in I.J.F. de Jong and A. Rijksbaron (edd.), *Sophocles and the Greek Language* (*Mnemosyne Suppl.* 269) (Leiden, 2006), 225–39, at 227 n. 4.

[24] See R. Quirk, S. Greenbaum, G. Leech, J. Svartvik, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (London and New York, 1985), 4.16; 4.37: 'such forms enable us to avoid the impoliteness which might well result from expressing one's attitude too directly'. Cf. S. Chalker and E. Weiner, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar* (Oxford, 1994), s.v. 'social distancing'.

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me a little favour'. They note a similar strategy in Tamil.[25] The second person can be used in a similar way, as one might say 'Did you want to see me?' to a nervous-looking student loitering outside one's office. In Greek, the future (for instance βουλήσομαι, αἰτήσομαι) can be used for polite requests (for example Soph. *OC* 1289; Eur. *Alc*. 164, *Med*. 259, *Heracl*. 475).[26] The imperfect ἐβουλόμην (without ἄν) is sometimes used to distance the speaker from an unfulfilled present wish.[27] There are of course many other ways of making suggestions more indirect and thus more polite, but the distancing effect of the aorist is particularly useful in these hortative cases. It was argued above that they are not impatient, and in many cases at least it is clear that the action proposed is in no sense overdue. On the other hand, the τί οὐ; or τί οὖν οὐ; introduction implies that it is appropriate for the action to be performed at exactly this moment. This immediacy would be diluted by a more normal form of polite request, for example optative with ἄν.

A parallel for the use of the Greek aorist for polite distancing is supplied by the 'tragic' aorist.[28] It might be better to call this the 'performative' aorist, which distinguishes the relevant cases from 'instantaneous' uses of the aorist. An example is Odysseus' greeting to Silenus (Eur. *Cyc.* 101): χαίρειν προσεῖπα πρῶτα τὸν γεραίτατον ('My greetings to the eldest first'), where the use of the third person is an additional polite feature which reinforces the effect of comical solemnity. Nijk objects that treating the aorist as a past here 'would be confrontational rather than polite: as if the speaker says "I (have) greet(ed) you whether you like it or not"'.[29] This seems rather arbitrary, and ignores the abundant comparative evidence for the attitudinal past. Nijk's own interpretation treats the aorist as a present tense, and the difference from the present as purely aspectual. Unfortunately, he only offers a single pair of examples to illustrate his theory, and overlooks the many examples of present-tense performatives.

In a somewhat similar vein, C.L.A. Bary argues that performatives are present perfectives, for which there is no satisfactory Greek tense since the present indicative is not perfective and the (perfective) aorist indicative is not present.[30] Both present and aorist are thus, according to her, suboptimal for performatives. The problem is that her theory implies that present and aorist would be used indifferently throughout Greek literature for performatives, but in fact the present is overwhelmingly the most common tense for performatives at all periods and in all genres, including fifth-century tragedy. There is no evidence that the present was felt as insufficiently perfective for the purpose. Furthermore, the performative aorist is only used in a limited stylistic and chronological context, and Bary does nothing to explain why its usage should be confined in this way. Nor does she explain why the performative aorist is used in some cases rather than others by those authors who do use it (for example fifth-century tragedians). To take just three verbs, there are no examples in Plato and Xenophon of the performative aorist

[25] Brown and Levinson (n. 19), 204–5; cf. 118–19. Cf. F. Coulmas, 'Linguistic etiquette in Japanese society', in R.J. Watts, S. Ide, K. Ehlich (edd.), *Politeness in Language: Studies in its History, Theory and Practice* (Berlin and New York, 1992), 299–323. Coulmas ([this note], 323 n. 12) notes the use of past-tense forms of the verb as a politeness marker in a northern dialect of Japanese, quoting Mr Tanaka answering the telephone: 'Moshi moshi, Tanaka deshita' (literally, 'Hello, this was Tanaka').

[26] Cf. Kühner and Gerth (n. 3), 1.172–3; Smyth (n. 1), §1913.

[27] Cf. Kühner and Gerth (n. 3), 1.205–6; Goodwin (n. 1), §425; Smyth (n. 1), §1782.

[28] For this interpretation, see M. Lloyd, 'The tragic aorist', *CQ* 49 (1999), 23–45.

[29] Nijk (n. 5), 98.

[30] C.L.A. Bary, 'The ancient Greek tragic aorist revisited', *Glotta* 88 (2012), 31–53.

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of ὄμνυμι ('I swear'), δέχομαι ('I accept') or ἐπαινῶ ('I approve'), although there are numerous opportunities in their works for swearing, accepting and thanking.

Nijk and Bary offer elegant theoretical constructions, which are internally consistent and make sense in terms of the principles of the Greek tense-system. Unfortunately, they are contradicted by the evidence. It was argued above that they do not explain enough, in that there are many examples of actual usage which seem to contradict them. On the other hand, they also explain too much, particularly in their discussion of the performative aorist. They integrate it into a general account of the Greek aorist so successfully that one would expect it to be much more widespread than it actually is.

In both the performative and the hortative aorists, the distancing effect of the aorist makes an utterance more polite, in a manner comparable to the attitudinal past in other languages. It is notable, however, that these two phenomena tend to appear in different genres. The performative aorist is mostly confined to fifth-century tragedy, together with some paratragic examples in Aristophanes. The hortative aorist is most common in Plato and Xenophon, although there are again a few examples in Aristophanes. Stephen Colvin objects to the view that the performative aorist is distinctive of fifth-century tragedy: 'A problem with the account is that it offers no explanation of where (which social or literary variety of Greek) the feature originated.'[31] It would indeed be an advantage to be able to offer such an explanation, but it remains highly likely that many features of conversational Greek are irretrievably lost, with the result that we are left with fragments of usage in the little literary dialogue that survives without evidence for the natural conversation which might have provided a context. It is striking that Aristophanes, with his acute ear for dialogue, has both performative and hortative aorists. The performative aorist is used much more by Euripides than by any other author, and we have seen that the hortative aorist is associated especially with Socrates. It is possible that these rare usages, while not invented by them, gained some currency because of the influence of these prominent individuals.

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[31] S. Colvin, 'The instantaneous aorist: the syntax of the agora and the syntax of Parnassus', in F. Cortés Gabaudan and J.V. Méndez Dosuna (edd.), *Dic Mihi, Musa, Virum* (Salamanca, 2010), 113–21, at 116. Colvin's other objections have no validity if the discussion is confined specifically to the performative aorist. Even with his inclusive definition of the 'instantaneous' aorist, it is notable that he can cite no examples in Plato or Xenophon. He suggests that Platonic dialogue 'lacks the interactive and reactive features of dramatic dialogue, and the linguistic markers of (realistic) turn-taking' (at 118), but such passages as the beginning of *Lysis*, to take one example from many, are likely to be closer to natural dialogue than is the verse of fifth-century tragedy.

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