Greece & Rome, Vol. 49, No. 2, October 2002

THE AORIST INDICATIVE

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Of ten papers published after the meetings of the Society for Biblical Literature in 1990 and 1991, five were on verbal aspect in Greek. In the first, it was estimated that in the New Testament perhaps 85% of finite aorists in the indicative are past-referring.[1] That as many as 15% might *not* be past-referring is striking. New Testament Greek is typical of the Hellenistic Greek that dominated the Mediterranean world from 300 BC to AD 300, and because this is closely related to Classical Greek it is worth considering Classical Greek uses of the aorist indicative.

A very simple explanation of verbal aspect[2] is that it refers to the viewpoint of the speaker or writer. Leaving the perfect aspect on one side, when the present or imperfect tense is used (the imperfect having the same aspect as the present), the viewpoint of the writer or speaker is *inside* the action being described. Use of the aorist indicates that the viewpoint of the speaker or writer is *outside* the action being described, while its beginning and end are in view. Accordingly, *all* aorist verbs have aspect, but only *some* have the past tense.

Non-past-referring aorist indicatives are sometimes prominent in epic: for instance, at *Iliad* 4.160–2:

> εἴ περ γάρ τε καὶ αὐτίκ' Ὀλύμπιος οὐκ ἐτέλεσσεν
> ἔκ τε καὶ ὀψὲ τελεῖ, σύν τε μεγάλῳ ἀπέτεισαν
> σὺν σφῇσιν κεφαλῇσι γυναιξί τε καὶ τεκέεσσιν.
>
> For if the Olympian at once has not finished this matter,
> late will he bring it to pass, and *they must pay* a great penalty,
> with their own heads, and with their women, and with their children.[3]

Agamemnon curses the Trojans after Pandarus has broken the truce by shooting an arrow at Menelaus. As he sees blood spurting from under

[1] D. A. Carson, *An Introduction to the Porter/Fanning Debate*, in *Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series* 80 (1993), 25.

[2] B. M. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford, 1990), 97 and 103.

[3] Tr. Lattimore. Kühner-Gerth, *Ausführlich Grammatik der griechischen Sprache* (1897, rep. 1955) vol. I, 166, para. 11 gives this as an example where the speaker, for emphasis, represents a future event as already having happened. Kirk, *The Iliad, A Commentary* vol. 1, 348 regards ἀπέτεισεν as gnomic and the actual curse on Troy as beginning at line 163: εὖ γὰρ . . . οἶδα . . . ἔσσεται ἦμαρ ὅτ' ἄν ποτ' ὀλώλῃ ('for I know . . . there will come a day when sacred Ilion shall perish').

https://doi.org/10.1093/gr/49.2.227 Published online by Cambridge University Press

his brother's sword belt, Agamemnon yells out *ἀπέτεισαν* – if Zeus brings it to pass, they *must pay* with their own heads, with their wives and their children; in this way, he justifies the death of Hector, the Trojan horse, the destruction of the city and all the miseries later endured by the Trojan women. At *Iliad* 9.412–6 Achilles expresses his great dilemma in a non-past-referring aorist: *ὤλετό μοι νόστος*. Here he says his return home *will be lost* if he fights round the walls of Troy, but his fame will be everlasting. *ὤλετό μοι κλέος ἐσθλόν*: his good fame will be lost if he returns to his own country.

> *εἰ μέν κ' αὖθι μένων Τρώων πόλιν ἀμφιμάχωμαι,*
> *ὤλετο μέν μοι νόστος, ἀτὰρ κλέος ἄφθιτον ἔσται*
> *εἰ δέ κεν οἴκαδ' ἵκωμι φίλην ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν,*
> *ὤλετό μοι κλέος ἐσθλόν, ἐπὶ δηρὸν δέ μοι αἰὼν*
> *ἔσσεται.*
>
> If I stay here and fight beside the city of the Trojans,
> my return home is gone, but my glory shall be everlasting;
> but if I return home to the beloved land of my fathers,
> the excellence of my glory is gone but there will be a long life left for me.
> (tr. Lattimore)

Aorist indicatives that do not refer to the past are found not only in Homer but also in the dramatists, Plato's and Xenophon's dialogues, and elsewhere. Kühner-Gerth gives 37 examples of indicative aorists in drama that are not past-referring, from lyric passages as well as from iambics, and from speeches as well as from line-by-line dialogue.

The familiar gnomic aorist is often equivalent to a condition. For instance, the famous example from Plato, *Critias* 108c *ἀθυμοῦντες ἄνδρες οὔπω τρόπαιον ἔστησαν* ('Disheartened men never yet raised a trophy', with which we may compare the English: 'faint heart ne'er won fair lady') is equivalent to saying, 'If there is a disheartened man, he has not yet raised a trophy'.[4] Similes with the aorist indicative, common in Homer, can be reduced to a condition of the form *as if*. For example at *Iliad* 3.33–7 when, catching sight of Menelaus, Paris shrinks back:

> *ὡς δ' ὅτε τίς τε δράκοντα ἰδὼν παλίνορσος ἀπέστη*
> *οὔρεος ἐν βήσσης, ὑπό τε τρόμος ἔλλαβε γυῖα,*
> *ἄψ δ' ἀνεχώρησεν. ὦχρός τέ μιν εἶλε παρειάς,*
> *ὣς αὖτις καθ' ὅμιλον ἔδυ Τρώων ἀγερώχων*
> *δείσας Ἀτρέος υἱὸν Ἀλέξανδρος θεοειδής.*

[4] W. W. Goodwin, *Greek Grammar* (1879), 276.

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> As a man who has come on a snake in a mountain valley
> suddenly steps back, and the shivers come over his body,
> and he draws back and away, cheeks seized with a green pallor,
> so, in terror of Atreus' son, godlike Alexandros
> lost himself again in the host of the haughty Trojans.
>
> (tr. Lattimore)

It is *as if* a man has drawn back on discovering a snake.

In conditional sentences when the 'if' clause is formed by *ἐάν* and a subjunctive, the tense meaning of an aorist indicative in the conclusion is sometimes hard to pin down. *ἐὰν μή τις μένῃ ἐν ἐμοί, ἐβλήθη ἔξω ὡς τὸ κλῆμα καὶ ἐξηράνθη* ('If any one does not remain in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers': St. John's Gospel, ch. 15, v. 6) is remarkably like Lucian, *The Double Indictment* 1, where Zeus says of the sun god, *ἢν γάρ τι ἐπιρραθυμήσας λάθῃ, οἱ ἵπποι κατέφλεξαν τὰ πάντα*, 'for if he relaxes at all, his horses burn everything up.' In both examples, the tense meant by the aorist indicative is ambiguous. *ἐβλήθη, ἐξηράνθη, κατέφλεξαν* are, in the translations used here, present with general meaning. Perhaps they could equally well have been translated as future, as when Admetus says to Alcestis, 'I shall be done for if you really leave me, wife!' (*ἀπωλόμην ἄρ', εἴ με δὴ λείψεις, γύναι*).[5] At Herodotus 8.102, Artemisia says to Xerxes, 'if he (Mardonius) makes the conquests he says he wants to . . . it is your work; for your servants will have achieved it.' (*ἢν καταστρέψηται τά φησι ἐθέλειν . . . σὸν τὸ ἔργον γίνεται· οἱ γὰρ σοὶ δοῦλοι κατεργάσαντο.*)[6] These aorist indicatives in the apodosis of a future or general condition seem to cover all possibilities, like the English 'in any case'.

Ancient grammarians held that Greek had six tenses (present and future, and four past tenses: imperfect, perfect, pluperfect, aorist) listed in the paragraph about the verb from the *Art of Grammar* of Dionysius Thrax (first or second century BC, if authentic).[7]

περὶ ῥήματος

χρόνοι τρεῖς, ἐνεστώς, παρεληλυθώς, μέλλων. τούτων ὁ παρεληλυθὼς ἔχει διαφορὰς τέσσαρας, παρατατικόν, παρακείμενον, ὑπερσυντελικόν, ἀόριστον, ὧν συγγένειαι τρεῖς, ἐνεστῶτος πρὸς παρατατικόν, παρακειμένου πρὸς ὑπερσυντελικόν, ἀορίστου πρὸς μέλλοντα.

Concerning the verb.

Three tenses: present, past, future. Of these the past has four divisions, imperfect, perfect, pluperfect, aorist, and there are three relationships between them, the present to the imperfect, the perfect to the pluperfect, the aorist to the future.

[5] Euripides *Alcestis* 386. 'I am lost, then, if you are going to leave me' (tr. Kovacs).

[6] *γίνεται* (present) indicates continuance of Xerxes' enterprise; *κατεργάσαντο* (aorist) indicates completion of a task not yet begun.

[7] Dion. *Techne* 13. J. Lallot, *La grammaire de Denys le Thrace* (Paris, CNRS, 1989), introduction, 21–6, is inclined to support Di Benedetto in thinking that chs. 11–20 are not by Dionysius of Thrace, but a 'modest manual' composed towards the 4th century AD.

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George Choeroboscus[8] (fourth or fifth century AD) comments on the indefiniteness of both the future and aorist tenses, referring to *On the Verb*, now unfortunately lost, by Apollonius Dyscolus, the great grammarian of Greek who worked in Alexandria in the second century AD and is our chief source for its history after the time of Dionysius Thrax. In his still extant work, *On Syntax*, Apollonius discusses imperatives. He notes that a present imperative signifies continuation of something that is happening. He takes as an example Agamemnon's instruction *βάλλε* to the archer Teucros at *Iliad* 8.282. Since Teucros had just shot eight Trojans and was aiming at Hector, Agamemnon meant, 'Go on shooting!' Apollonius continues, if we say *γράψον*, 'write', using an aorist imperative, while we give an order for something that is not happening, we do not mean 'go on writing' but 'complete the writing'. If he means that a person using an aorist imperative has both the beginning and the completion of the action in mind, Apollonius seems to be thinking of the aorist imperative in terms which we would now associate with aspect.[9]

Goodwin explained the aorist as denoting a simple past occurrence, with none of the limitations as to completion, continuance or repetition found in other tenses. But he classed the gnomic aorist as a primary tense 'as it refers to present time' and explained it by saying that one instance in past time is used vividly to represent all possible cases.[10] Jebb, in his commentaries on Sophocles' tragedies, usually explained the 'dramatic' aorist, which is translated as present in English, as an aorist referring to the moment just past. This is a possible explanation of, for instance, Sophocles, *Electra* 668 where the paedagogus, immediately on

[8] Georgius Choeroboscus, *Prolegomena et scholia in Theodosii Alexandrini canones isagogicos de flexione verborum*, 479g–481g, *Grammatici Graeci* VI, ii (ed. Hilgard, rep. Hildesheim, 1970).

[9] Apoll. *On Syntax* 3.253a:

ὁ ἀποφαινόμενος οὕτως, γράφε, σάρου, σκάπτε, ἐν παρατάσει τῆς διαθέσεως τὴν πρόσταξιν ποιεῖται, ὡς ἔχει καὶ τὸ βάλλ' οὕτως, αἴ κε φόως Δαναοῖσι γένηαι· φησὶ γὰρ ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ καταγίνου εἰς τὸ βάλλειν. ὅ γε μὴν λέγων κατὰ τὴν τοῦ παρῳχημένου προσφορὰν γράψον, σκάψον, οὐ μόνον τὸ μὴ γινόμενον προστάσσει, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ γινόμενον ἐν παρατάσει ἀπαγορεύει, εἴγε καὶ τοῖς γράφουσιν ἐν πλείονι χρόνῳ προσφωνοῦμεν τὸ γράψον, τοιοῦτόν τι φάσκοντες, μὴ ἐμμένειν τῇ παρατάσει, ἀνῦσαι δὲ τὸ γράφειν.

For he who declares thus: *γράφε, σάρου, σκάπτε*, (write!, sweep!, dig!) makes the command in an extension of the state of affairs (*διάθεσις*), as for example: go on shooting thus, so that you may be a light for the Danaans; for he says, in the combat, 'busy yourself in shooting'. But he who says, using the past tense (*κατὰ τὴν τοῦ παρῳχημένου προσφορὰν*), *γράψον, σκάψον* (write, dig) not only enjoins what is not being done, but also forbids what is being done continuing (*ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ γινόμενον ἐν παρατάσει ἀπαγορεύει*), if indeed also to those who are writing in too much time we call *γράψον*, giving a command something like this: (I order you) not to remain in continuance, but to finish the writing.

See S. E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect of the Greek New Testament* (New York, 1989), 337 and (for n. 14 also) F. W. Householder, *The Syntax of Apollonius Dyscolus* (Amsterdam, 1981), 191 and 205.

[10] Goodwin, (n. 4), 270–1.

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entering, says he brings sweet tidings from a friend to her and Aegisthus, and at once Clytaemnestra replies *ἐδεξάμην τὸ ῥηθέν*, 'I welcome what was said',[11] but it seems unsatisfactory both because it does not consider why *this* passage in Greek has the aorist rather than the present, and because as a general explanation it does not suit other examples from drama well, e.g. Aristophanes, *Knights* 696–7 where the sausage seller says to the Paphlagonian:

> *ἥσθην ἀπειλαῖς, ἐγέλασα ψολοκομπίαις,*
> *ἀπεπυδάρισα μόθωνα, περιεκόκκασα.*
>
> I am delighted when you bluster, I laugh at your thunderous talk;
> I dance the sailor's hornpipe and call out cuckoo round you![12]

Furthermore, it does not explain the connection of this with other uses of the aorist, for instance in future or general conditions after an 'if' clause beginning *ἐάν*.

When the aorist indicative is introduced in *Reading Greek* (*Grammar*/*Vocabulary*/*Exercises*, section 69 (iv)), a note says ' aorist indicatives indicate that something has happened in the past without reference to the duration of time over which it occurred. They regard the action as a single event, not as a process.' (There is a much clearer note on aspect at section 79, à propos the aorist participle.) Mastronade, in his *Introduction to Attic Greek* (1993), says that the Greek verb usually conveys time distinctions but the fundamental distinction is aspect. He goes on (p. 147) to say that the aorist stem conveys an action which is instantaneous and includes conceptually its completion. However, examples of aorist indicatives for actions which are not instantaneous are well-known. See, for example, Lysias, *Against Eratosthenes* 4:

Οὑμὸς πατὴρ Κέφαλος ἐπείσθη μὲν ὑπὸ Περικλέους εἰς ταύτην γῆν ἀφικέσθαι, ἔτη δὲ τριάκοντα ᾤκησε.

My father Cephalus was persuaded by Pericles to come to this land and lived there thirty years.[13]

Other aorist indicatives refer to events which occurred over a long period of time, as at Thucydides 1.12:

[11] 'I welcome the omen' (tr. Jebb), 'I accept the omen' (tr. Lloyd-Jones). In his footnote, Jebb refers to similar examples of the aorist at *Electra* 1322 and 1479 (*ξυνῆκα τοὔπος*), *Antigone* 1307 (lyr.), *Oedipus at Colonus* 1466 (lyr.), *Ajax* 693 (lyr.), and *Oedipus Rex* 337.

[12] 'I enjoy your threats! I laugh at your smoky boasts! I dance the fling! I scout you and I flout you!' (tr. Sommerstein).

[13] Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, para. 1928 calls this 'aorist with a definite number'.

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πάντα δὲ ταῦτα ὕστερον τῶν Τρωικῶν ἐκτίσθη.

And all these colonies were planted after the Trojan war.
(tr. Forster-Smith)

The section on the aorist indicative in Kühner-Gerth begins: 'The aorist marks the action simply as happening and attaining its conclusion.' This is supported by Apollonius Dyscolus where, while proving that the subjunctive after ἐάν is aorist and not future, he explains that ἐὰν μαθῶ 'if I learn' means ἐὰν ἀνύσαιμι μαθεῖν 'if I succeed in learning' because the aorist subjunctive contains the idea of completion whereas a present subjunctive ἐὰν τρέχω means 'if I continue running'.[14] However, there are occasional instances of the aorist which do not seem to mark completeness. See, for example, Eurip. *Ion* 1291:

ἔκτεινα σ' ὄντα πολέμιον δόμοις ἐμοῖς.

Foe to my house! Therefore I sought thy life![15]

Creusa, who does not know that Ion is her son, has sent him a cup of poison at a banquet. Fortunately, he has poured some out as an offering to the gods, and a dove which tried to drink it has had convulsions and dropped dead on the spot. Creusa has taken refuge on an altar when Ion confronts her, and she says ἔκτεινά σε, which cannot mean 'I killed you' because 'killed' cannot have been a completed action.

The notion of the aorist aspect, that all aorists essentially describe an action from *outside*, not *inside*, is supported by Kühner-Gerth's definition that an aorist implies completeness. It seems to be the best explanation of most if not all dramatic aorists. At Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris* 1023 Orestes has just suggested to Iphigenia that they should kill the king whom she serves as priestess. οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην· τὸ δὲ πρόθυμον

[14] Apoll. *On Syntax* 3.273b7:

ἐχρῆν μέντοι γινώσκειν ὡς αἱ ἐγγινόμεναι παραθέσεις ἐξ ἐνεστώτων εἰσιν καὶ παρῳχημένων. τοιοῦτόν τι τῆς συντάξεως ἐπαγγελλομένης ἐν τῷ ἐὰν μάθω, εἰ ἀνύσαιμι τὸ μαθεῖν, ἐὰν δράμω, εἰ ἀνύσαιμι τὸ δραμεῖν· ἔν γε μὴν τῷ ἐαν τρέχω, ἐὰν ἐν παρατάσει γένωμαι τοῦ τρέχειν. καὶ ἔνθεν ἀνέφικτος ἡ τοῦ μέλλοντος σύνταξις· αὐτοὶ γὰρ οἱ σύνδεσμοι τὸ ὡς ἐσόμενον σημαίνουσιν εἰς παράτασιν ⟨ἢ ἄνυσιν⟩.

Indeed, one should notice that the instances (παραθέσεις) that occur (with ἵνα and ἐάν) use both the present and the past tenses. In ἐάν μάθω the combination has a meaning such as: 'if I complete the act of learning', and in ἐὰν δράμω 'if I complete the act of running'; nevertheless, ἐὰν τρέχω signifies 'if I get into a state of going on running'. Hence the combination with the future (tense) is never found, for the constructions themselves indicate the future as leading to continuance ⟨or completion⟩.

[15] Owen (note ad loc.) calls this 'the tentative aorist used of an effort which has ended in failure' and, with Kühner-Gerth, cites also *Ion* 1500: ἔκτεινα σ'ἄκουσα 'I never willed thy death' (tr. Verrall), as well as an example (participle) from Sophocles, *Ajax* 1127: *ΜΕΝΕΛΑΟΣ δίκαια γὰρ τόνδ' εὐτυχεῖν κτείναντά με; ΤΕΥΚΡΟΣ κτείναντα; δεινόν γ'εἶπας, εἰ καὶ ζῇς θανών* (Me: 'Is it right that this my murderer should have honour?' Te: 'Murderer? A marvel truly if, though slain, thou livest.' (tr. Jebb)).

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ᾔνεσα ('I couldn't do it') she replies, and because the aorist enables her to distance herself from his proposal she goes on, 'but all the same, I admire your pluck.'[16] Essentially, an aorist takes in the whole picture, as gnomic aorists do. At Euripides, *Medea* 223–4 Medea sums up her feelings for all people of a certain kind:

οὐδ' ἀστὸν ᾔνεσ' ὅστις αὐθαδὴς γεγὼς
πικρὸς πολίταις ἐστὶν ἀμαθίας ὕπο . . .

And I never approve of any townsman who is so self willed that through discourtesy he is objectionable to the citizens.[17]

In the difficult example from Euripides' *Ion*, Creusa sums up in retrospect the whole of her action, ignoring its internal make-up, and says to Ion, 'what I did *was* killing; by me of you', meaning 'in short, I meant to kill you.' Because the aorist is the normal verb form for narrative, sometimes it is used simply to summarize the background to an action in contrast with a verb with another form, which is more worthy of note. Perhaps this is a more helpful explanation of Sophocles, *Electra* 668. Clytaemnestra's remark in full is: ἐδεξάμην τὸ ῥηθέν· εἰδέναι δέ σου πρώτιστα χρῄζω, τίς σ' ἀπέστειλεν βροτῶν. ἐδεξάμην gives greater emphasis to χρῄζω. 'I welcome what was said, *but first of all I want to know from you who on earth it was that sent you*.' A similar explanation may be given for Sophocles, *Philoctetes* 1314. Philoctetes has just made a complimentary remark to Neoptolemus, who has given him back the bow of Heracles. Neoptolemus responds:

ἤσθην πατέρα τὸν ἀμὸν εὐλογοῦντά σε
αὐτόν τέ μ'· ὧν δέ σου τυχεῖν ἐφίεμαι
ἄκουσον . . .

I'm pleased that you praise both my father and me myself, *but now hear what I want to obtain from you* . . .

The aorist indicative ἤσθην summarizes the background for ἄκουσον, a verb of a different form (aorist imperative) which is more worthy of note and carries the main emphasis. An aorist indicative is sometimes used to

[16] 'I could not. But I admire your courage.' (tr. Morwood). 'I praise your courage, but I could not think of it.' (tr. Vellacott). Platnauer's note is: Orestes has said: 'if the king's murder will save us, it must be *dared*.' Iphigenia answers in effect: 'yes, but it is not *decent* – though I recognize and admire the daring of your suggestion.' αἰνέω: 'I decline with thanks' is foreshadowed by Hesiod, *Works & Days* 643 (v. Liddell & Scott).

[17] 'Nor do I have any words of praise for the citizen who is self-willed and causes his fellow-citizens pain by his lack of breeding.' (tr. Kovacs). Elliott, *Euripides Medea* (Oxford, 1959) notes à propos ᾔνεσα: We might expect a present. The Greek means roughly 'Whenever this kind of thing has happened, I *did* not approve.' His note would have been more helpful, even for beginners, if it had related this to other examples of the 'dramatic' aorist.

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express an attitude which is adopted all at once. At Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis* 874 Clytaemnestra, after hearing from the slave that Agamemnon intends to kill their daughter, expresses complete disbelief: *ἀπέπτυσ', ὦ γεραιέ, μῦθον*. 'I totally reject the story, you dotard!'[18]

Interestingly, the 'dramatic aorist' is not always restricted to the first person singular. An example in the second person is to be found at Sophocles, *Ajax* 270:

> *πῶς τοῦτ' ἔλεξας; οὐ κάτοιδ' ὅπως λέγεις.*
>
> What do you mean? I do not understand what you are saying.
>
> (tr. Lloyd Jones)

and in the third person at Aristophanes, *Eccl.* 186–8:

> *ὁ μὲν λαβὼν ἀργύριον ὑπερεπῄνεσεν,*
> *ὁ δ' οὐ λαβὼν εἶναι θανάτου φήσ' ἀξίους*
> *τοὺς μισθοφορεῖν ζητοῦντας ἐν τῇκκλησίᾳ.*
>
> And he who gets the cash applauds the man,
> and he who gets it not protests that they
> who come for payment ought to die the death. (tr. Rogers)[19]

Plato and Xenophon often use *τί οὐ* followed by an aorist indicative to express impatience (Kühner-Gerth, 161, para. 10). This might be expressed in English by 'just', as at Plato, *Gorgias* 503b, Socrates says *εἴ τινα ἔχεις τῶν ῥητόρων τοιοῦτον εἰπεῖν, τί οὐχὶ καὶ ἐμοὶ αὐτὸν ἔφρασας τίς ἐστιν*; 'if you can mention such an orator, why don't you just say who it is?', expressing his impatience that Callicles, his interlocutor, hasn't already done so.[20] Another instance occurs later in the *Gorgias* (509e) when, after Callicles has broken off their discussion and resumed reluctantly, Socrates says *τί οὐκ αὐτό γέ μοι τοῦτο ἀπεκρίνω*; 'why don't you just answer this very point for me?' a question he has not asked Callicles before.[21] But *τί οὐ* with

[18] Headlam's explanation, that the access of feeling expressed by the verb has already taken place before the speaker can express in words the change in her mental attitude, cannot apply because this is the first that Clytaemnestra has heard of it, and so there has been no change in her attitude. Kühner-Gerth, 164, explains *ἀπέπτυσα* here as an aorist marking the entry of the feelings stimulated by the preceding remark, and renders it by the exclamation 'abscheulich', 'pfui!' ('how abominable!').

[19] See also Halliwell's translation:

> 'Those who draw pay adore Agyrrhios
> while those who don't regard the rest as frauds
> for living on their payment from the assembly!'

[20] 'If you have any orator of this kind that you can mention, without more ado let me know who he is!' (tr. Lamb).

[21] G. Wakker, in B. Jacquinod (ed.), *Études sur l'aspect chez Platon* (Université de Saint-Étienne, 2000), 356–7.

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the aorist can be coquettish, as for example at Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 3.11.15 when the glamorous and amiable Theodoté, an artists' model who lives in a good style on presents from her admirers, says to Socrates, 'why don't you just become my partner in hunting for friends?' *Τί οὖν οὐ σύ μοι, ἔφη, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἐγένου συνθηρατὴς τῶν φίλων;*[22]

A different use of the aorist indicative is found at Plato, *Phaedrus* 247e2–248b1. Socrates has likened a soul to a chariot with a driver and two horses, and describes a god's soul journeying round the eternal verities outside the heavens. He expresses the visions of eternal justice in the present tense, and sums up the whole trip with an aorist:

καὶ τἆλλα ὡσαύτως τὰ ὄντα ὄντως θεασαμένη καὶ ἐστιαθεῖσα, δῦσα πάλιν εἰς τὸ εἴσω τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, οἴκαδε ἦλθεν.

and having gazed and feasted in the same way on the other things which really are, it descends into the region below the heavens and [just] goes home (tr. Rowe, alt.).

ἦλθεν is the first of eight consecutive non-past-referring aorists without *τί οὐ*. Two more describe the charioteer part of a god's soul stabling his horses, and five then describe the more turbulent progress of the soul most like the god and best able to follow him. Socrates reverts to the present tense to describe the chaotic efforts of the rest of humanity. Kühner-Gerth (161, end of para. 7) notes these aorists as gnomic, used to specify things not cited from experience but from fantasy, and perhaps we could render the last five: 'if ever a soul is best able to follow a god and most like him, then it ascends to the place outside and . . .'[23]

Evidently, the notion of completeness specified in Kühner-Gerth is

[22] 'Then Socrates,' exclaimed Theodoté, 'why don't you become my partner in pursuit of friends?' (tr. Marchant).

[23] Plato, *Phaedrus* 247e2–248b1: *καὶ τἆλλα ὡσαυτῶς τὰ ὄντα ὄντως θεασαμένη καὶ ἐστιαθεῖσα, δῦσα πάλιν εἰς τὸ εἴσω τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, οἴκαδε ἦλθεν. ἐλθούσης δὲ αὐτῆς ὁ ἡνίοχος πρὸς τὴν φάτνην τοὺς ἵππους στήσας παρέβαλεν ἀμβροσίαν τε καὶ ἐπ' αὐτῇ νέκταρ ἐπότισεν. Καὶ οὗτος μὲν θεῶν βίος· αἱ δὲ ἄλλαι ψυχαί, ἡ μὲν ἄριστα θεῷ ἑπομένη καὶ εἰκασμένη ὑπερῆρεν εἰς τὸν ἔξω τόπον τὴν τοῦ ἡνιόχου κεφαλήν, καὶ συμπεριηνέχθη τὴν περιφοράν, θορυβουμένη ὑπὸ τῶν ἵππων καὶ μόγις καθορῶσα τὰ ὄντα· ἡ δὲ τοτὲ μὲν ἦρεν, τοτὲ δ' ἔδυ, βιαζομένων δὲ τῶν ἵππων τὰ μὲν εἶδεν, τὰ δ' οὔ. αἱ δὲ δὴ ἄλλαι γλιχόμεναι μὲν ἅπασαι τοῦ ἄνω ἕπονται, ἀδυνατοῦσαι δέ, ὑποβρύχιαι συμπεριφέρονται, πατοῦσαι ἀλλήλας καὶ ἐπιβάλλουσαι, ἑτέρα πρὸ τῆς ἑτέρας πειρωμένη γένεσθαι.*

And having gazed in the same way at the other things that really are and having feasted, sinking back again to what is inside the heaven, it just *goes* home. And when it arrives, the charioteer, having set the horses at the manger both *puts* ambrosia beside them and *gives* them a drink of nectar as well. And this is the life of gods; as regards the other souls, if ever there is one that follows a god best and is like him, it *raises* its charioteer's head to the place outside, and it *is carried round* the revolving vault with him (the god), though distracted by the horses and only able with difficulty to catch sight of the things that are; and one sometimes *rises*, and another sometimes *sinks*, and because of the violence of the horses, *sees* some of the realities, but not others. And indeed the other souls all follow, striving ineffectually after what is above, but they are carried round below the surface (of the heaven), knocking into and jostling each other, each trying to get in front of the other (tr. F.B.).

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typical of aorists. This seems to have been recognized in some way in antiquity by Apollonius Dyscolus, and is found in the more modern notion of aspect. It is unfortunate if students are introduced to the aorist indicative *only* as a past tense. The aorist aspect indicates the viewpoint of a speaker or writer outside an action *not necessarily in the past*, of which the beginning and end are in view. Anyone who does not have any feeling for the aorist will miss a lot in reading Classical Greek. Recognition of the aspectual quality of *all* aorists will interest students and help clarify the relation between aorist indicatives and participles, and the aorist imperative, infinitive, optative, and subjunctive.

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