SYNTAX IN EXEGESIS*

By K. L. MCKAY

The title of this paper might be more correctly expressed as 'Basic Syntax of the Greek Verb', as its emphasis is mainly on aspect (*Aktionsart*) in the Greek verb. Many years ago I was told by a senior classical scholar that classicists have a duty to remind theologians to keep their feet on the ground. In aiming to fulfil that duty, it is only fair to warn that, since I have become concerned with the Greek perfect, I have become something of an enthusiast for the emancipation of Greek syntax, and I may myself need reminding to keep my feet on the ground.

Syntax is the arrangement of words to form clauses, sentences, paragraphs. It is primarily a matter of relationships, and no part of it can be studied completely in isolation. It includes word order as well as inflexion and both may be significant at any point even though inflexion is usually the more important in Greek. Even when we know the words in a sentence any confusion we may have about their syntax may distort our understanding of their significance.

One of our problems in studying New Testament Greek syntax is the number of textual variants that make one just a little uncertain of a particular point. Where the manuscript evidence is divided between, say, perfect and aorist, one hesitates to expound so forcefully the significance of the reading in the text one happens to be using, especially if other editors have chosen the other reading. And of course, once an authoritative grammar contains the declaration that in this period the perfect is often confused with the aorist, most editors cease to bother to record alternatives of this kind in their apparatus

criticus. Yet the remarkable thing is the number of passages in which there is no serious doubt.

Another complication we have to face is that most, if not all, of the discourses recorded in the New Testament are not given in their full and unabridged form, and précis does have a tendency to distort syntax. On the other hand, in the Epistles, where we can expect to find the original fullness of exposition, we must recognize the possibility of anacoluthon due to the writer's thoughts on a current problem racing ahead of his ability to communicate them, with the result that a sentence may change direction in mid-course.

A proposition may usually be expressed in a variety of ways, sometimes with no perceptible difference, sometimes with only a greater or lesser degree of emphasis, sometimes with only a difference in the level of formality. A writer's style is made up of his preferences for particular modes of expression in varying circumstances. The difference between ἵνα and ὅπως used with the subjunctive to express purpose appears to have been simply a matter of personal choice in both the classical and the hellenistic periods, but in the latter ὅπως was a revival of an old-fashioned formula while ἵνα was in the mainstream of the development of the language. In this case a writer's choice of one or other of these conjunctions affects his style but not his syntax, but if he decides to use a future participle instead his syntax as well as his style is affected.

Grammatical categories are rarely as clear cut as the grammarians' labels tend to suggest. In Matthew 19:27 τί ἄρα ἔσται ἡμῖν; 'What will there be for us?' amounts to 'What shall we have?' or even 'What will belong to us?' Can we distinguish here between the datives of advantage and of possession? The fact that at times a genitive is found where this dative could be used suggests that the label 'dative of possession' is not inappropriate, but it is impossible to define its limits in such a way that there can be no doubt at all which datives belong to this category and to no other.

The distinction between expressions of purpose and of consequence may seem clear enough to us, but much of it depends on point of view. Sometimes one person may regard action A as having been taken in order that B may happen, while another person may prefer to state simply that B happened

as a result of A. In the classical period, when the normal means of expressing purpose and consequence are fairly distinct, we are sometimes surprised that Greek writers express as consequence what seems a fairly clear case of purpose. By New Testament times the use of the infinitive to express purpose had extended rather widely and a certain confusion seems to have developed between the methods of expressing the two notions. When confusion occurs in one direction a certain amount of backlash effect is natural, increasing the confusion. In trying to assess the problem we should bear in mind that if the ancient Greeks had had our approach to these questions this confusion might never have developed: our logic may be useful in sorting out the facts for our own appreciation, but it does not necessarily lie behind the ancient Greek linguistic developments.

The labels that we give to grammatical categories are a useful form of shorthand description, but they are not the whole story, and we need to beware of assuming that once we have attached a label we have proved that we understand fully. The very brevity of these labels implies that they depend on assumptions, and different people's assumptions can be sufficiently different to distort and to some extent to undermine the communication of ideas which the system of terminology was intended to achieve.

Every language, like every person, is in the final analysis an individual, however many inherited traits it may share with other members of its linguistic family, and however many environmental peculiarities it may have picked up from its foreign neighbours. In the study of a modern language we can deal synchronically with what exists now, observing living usage and testing our theories on native speakers. Our understanding can in some cases be enriched by means of comparative and historical studies, but these can be kept in perspective and not allowed to overshadow the observation of the individual language as it is.

In dealing with an ancient language we need to rely much more on comparative and historical studies. The body of material available for study is limited, and there are no contemporary informants to answer our questions. We need to make the most of what we have, and to explore thoroughly

every piece of evidence which may conceivably prove useful. There are undoubted similarities between Greek and Latin, and the comparative study of the two has shed light on the individual structure of each of these languages; but the predominance of Latin in western Europe has led to Greek grammar's being explained too much in terms of Latin grammar. Even today when much has been done to overthrow it this tyranny still has its influence.[1] It is not essential to adopt an entirely different terminology for each language, but it is necessary to redefine terms carried over from one language to another to suit the different circumstances. Sometimes there can be identity of definition, but more often some modification will be necessary.

Our understanding of New Testament Greek is, however, advanced less by comparisons with other languages than by the examination of the historical development of Greek itself. For example, we would hardly have enough material to get a clear picture of the optative as it occurs in the New Testament if we were not able to compare it with the more extensive use of the classical period. It is very satisfying to trace the decay of one element of the language from almost imperceptible confusions in one period through to the time when the syntax has been restructured to compensate for the change and loss of that element, but in doing this, and especially when working backwards, it is important not to confuse conjecture with proof.

For example, it is known that the ancient Greek perfect broke down towards the end of the Byzantine period and was eventually replaced by a periphrastic perfect more or less parallel to the form of perfect found in modern English, French, German, *etc*. As one factor in the breakdown was a certain confusion with the narrative use of the aorist, grammarians have projected something of this confusion back, not only to the New Testament period, but even as far back as Homer. But much of the evidence is overstated, as it is by Dr Nigel Turner in dealing with the use of periphrastic forms of the perfect in New Testament Greek.[2] He declares that the substitution of a periphrasis is a common feature of the loss by a

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[1] In Moulton's *Grammar of New Testament Greek*, Vol. 3, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh (1963) 117, Dr N. Turner goes too far in the other direction and, in his efforts to contrast with the Greek, partially misrepresents Latin standards.
[2] Moulton's *Grammar of New Testament Greek*, Vol. 3, 88f.

grammatical form of its characteristic force, and goes on to sketch briefly a development of the use of the perfect participle with the verb *to be*, as occurring in the subjunctive and optative in classical Greek, spreading to the indicative in the New Testament, possibly due to Semitic influence, and he then concludes by stating that it is the periphrastic perfect that has persisted to the present day. In all this he underestimates the use of the perfect participle with the verb *to be* in classical Greek, where it is pretty regular for subjunctive, optative *and* imperative and by no means unknown in the indicative. There may be Semitic influence behind New Testament usage, but only to the extent of strengthening a natural Greek tendency, which incidentally seems to emphasize the characteristic force of the perfect rather than illustrate its corruption. But in his reference to modern Greek he is quite misleading, for the periphrasis which predominates in the modern Greek perfect is ἔχω with the aorist infinitive, which did not begin to appear with anything approaching a perfect meaning until the Middle Ages. The only other periphrasis for the perfect which exists in modern Greek is developed from ἔχω with the perfect passive participle, which occurs in the classical period as well as in the New Testament and later, but comparatively rarely, and then always, it seems, with a rather special sense.[3]

I apologize for this digression into morphology, but it is relevant to the extent that it is often assumed that a change of form necessarily indicates a change of meaning, and it is a particularly clear example of the sort of muddled argument that so often sidetracks the best intentions. But let me add yet another example. In hellenistic Greek the 3 pl. perfect active indicative ending -ασι tends to be replaced by -αν, and it is argued that this is because the perfect in taking over the meaning of the aorist naturally takes its suffixes too. But another explanation is not only possible but more likely: the endings of the perfect and weak aorist indicative active are identical except in the third plural; the weak aorist occurs more commonly than the perfect, and in some of the very common verbs it contains ϰ instead of σ, so that the ending -ϰαν was

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[3] Erika Mihevc: 'La disparition du parfait dans le grec de la basse époque' (Akademija znanosti in umjetnosti u Ljubljana: *Razred za filoloske in literarne vede: Classis II Philologia et litterae*, Dela 5: 1956, 91ff.), 141f. The earliest example she quotes is from the third century BC, but it occurs in Herodotus 1.60.1.

reasonably common; the weak aorist endings were spreading to the strong aorist (perhaps also to the imperfect, but that is probably a later development). The wonder is that -ασι persisted as long as it did. It is perhaps worth noting that the perfect participle shows no sign of adopting aorist forms.

Most of the New Testament writers are likely to have been native Aramaic speakers, so their judgment of what was idiomatically right for Greek may well have been slightly biased towards apparent parallels in Aramaic. In such matters as the use of periphrases with participles each occurrence must be examined separately: we cannot *a priori* rule out either the full Greek significance of the combination or the weakened meaning of a Semitism. While Aramaic influence was probably confined to formal and syntactical details in which the two languages came fairly close to one another, Latin influence on New Testament Greek is likely to have been confined to technical words and phrases, especially in the sphere of government.

When J. H. Moulton first wrote the *Prolegomena* to his *Grammar of New Testament Greek* nearly seventy years ago he introduced as something new, which had not yet found its way into the grammars, the concept called by German philologists *Aktionsart*. This label has since become well known among New Testament grammarians, but it is possible that its significance is less well understood. In common with most English-speaking classical scholars, I prefer to use another label, 'aspect', for what is referred to is not the kind of action, but the way in which the writer or speaker regards the action in its context—as a whole act, as a process, or as a state.

It is on this general question of aspect that Greek syntax has suffered most from attempts to force it into Latin categories. In the Latin of the early second century BC there is clear evidence of the partial persistence of more aspectual distinctions than we find a century later, while the pluperfect subjunctive seems to be still a relatively new development, not yet fully acclimatized. By the first century BC, however, Latin had a strong tendency not only to divide actions into past, present and future, but to specify which of two past or future actions is prior in time. This time-centredness applies to the subjunctive and infinitive as well as to the indicative, and it

has been largely inherited by modern European languages. The Greek verb was quite different. Moulton and others have in varying degrees drawn attention to the extent of the difference, and one would have expected to find by now general recognition of the irrelevance of time considerations to the Greek subjunctive. Yet in the third volume of Moulton's *Grammar*, published in 1963, Dr Turner writes on relative clauses with the subjunctive as follows (p. 107): 'The use of pres. or aor. subj. bears little or no relation to the *Aktionsart*. In the papyri the difference appears to be that the pres. indicates that the time of the subordinate clause is coincident with that of the main (or durative action, if relatively past), while the aor. indicates a relatively past time.' He then proceeds to illustrate this from the New Testament, torturing the sentences to produce his meaning. I do not think I exaggerate in saying that this emphasis on time is completely wrong. What we need is not to turn the clock back to Latin-based explanation, but to follow the logic of aspect a little further away from them.

Being convinced that time considerations in the ancient Greek verb, at least to the end of the second century AD, were not only confined to the indicative, but even in that mood were rather less important than we tend to assume, I would like to reorganize its categories sufficiently to make this clearer, while retaining most of the traditional terminology. I propose therefore that the major divisions of the verb now called 'tenses' be renamed 'aspects'; that 'tense', with its temporal implications, be redefined as belonging only to the indicative; that the term 'present', because of its strong temporal associations, be restricted to the indicative; and that the term 'imperfective' be introduced to describe the corresponding aspect. Thus:-

	Imperfective Aspect	*Aorist Aspect*	*Perfect Aspect*	*(Future)*
Indicative {	present tense imperfect tense	aorist tense	perfect tense pluperfect tense future perfect tense	future tense
Subjunctive	imperfective subj.	aorist subj.	perfect subj.	—
Optative	imperfective opt.	aorist opt.	perfect opt.	—
Imperative	imperfective imperat.	aorist imperat.	perfect imperat.	—
Participle	imperfective part.	aorist part.	perfect part.	(future part.)
Infinitive	imperfective inf.	aorist inf.	perfect inf.	(future inf.)

In this scheme the future has an anomalous position, but it *is* rather anomalous in Greek. In the earlier history of the language it can be seen to have links with the subjunctive, which give it some of the characteristics of a mood. It exists most fully in the indicative, and its infinitive and participle are limited to those uses which are substitutes for the indicative. In the classical period it had a similarly limited optative, but this was always rare, and did not survive in the hellenistic period.

The aorist aspect gets its name from the Greeks' own assessment of it as undefined (ἀόριστος). If we add this information to the impression we get from an examination of its use as a whole (not concentrating on the tense alone), it seems that we should define the aorist aspect as concerned with events or actions considered simply as complete entities. It is virtually a residual aspect, used when the speaker or writer had no special reason to use any other. We may, for the sake of translation into another language, subdivide its uses into ingressive, constative, punctiliar, and the like. No doubt the ancient Greeks could recognize some of these distinctions when they paused to contemplate the exact meanings of what they were saying, but in the main the aorist was to them one aspect and they chose between it and the other aspects as readily as we do between 'I did' and 'I have done', or between 'I do' and 'I am doing' without necessarily being able to explain satisfactorily the nature of these distinctions.

The action referred to by the aorist may be single and punctiliar or it may be repeated, or spread continuously over a long period of time, but it is regarded as a complete entity, nothing more or less. In Acts 28:30 ἐνέμεινεν διετίαν ὅλην the verb covers a long period but simply records the fact of Paul's staying for that period. In Acts 10:38 διῆλθεν covers all the Lord's movements of passing through as a single fact without special reference to the number or length or spacing of individual journeys. A verb whose basic meaning involves a continuing state of affairs may crystallize as a complete event at the point where the state of affairs begins (ingressive use): *e.g.* Galatians 4:9 οἷς πάλιν ἄνωθεν δουλεῦσαι θέλετε; 'do you want to become enslaved to them all over again?' (The variant reading δουλεύειν would mean 'to be in a condition of slavery', a different but not inappropriate significance.) In verse 8

τότε ἐδουλεύσατε 'at that time you were slaves' the aorist is not ingressive but constative, covering the whole period of their slavery, but simply recording it as a complete event, the context implying that it should be quite over and done with. There is no problem about using the aorist of the same verb twice in quick succession with these apparently different meanings. In Greek the aorist was simply the aorist, the 'undefined.'

The imperfective was used to express an action as in process, going on—durative in a sense, but the idea of time is unimportant. It may refer to a single action, whether momentary or extended, or to a series of actions, but essentially it represents it as simply a process. Against a background of aorists this may imply incompleteness, so 'try to do', 'begin to do', 'set about doing' may be appropriate English equivalents. In some contexts 'keep on doing' may be more appropriate.

The perfect aspect was used to express state or condition consequent upon an action. It has been argued that one of the factors that led to the decay of the perfect was the development at an early date of the resultative perfect, expressing the state of the object instead of that of the subject: 'I have done it and it remains done.'[4] My own studies have made me certain that this development was nowhere near as widespread as has been claimed, at least down to the end of the second century AD, and I am very doubtful whether it occurred at all. When the Lord said ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε (Mt. 9:22, etc.) I do not think He meant the same as Paul in Ephesians 2:8, but 'It is your faith that has saved you now', with the implication 'you need to continue in faith'. Originally and naturally the state expressed was that of the subject. Where the state of the object was in view either the passive could be used or ἔχω with the perfect passive participle. Some grammarians use the term 'resultative perfect' for an active perfect with an accusative object, but I fail to see the point of defining it this way. Certainly Wackernagel, who invented it, used it for the state of the object, although he argues that this came about because of the attachment of accusative objects to previously intransitive perfects. But is the transitive use of the perfect so very significant?

[4] J. Wackernagel, 'Studien zum griechischen Perfectum', *Kleine Schriften*, II, Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, Göttingen (1953) 1000–21; P. Chantraine, *Histoire du parfait grec*, H. Champion, Paris (1927).

In Latin the distinction between transitive and intransitive is important and fairly clear. In Greek it is much less so, and we need to beware of judging Greek by Latin standards.

The concept 'I am in the condition of having done' may involve 'I am guilty of doing', 'I am responsible for having done', or 'I am on record as having done'. When Pilate said ὃ γέγραφα γέγραφα he meant 'This is my responsibility and I accept it'. When used with a verb like ἔχω or δουλεύω or a verb of emotion the perfect either draws attention to the fact that the state of affairs began with a particular action, or intensifies the meaning by stressing state rather than process. Ἔχω means 'I have', 'I am having'; εἶχον 'I had', in the sense 'I was having'; ἔσχον 'I had', complete or constative (although some doubt this), or 'I got'; ἔσχηκα 'having got I continue to have', or 'having had I am now free of'. This last, which might be given the label 'ex-state', is an interesting one that is comparatively rare, but sufficiently widespread to be clearly a normal possibility. It occurs in Mark. 5:15 τὸν ἐσχηκότα τὸν λεγιῶνα 'the man who had had the legion (but who was now cured)'. Either the imperfective or the aorist participle might have been used here with possible but slightly different emphases. In the same sentence the man is in fact called τὸν δαιμονιζόμενον, 'the man who used to be (or, who has until now been) a demoniac'. In verse 16 the imperfective participle is again used, but in verse 18 he is ὁ δαιμονισθείς. The reason for these variations lies in the context. The crowd came up and recognized the man, and the imperfective participle stands for the relative clause ὃς ἐδαιμονίζετο, imperfect (or perhaps δαιμονίζεται, present—but both are imperfective); then as the significance of the man's changed appearance dawned on them he became τὸν ἐσχηκότα, expressing both the former position and the new state of affairs, and they became afraid. Then the explanations from eyewitnesses went round the crowd and the imperfective again stresses the open-ended 'he used to be demon-possessed'. Then he is referred to objectively by the historian, and the aorist records simply the completed occurrence of demon-possession without any stress on either continuation or a new state of affairs.

In the tenses, by which I mean the indicative mood of the various aspects, time does have some significance, but even

here I suspect that we tend to overstress it. The present tense not only refers to present time, but is commonly used for timeless statements. 'I always kiss my wife when I come home from work'—but I have not been home for months, and it will be months before I reach home again. For the *present* therefore the statement hardly applies: in *time* it is past and future. The same is true of the aorist. The so-called gnomic aorist has no particular time reference. There is no need to imagine any development from particular past events to general timeless statements. The difference between the present and the aorist in these timeless contexts is the normal aspectual difference between process and complete action, and we need not apologize for it. True, the aorist indicative is more often used to express past time than in this timeless sense, but the gnomic aorist is not so uncommon in Greek that we can write it off as an embarrassment. Some grammarians write as if the present may be used to express a punctiliar action in present time ('aoristic present'), but can it? If a real action is really in present time it is almost inevitably in process. In the rare cases where an aoristic sense in present time is appropriate—mainly in the colloquial language of comedy—the aorist is used.[5] Similarly when in an unreal sentence (what would happen if things were otherwise) it is necessary to express complete action in present time—also a rarity—the aorist is used with ἄν.[6] These details are found outside the New Testament and they are rare, but they exist, and we must either explain them away or incorporate them in our explanation of the Greek verb. The imperfect tense is most commonly used of past time, but in unreal sentences it is often used of present time: it is always imperfective in aspect. Similarly the pluperfect usually refers to past time, in an unreal context may have present reference, but is always perfect in aspect.

If we could project our minds into the mould of those who used Greek commonly in the New Testament period, we would be less preoccupied with time—although not completely oblivious of it—and more alert to the nuances conveyed by the varying patterns of aspect in the verbs in our texts. We need to remember, however, that the same form in a different

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[5] *E.g.* Aristophanes, *Knights* 696, *Wasps* 213.
[6] *E.g.* Plato, *Euthyphro* 12D, *Protagoras* 311B, C; Euripides, *Alcestis* 360-2, 386.

context might have a very different effect, and that in some circumstances it will make little difference whether imperfective or aorist, aorist or perfect aspect is used, so the final decision is simply due to the whim of the speaker or writer. If we cannot see why he chose as he did, it may be that we can detect a change in his use of the aspects, or it may be that we do not fully appreciate what he and his audience took for granted.

In dealing with the different aspects in commands and prohibitions Dr Turner[7] seems to turn away from the position taken by Moulton in the *Prolegomena* to his *Grammar*. While admitting that the aspectual distinctions between imperfective and aorist are broadly observed at all periods and persist in modern Greek, he expresses his doubts, quoting 2 Corinthians 13:11, 12 as an exception. But surely the answer there is simple. The imperfective imperatives in verse 11 'live in unity, keep the peace', *etc.* are followed in verse 12 by the specific ἀσπάσασθε 'greet one another', which must be linked with the greeting from 'all the saints' which occupies the latter half of the verse. Turner goes on to suggest that each verb may be used in only one aspect, and then asks, 'Why the same prohibition, however, μὴ ὁμόσῃς in Mt. 5:36 and μὴ ὁμνύετε in Jas. 5:12?' Again the answer lies in the context. In Matthew our Lord is dramatizing a new command, not just to limit swearing, but not to swear at all (*cf.* verse 34 μὴ ὁμόσαι πάντως, which is the indirect form of the command), so that aoristic completeness is important. James on the other hand is giving without contrast a mild series of exhortations to ἀδελφοί μου: 'my brothers, don't be in the habit of swearing'.[8]

It is commonly argued that the perfect was being confused with the aorist and was on its way to being absorbed by it, as happened in Latin at an early stage in the development of that language. Now if one examines the Greek verb, not only in the New Testament but in classical literature, with a Latin-orientated preoccupation with time, it is not difficult to find examples that are readily explained as illustrating this development. Yet the fact remains that however willing we are to see decay in the perfect we must acknowledge that the ancient

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[7] *Op. cit.*, 75.
[8] See J. P. Louw, 'On Greek Prohibitions', *Acta Classica* 2 (1959) 43–57.

function of the Greek perfect is clearly fulfilled by many perfects, and this continues to be true for several centuries after the New Testament. It seems to me that once a confusion of this kind really sets in it is likely to produce significant decay within a generation or two, and not follow a steady transition over a period of a millennium or two, as Chantraine[9] argues. The fact that a change took place late in the Byzantine period does not in itself make it likely that the seeds of that change will be found in the early Roman period. I have examined in their contexts the examples adduced by Wackernagel, Chantraine and Mihevc[10] covering the period from Homer to the end of the second century AD, and I find that the majority of them prove nothing either way: they will satisfactorily illustrate more than one theory of the perfect. Many of these examples, however, have a much more satisfactory significance within their contexts if they are taken as true perfects, describing the state or condition of their subject. For a very small number a case can be made for a resultative perfect, but the number of examples that seem to require the confusion of aorist and perfect is very small indeed, and possibly zero.

If, as is likely, most of the New Testament writers were native Aramaic speakers to whom the aorist/perfect distinction was a foreign element, a proportion of confusions might be expected, so the paucity of apparent examples of confusion is significant rather to establish the strength of the distinction between aorist and perfect. Some of the arguments that have been used in alleging confusion are that when two co-ordinate verbs are of different aspectual form they must both have the same aspectual force, and similarly when a question asked with one aspect is answered by another. But this is to assert that the Greek language was entirely governed by mechanical rules, when even a superficial reading gives the impression of variety and flexibility—and that impression deepens as one examines more closely. In Mark 5:19 the healed demoniac is told to go home and declare ὅσα ὁ κύριός σοι πεποίηκεν καὶ ἐλέησέν σε 'how much the Lord has done for you in having mercy on you'. Both verbs could have had either aspect. Both could simply

have told of the event with the aorist, or both could have drawn more attention to the author of the deed by using the perfect. But the first, a more general verb, depending for its effect on the relative ὅσα, is put into the more expressive form, high-lighting ὁ κύριος, and then the more specific verb can make its contribution in the more matter-of-fact aorist. It does not contrast with the perfect: it carries on its force to some extent, but as the effect of the perfect has already been achieved it need not be repeated. The conjunction καί here is epexegetic, used not to introduce a further action, but to explain with further detail. A similar pattern occurs in Revelation 3:3 μνημόνευε οὖν πῶς εἴληφας καὶ ἤκουσας. It is important to re-member that just as in many contexts the speaker or writer would be justified in using either imperfective or aorist, so also in many contexts he would be justified in using either aorist or perfect. These borderline cases may even be more numerous than the ones where only one aspect is really appropriate, but the writer's choice often reveals something significant about his attitude to the events he refers to.

Frequently in the New Testament the perfect is used where we might expect the aorist, in order to draw attention to the identity of the subject. For example, in Acts 7:35 'this Moses, whom they rejected with the question "Who appointed you?"', τοῦτον ὁ θεὸς . . . ἀπέσταλκεν. If the aorist had been used the contrast between the doubting Israelites and God would have been clear enough, but the perfect underlines it by going beyond the mere statement of the event of God's sending Moses. The fact that English idiom would prefer a simple past tense in translating this perfect is neither here nor there. In Hebrews 1:5 the question is asked τίνι γὰρ εἶπέν ποτε τῶν ἀγγέλων; and in 1:13 there is a similar question, πρὸς τίνα δὲ τῶν ἀγγέλων εἴρηκέ ποτε; Is there any difference between aorist and perfect here? It may be only a matter of style or emphasis, but I think there is a difference, although it may not show out in transla-tion. The perfect in verse 13 is the same as that of Acts 7:35, stressing the identity of the subject, although it is implied from the context rather than explicitly stated. The more formal πρὸς τίνα accompanies it, while verse 5 has the dative of the indirect object; but most significantly the perfect comes in the emphatic end position, while εἶπεν in verse 5 is unobtrusively

placed in the middle of the sentence, allowing the contrast of the Son with the angels to be given greater prominence. That contrast having been established, a different emphasis can be made in verse 13. This perfect stressing the authority of the subject is not peculiar to the New Testament. Thucydides at the start of his history of the Peloponnesian War makes some deductions on the scale of the Trojan War, using Homer as his authority and the perfect εἴρηκε as his verb.

In Matthew 26:48 we find ὁ δὲ παραδιδοὺς αὐτὸν ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς σημεῖον, while in the parallel passage in Mark 14:44 the pluperfect is used: δεδώκει δὲ ὁ παραδιδοὺς αὐτὸν σύσσημον αὐτοῖς. Both are appropriate, the aorist simply recording the event and the pluperfect (which is simply one of the tenses within the perfect aspect) describes the state of preparation Judas was in. Of the two the more expressive is the pluperfect, and it is not without significance that it is given the emphatic position at the beginning of the sentence, while the aorist occupies the weaker position in the middle.

It is sometimes assumed that there is little or no difference between the imperfective γινώσκω and the perfect ἔγνωκα, mainly, I think, because the translation 'know' is sometimes appropriate to both. But both are contrasted in 2 Corinthians 5:16 εἰ καὶ ἐγνώκαμεν κατὰ σάρκα Χριστόν, ἀλλὰ νῦν οὐκέτι γινώσκομεν, 'even if we have come to know Christ according to the flesh, nevertheless we now no longer gain knowledge of him that way'. It is interesting to note that οἴδαμεν also occurs in the first section of this verse in a way that suggests that the difference between οἶδα and ἔγνωκα is that the former takes little or no account of the act of learning, while the latter gives it a certain prominence.

Moulton argued in his *Prolegomena*[11] that ἔσχηκα may have come to be regarded as an aorist form. Yet in some of its occurrences there is no difficulty in taking it as really perfect: *e.g.* in Romans 5:2 an aorist would be possible but the perfect is more expressive of the Christian's position. The example that is, I think, generally regarded as the most difficult to accept as perfect is 2 Corinthians 2:13 οὐκ ἔσχηκα ἄνεσιν. On the face of it an aorist seems natural: 'When I went to Troas, although a door of opportunity was open I got no respite

[11] *Prolegomena*, 145.

because I didn't find Titus, but I went away . . .' The context stresses Paul's concern for the Corinthians and his eagerness to get news. In view of the extent to which the perfect can be used to highlight the continuing effect of his action on the subject's life, or even on his reputation beyond his lifetime,[12] I think this may be just a means of emphasizing the emotional effect, not only at the time but ever since, of his not getting the expected news. It amounts to 'I got no respite—and I still feel the effect—because . . .'.

A parallel special effect of a slightly different kind is to be found in 1 Corinthians 15:4 καὶ ὅτι ἐγήγερται τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ κατὰ τὰς γραφάς. The verbs which precede and follow are all aorists, and the specific time reference seems to indicate an aorist as appropriate here too. Logically the aorist is the most natural form to use: this is a simple summary of the content of the gospel, providing the background to a fuller argument on the resurrection. But Paul cannot wait. His main theme demands the perfect, 'Christ is risen', and so the argument is anticipated in its prologue: 'Christ died, was buried, rose again the third day according to the scriptures—and remains risen!—was seen . . .' The ability of the Greek perfect to imply a complete action sufficiently to allow the attachment of a specific time phrase, while at the same time stressing the state of affairs resulting from that action, is here fully exploited by Paul. An English translation must either ignore part of the significance or become cumbersome. It is worth noting that in Matthew 28:7, Mark 16:6 and Luke 24:34 the resurrection is reported by means of the aorist ἠγέρθη 'He has risen' (or 'has been raised', but not 'is risen').

Revelation 5:7 καὶ ἦλθεν καὶ εἴληφεν has been quoted as an illustration of an aoristic perfect. But the context is suggestive: 'nobody could open the book, or even look on it . . . and I saw a lamb . . . and he came and took it . . . and when he took (ἔλαβε) it the beasts and elders fell before the lamb.' The writer of Revelation tends to favour occasional historic presents in predominantly aorist contexts, and the perfect εἴληφεν is something like a highly dramatized historic present.[13] It is made clear in the next sentence that it was the action of taking that was the important one, so as the vision is recorded the

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[12] McKay, *op. cit.*, 11.   [13] *Cf.* McKay, *op. cit.*, 13f.

writer suddenly moves from normal narrative to the vivid 'he's got it!' Even the historic present would not be enough to catch the emotional effect of this significant event.

The same verb form is used with less sudden dramatic force in Revelation 8:5. It may indeed be taken as equivalent to a historic present, but its purpose here is only resumptive. In verse 3 the angel comes on the scene ἔχων λιβανωτὸν χρυσοῦν and then our attention is drawn to some of the other circumstances. Eventually we return to the censer with the words καὶ εἴληφεν ὁ ἄγγελος τὸν λιβανωτόν, and we are told what he did with it. The verb might have been ἔχει or εἶχεν, but εἴληφεν is more weighty. The pluperfect εἰλήφει would be another possibility, more impressive than ἔχει or εἶχεν, but less dramatic than εἴληφεν.

Participles are very common in Greek and seem to have caused a lot of trouble because of the apparent time element in so many of them. The difficulties virtually disappear if one bears in mind that it is aspect rather than tense that is primarily expressed by the Greek verb, and that the participle is a substitute for a subordinate clause, although in many cases it might seem more natural to substitute a co-ordinate clause. In Luke 15:23 if we were asked to express φαγόντες εὐφρανθῶμεν without a participle we would naturally write φάγωμεν καὶ . . . Although the use of a participle here is itself proof of formal subordination to the other verb, it is difficult to think of a satisfactory subordinate clause as an intermediate stage: ὅταν φάγωμεν 'when we eat', or ἐν τῷ φαγεῖν 'by eating' might do, but neither seems as likely as either φάγωμεν καὶ or φαγόντες. The fact is that in some circumstances the participle had become so much the normal form of subordination that we rarely or never find subordinate clauses in those circumstances. Nevertheless the participle regularly has the aspect of the verb that would have occurred in an equivalent subordinate clause. In Matthew 27:4 ἥμαρτον παραδούς Judas means[14] ἥμαρτον ὅτι (or ὅτε) παρέδωκα, and the aorist participle is used because this last is aorist in aspect. That it happens to be indicative, aorist tense, with past time reference, is unimportant; that it is aorist aspect, referring to the action as complete,

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[14] Note that he did not go so far as to say ἡμάρτηκα, although in view of his subsequent suicide this may not be especially significant.

is all important. In Matthew 10:4 Judas at the time of his selection as one of the twelve is referred to as ὁ καὶ παραδοὺς αὐτόν, i.e. ὃς καὶ παρέδωκεν αὐτόν. The relationship of the time of the betrayal and the time of the selection is irrelevant: the event only is important and it alone is expressed. If Matthew had wanted to remind us that it happened later he would have added ὕστερον. In Matthew 26:48 when the betrayal is in progress Judas is ὁ παραδιδούς (i.e. ὃς παρεδίδου)—an imperfective participle because the verb would be imperfective in aspect: again the tense and time reference are incidental.

In 1 Corinthians 7 when Paul turns from the unmarried and the widows he refers in verse 10 to τοῖς γεγαμηκόσιν, i.e. τούτοις οἳ γεγαμήκασιν 'those who are in a state of marriage'. Then in verse 25 he turns again to the unmarried, and in verse 28 we find ἐὰν δὲ καὶ γαμήσῃς, οὐκ ἥμαρτες 'if you marry you do not commit sin thereby'.[15] Both verbs are aorist because they refer to a decisive event as a whole. In verse 33 we find, in contrast with the devotion of the unmarried to the Lord's business, ὁ δὲ γαμήσας μεριμνᾷ τὰ τοῦ κόσμου. Now if this is simply 'the married man', why not ὁ γεγαμηκώς, as in verse 10? Surely the participle here is the equivalent of ὃς ἂν γαμήσῃ 'the man who married'. While not presumably limiting his statement to one narrow set of circumstances, Paul is here concerned not with the preoccupations of the man with an established family, but with those of the man newly committed to marriage: the Old Testament law exempted such a man from other responsibilities for a whole year.

Context is always important in deciding the precise significance of a particular form. Words lose much of their meaning when they are isolated and syntax involves the interplay of combinations of possible meanings. There are ambiguities in Greek, as in every language. In Luke 6:48 ἔσκαψεν καὶ ἐβάθυνεν καὶ ἔθηκεν θεμέλιον ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν the second verb has been taken as imperfect, with the significance 'he dug and kept on digging deeper, till he hit rock'. But the form is ambiguous, and the writer's contemporaries would most naturally understand it, in this context, as an aorist. If continuous effort were intended here a circumlocution such as διετέλει βαθύνων would

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[15] ἥμαρτες is, incidentally, an interesting case of a gnomic aorist in the second person.

have made it clear. Passive forms in Greek are separate from the middle only in the aorist and future, and not always even there. A perfect or imperfective form may be proved to be passive by its context, either grammatical (*e.g. ὑπό* with genitive) or theological.[16] It is worth noting, however, that while we, in line with Latin, naturally regard the passive as the proper alternative to the active, in Greek the passive appears to have been a comparatively late development which throughout antiquity remained subsidiary to the middle.

I am sorry if I have confused my readers with too much radical theory, produced like a succession of rabbits out of a hat. I am, however, convinced that Greek syntax must escape from the tutelage of its Latin *paedagogus* and enter into its own free inheritance, and I hope that somehow someone may have been encouraged to recognize error occasionally even among the experts. No radically different interpretation of the New Testament is likely to arise among those who judge scripture by scripture, for some of the main effects of aspect have long been recognized, but there may be fresh insights in points of detail.

[16] Is ἐγήγερται in 1 Cor. 15:4ff. to be taken as passive because of Gal. 1:1, Acts 2:32, Mt. 28:7, *etc.*?