THE 'POLITE' AORIST: TENSE OR ASPECT?*

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the semantics and pragmatics of the 'hortative' aorist (the aorist indicative in questions with τί οὐ 'why don't …') and the 'tragic' or 'performative' aorist (for example ὤμοσα 'I swear'). Lloyd argued in 1999 that the tragic aorist is a more polite alternative for the corresponding present (ὄμνυμι 'I swear'). Recently, he has extended this view to the hortative aorist, suggesting that, for example, τί οὐκ ἐκαλέσαμεν; is a polite alternative for τί οὐ καλοῦμεν; Lloyd argues that the politeness value of the aorist derives from its being a past tense, comparing the so-called 'attitudinal' past (as in I wanted to ask you something instead of I want to ask you something). The present article, building on work by Colvin, Bary and Nijk, argues instead that the semantic value of the aorist is purely aspectual in these cases: the hortative and tragic aorists serve to construe the designated event as bounded, while the corresponding present forms serve to construe the designated event as unbounded. An extensive discussion of the evidence for the hortative aorist and present is presented, as well as a case study concerning the aspectual behaviour of the verb ὄμνυμι. Moreover, I argue that the proposed semantic account of the hortative and tragic aorists in terms of aspect can be unified with Lloyd's pragmatic account in terms of politeness: the difference in tone between the present and the aorist can be derived from their respective aspectual values, rather than from their temporal values.

Keywords: classical Greek; linguistics; aspect; politeness; semantics; pragmatics; tragic aorist; hortative aorist

1. INTRODUCTION

The classical Greek aorist indicative is normally a past tense, but it also exhibits a range of uses hard to explain in terms of past time reference. A particularly recalcitrant use is what has traditionally been called the 'tragic' aorist, as in the following example (Eur. *Or.* 1516–17):

> OP. ὄμοσον—εἰ δὲ μή, κτενῶ σε—μὴ λέγειν ἐμὴν χάριν.
> ΦΡ. τὴν ἐμὴν ψυχὴν **κατώμοσ'**, ἣν ἂν εὐορκοῖμ' ἐγώ.

> Orestes Swear—if you will not, I will kill you—that you do not say that to please me.
> Phrygian **I swear** by my soul, an oath I would keep.

The aorist κατώμοσα has to be rendered with a present tense in translation: 'I swear'. Scholars have tried to explain the use of the aorist here in terms of past time reference nevertheless. Kühner and Gerth, for example, claim that the tragic aorist with verbs of

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speaking is more forceful in tone than the present: locating the verbal act in the past suggests that it cannot be altered.[1]

In 1999, Michael Lloyd published a discussion of the tragic aorist that opened up an entirely new perspective on the issue.[2] Lloyd rejected over-semanticizing interpretations in terms of past time reference and emphasized the importance of pragmatics. By an exhaustive survey of the relevant evidence, he convincingly showed that the key difference between the present and the aorist in these cases is one of tone: the aorist is more polite and reserved than the present. In explaining this difference, Lloyd adduced the well-established cross-linguistic phenomenon of the 'attitudinal past' (the polite use of the past tense in phrases such as *I wanted to ask you something*) as an analogy.

This account of the tragic aorist in terms of a polite past tense has been criticized by several scholars, who have called attention to the importance of the parameter of *aspect*. Stephen Colvin argues that the 'instantaneous' (which includes the 'tragic') use of the aorist goes back to a time when the Indo-European aorist indicative was not yet a past tense, but marked for aspect only.[3] Similarly, Corien Bary argues that, in its 'tragic' use, the aorist indicative is used as if it were a present tense form with aoristic aspect.[4] I extended this argument, identifying five 'non-past' uses of the aorist indicative where the variation with the competing present seems to be purely aspectual.[5]

One of these five uses, the 'hortative' aorist, is the object of a recent discussion by Lloyd.[6] The hortative aorist is the use of the aorist in questions of the type τί οὐ 'why don't I/you …' with directive force (Xen. *Mem.* 3.11.15):

> τί οὖν οὐ σύ μοι … **ἐγένου** συνθηρατὴς τῶν φίλων;
>
> Why then **don't you become** my fellow-hunter for friends?

Adopting a similar methodology as in his 1999 article, Lloyd argues that the difference between the aorist and the competing present in such questions is a matter of politeness, the aorist being more polite than the present. At the same time, he replies to the aspectualist accounts of the 'polite' usages of the aorist. With respect to the hortative aorist, Lloyd (n. 6), 416 argues: 'Nijk's explanation [in terms of aspect] is theoretically plausible in linguistic terms, but is only illustrated by two contrasting pairs of passages, neither of which supports it. A number of counterexamples are also overlooked.' Similarly, revisiting the tragic aorist, he notes (at 424): '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.'

The main aim of this article is to argue that an aspectual account of the variation between the aorist and the present in hortative questions is in fact supported by the

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[1] R. Kühner and B. Gerth, *Ausführliche Grammatik der griechischen Sprache* (Hannover and Leipzig, 1898–1904), 2.163–5.

[2] M. Lloyd, 'The tragic aorist', *CQ* 49 (1999), 25–45.

[3] 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. Homenaje al Professor Antonio López Eire* (Salamanca, 2010), 113–21.

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

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

[6] M. Lloyd, 'The hortative aorist', *CQ* 68 (2018), 415–24.

evidence (section 2). At the same time, I believe that a *semantic* explanation in terms of aspect is compatible with Lloyd's *pragmatic* explanation in terms of politeness. I will argue that the 'polite aorist' cannot be explained as a kind of 'attitudinal past', but that the implication of politeness derives from its aspectual value. Additionally, I will revisit the 'tragic' aorist and argue for these same points (section 3).

2. THE HORTATIVE AORIST

2.1 Defining hortative questions

For a question to qualify as hortative, it must contain the question word τί in the sense 'why' (not 'what'), and the question must be modified by a negation. However, not all questions with the formula τί οὐ are hortative. A review of a corpus consisting of Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Euripides, Sophocles, Plato and Xenophon (searches in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* on the exact phrases τί οὖν οὐ, τί οὐ, τί οὐκ, τί οὐχί, and proximity searches on τί οὖν … οὐ, τί … οὐ, τί … οὐκ and τί … οὐχί; cases are listed in the Appendix at the end of this article) reveals a distinction between three types of questions.

The first type concerns the idiomatic phrase τί δ' οὐ μέλλω (also in the third person, as well as in the plural; one instance in the imperfect), literally 'why/how am I not going to', that is, 'of course I do'. These cases will not concern us here.

The second type consists of what we may call 'indignant' questions. Here, the speaker is indignant, frustrated or surprised by *the fact that* something did not occur or that something is not going on. In these cases, the aorist is to be interpreted as a past tense, and the variation between the present and the aorist is temporal. Consider the following example of the aorist (Soph. *OT* 1391–3):

> ἰὼ Κιθαιρών, τί μ' ἐδέχου; τί μ' οὐ λαβὼν
> **ἔκτεινας** εὐθύς, ὡς ἔδειξα μήποτε
> ἐμαυτὸν ἀνθρώποισιν ἔνθεν ἦ γεγώς;

> O Cithaeron, why did you receive me? Why **didn't you kill** me immediately after taking me, so that I would have never showed my true parentage to men?

Oedipus bewails the fact that Mt Cithaeron allowed him to live as a child. A hortative interpretation ('why don't you kill me') is out of the question here, as the opportunity for carrying out the designated event has expired.[7]

In the case of the present, the distinction between indignant questions and hortative questions is less clear. The difference between 'I am frustrated that X is not happening' and 'Why don't you do X' is much more subtle than that between 'I am frustrated that X *did* not happen' and 'Why don't you do X' (because, typically, there is an expiration date on the opportunity for carrying out X).

An 'indignant' interpretation is preferred when it is reasonable for the speaker to assume that the designated event should already be carried out at the present moment.

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[7] Other examples of the 'indignant' aorist are listed in the Appendix (at the end of this article), marked with an asterisk.

This is especially clear when there has been a previous request or (implicit) injunction to carry out the described action. Consider the following example (Pl. *Grg.* 468c):

ἀληθῆ σοι δοκῶ λέγειν, ὦ Πῶλε, ἢ οὔ; τί οὐκ **ἀποκρίνῃ**;

Do I seem to you to be speaking the truth, Polus, or not? Why **aren't you answering**?

Socrates asks Polus a question. This requires an answer. Polus remains silent. This prompts Socrates to ask why Polus does not answer. Socrates is justified in assuming that Polus should at this moment be answering the question, and asks him what the reason is for his silence. This makes the import of the question more confrontational than in the case of a hortative question: the tone is 'Why aren't you answering', that is, 'What is your deal that you are not answering', rather than 'Why don't you answer', that is, 'I suggest you answer'.

That the variation between the aorist and the present in indignant questions is temporal in nature is corroborated by the fact that the *imperfect* can also be used in such contexts. Thus there is aspectual variation in the past tense, which means that the choice of the present is unlikely to be aspectually motivated. An example is the following (Ar. *Ran.* 33):

οἴμοι κακοδαίμων, τί γὰρ ἐγὼ οὐκ **ἐναυμάχουν**;

Woe, unhappy me. Why **wasn't I in the sea-fight**?

Xanthias laments the fact that he did not take part in the battle of Arginusae, because then he would have more rights. In each case where the imperfect is used in indignant questions, the opportunity for carrying out the designated event has expired, as here (the sea-fight has been fought). The imperfect does not have a hortative use.[8]

Hortative questions constitute the third type. A hortative question is actually a suggestion to carry out the described action, without the implication that it should already have occurred or should already be in the process of occurring. In the case of the aorist, we can define hortative questions as those questions with the phrase τί οὐ where the opportunity for carrying out the designated action is still actual. Consider the following example (Xen. *Mem.* 3.11.15):

τί οὖν οὐ σύ μοι … **ἐγένου** συνθηρατὴς τῶν φίλων;

Why then **don't you become** my fellow-hunter for friends?

Theodote asks Socrates to become her fellow-hunter. Socrates is in a position to fulfil her request. There is no reason for the speaker to feel that the designated state of affairs should have already been brought about before she asked the question.

In the case of the present tense, τί οὐ-questions are hortative when it is unreasonable for the speaker to suppose that the designated event should already be going on at the present moment. Consider Ar. *Av.* 828 τί δ' οὐκ Ἀθηναίαν **ἐῶμεν** πολιάδα; 'Why **don't we let** Athena Polias [wear the peplos]?' Pisthetaerus and Euelpides, together with the chorus, are discussing some basic questions concerning their new city. One question is who should wear the sacred peplos, and Euelpides suggests that it should be Athena. As the issue is just being raised, and the city has not yet been founded, there is no reason for

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[8] There are four instances of the imperfect in τί οὐ-questions in the selected corpus, one of which belongs to the μέλλω type.

us to interpret Euelpides as saying that Athena should at this moment already be wearing the peplos.

A final point concerns person marking on the verb. It is generally understood that hortative questions occur only with first- and second-person verbs. This seems logical, as a hortative question seems to require the subject to be addressed directly. However, there are also instances of τί οὐ-questions with a third-person verb that function as hortative questions. In hindsight, this is not surprising, for if a language can have a third-person imperative, then why not a third-person hortative question? For example, (Soph. *Ant.* 1308):

> τί μ' οὐκ ἀνταίαν **ἔπαισέν** τις ἀμφιθήκτῳ ξίφει;
>
> Why **doesn't** someone **strike** me a frontal blow with a sword whetted on both sides?

The import of Creon's question is 'Will someone please strike me with a sword?'[9]

2.2 Accounting for the data

Before we turn to actual examples, a point of methodology needs to be addressed. I argue that the variation between the aorist and the present in hortative questions is aspectually motivated, as in grammatical categories such as the past tense indicative, the infinitive, the imperative, and so on. Even in those cases, however, the explanation for aspectual variations is often a matter of debate, and this issue cannot be solved in this article.[10] I do not pretend to present a full-fledged theory of aspect in classical Greek; rather, I adopt a working hypothesis of the semantic value of the two aspectual categories. When this working hypothesis does not fit the data, that does not automatically invalidate the claim that tense usage in hortative questions is aspectually motivated, because we may have to do with a peculiarity of Greek aspectual usage. Therefore, we also have to take the general aspectual behaviour of specific verb types into account.

2.2.1 The aorist in hortative questions

In this section I discuss a number of aspectual principles that account for the use of the aorist in hortative questions. I then turn to a few difficult instances.

Generally, the aorist (perfective aspect) construes the designated event as bounded, that is, as a complete whole. Such a construal is favoured when the verb phrase is telic (when it has an inherent endpoint: for example 'destroy', 'cut', 'build a house'), and especially when the designated event is of short duration:[11] for example Ar. *Lys.* 906

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[9] Compare Pl. *Phd.* 86d εἰ οὖν τις ὑμῶν εὐπορώτερος ἐμοῦ, τί οὐκ **ἀπεκρίνατο**; 'If there is someone who is readier than I am, why **doesn't he answer**?'

[10] See C.M.J. Sicking and P. Stork, *Two Studies in the Semantics of the Verb in Classical Greek* (Leiden and Boston, 1996); M. Napoli, *Aspect and Actionality in Homeric Greek: A Contrastive Analysis* (Milan, 2006); L. Basset, 'The use of the imperfect to express completed states of affairs: the imperfect as a marker of narrative cohesion', in S.J. Bakker and G.C. Wakker (edd.), *Discourse Cohesion in Ancient Greek* (Leiden and Boston, 2009), 205–19; R.J. Allan, 'The imperfect unbound: a cognitive linguistic approach to Greek aspect', in K. Bentein, M. Janse and J. Soltic (edd.), *Variation and Change in Ancient Greek Tense, Aspect and Modality* (Leiden and Boston, 2017), 100–30.

[11] On the relation between aspect and verbal semantics, see Napoli (n. 10).

τί οὖν οὐ **κατεκλίνης**, ὦ Μύρριον; 'Why don't you lie down, my Myrinne?' The verb κατακλίνομαι 'lie down' designates an action that can be completed in a moment.[12] Also, Soph. *Ant.* 1308 (cited above, page 524), the verb παίω 'strike' is punctual; Creon wishes to be put out of his misery by a single fatal blow.[13]

Certain preverbs can make an atelic verb telic, or emphasize the aspect of 'completion' in the case of an already telic verb. In twelve cases of the hortative aorist, such a preverb is present (διά, lit. 'through', five instances; ἀπό, lit. 'away from', six instances; ἐξ, lit. 'out of', one instance). In the case of the present, by contrast, there is only one such instance (featuring διά). The case of διηγέομαι 'fully discuss' and διέρχομαι/διιέναι 'go through' is most instructive. An example is Pl. *Symp.* 173b τί οὖν … οὐ **διηγήσω** μοι; 'Why then **don't you tell** me [about the symposium]?'[14] That the use of the aorist here is aspectually motivated is supported by the fact that in the imperative Plato only uses the aorist (three cases of δίελθε, four cases of διήγησαι). Moreover, the aspectual behaviour of this verb in other grammatical categories in the context is also of interest. In 172b, a friend asks Apollodorus to tell him about the symposium: σὺ οὖν μοι **διήγησαι** 'so you **tell** me about it'. In 173b, he uses the hortative aorist: τί οὖν … οὐ **διηγήσω** μοι 'why then **don't you tell** me about it?' In 173c, Apollodorus acquiesces: εἰ οὖν δεῖ καὶ ὑμῖν **διηγήσασθαι**, ταῦτα χρὴ ποιεῖν 'well, if it is necessary that **I should tell** you about it as well, then that is what I have to do'. In 173e, the friend repeats his request: ἀλλὰ **διήγησαι** τίνες ἦσαν οἱ λόγοι 'but **tell** me what speeches were made'. Finally, Apollodorus says μᾶλλον δ᾽ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ὑμῖν ὡς ἐκεῖνος διηγεῖτο καὶ ἐγὼ πειράσομαι **διηγήσασθαι** 'rather, I will try **to tell** you about it from the beginning, as he told me'. In all these cases where the verb designates the potential event of Apollodorus telling the story to his friend, the perfective (aoristic) aspect is used.[15]

Another way in which the boundaries of the designated event become particularly salient is when it is emphasized that its duration should be as short as possible. This occurs in Pl. *Plt.* 279b–c τί δῆτα οὐ, καθάπερ ἐν τοῖς ἔμπροσθε τέμνοντες μέρη μερῶν ἕκαστον διηρούμεθα, καὶ νῦν περὶ ὑφαντικὴν ταὐτὸν τοῦτ᾽ **ἐδράσαμεν**, καὶ κατὰ δύναμιν ὅτι μάλιστα διὰ βραχέων ταχὺ πάντ᾽ ἐπελθόντες πάλιν **ἤλθομεν** ἐπὶ τὸ νῦν χρήσιμον; 'Why then, just as we divided each subject before by cutting off parts from parts, **don't we** now **do** the same with respect to the art of weaving, and, as quickly as we possibly can, go through all the steps and **arrive** again at what

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[12] Compare the aorist imperative κατακλίνηθι in line 904 (the use of the imperative earlier may favour an indignant interpretation, but I do not think that is necessary here).

[13] Compare Ar. *Ach.* 592 ἀπεψώλησας 'draw back [my] foreskin': once someone is sexually aroused, the foreskin is drawn back and remains there. On the meaning of the verb (with a double entendre on the meaning 'circumcise'), see S.D. Olson, *Aristophanes* Acharnians (Oxford, 2002), ad loc. See also Xen. *Mem.* 3.11.15 ἐγένου 'become': the verb γίγνομαι 'become' denotes a telic, punctual event: Socrates only has to say yes in order to fulfil the request. Lloyd (n. 6), 418 suggests that the construal here is unbounded, which I fail to understand. The aorist imperative γενοῦ is much more common in classical Greek (fifty instances, all in the dramatists; I have not counted three editorially supplied instances in the fragments) than the present (eleven instances, seven in Isocrates).

[14] Also *Prt.* 310a διηγήσω, *Prm.* 136c and 136d διῆλθες.

[15] Compare Xen. *Cyr.* 2.1.4 τί οὖν, ἔφη ὁ Κῦρος, οὐ καὶ τὴν δύναμιν **ἔλεξάς** 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 with that in view how best we may fight?' Cyrus uses the aorist to signal he needs a complete account of the armed forces before further deliberation is possible.

is useful for the present discussion?' The aorist is used because the Stranger has the end firmly in view and wishes to reach it as quickly as possible (κατὰ δύναμιν ὅτι μάλιστα διὰ βραχέων ταχύ 'as quickly as we possibly can').

Finally, the aorist can be used to emphasize that the designated action needs to be carried out *before* another action can be carried out. Consider the example of Pl. *Chrm.* 154e τί οὖν … οὐκ **ἀπεδύσαμεν** αὐτοῦ αὐτὸ τοῦτο καὶ **ἐθεασάμεθα** πρότερον τοῦ εἴδους; 'Why then **don't we strip** [Charmides] of exactly this and **admire** it before we do his looks?' Socrates suggests they take a look at Charmides' soul before admiring his looks. Now, the verb ἀποδύω 'strip' is telic, but θεάομαι 'watch', 'admire' is not. However, the point is that the interlocutors should admire Charmides' soul *before* admiring his looks. The boundaries of the designated event are thus salient: before the latter can be done, the former must be completed.[16]

Most instances in the data are relatively straightforward, but in some cases the aspectual interpretation of the aorist is less obvious. First, Eur. *Heracl.* 805 ὦ στρατήγ' ὃς Ἀργόθεν | ἥκεις, τί τήνδε γαῖαν οὐκ **εἰάσαμεν** <lacuna>; 'General coming from Argos, why **don't we let** this land be <…> ?' Hyllus proposes a monomachy instead of an all-out battle, which would ravage the country. The verb ἐάω 'leave be' is in itself atelic (compare the present in Ar. *Av.* 828: n. 17). In my view, however, the point here is that, if this proposal is adopted, the parties involved will *let* Athens and Argos *off the hook*.

Second, Pl. *Soph.* 251e τί οὖν οὐ καθ' ἓν ἀποκρινόμενος ἐφ' ἑκάστου τὰ συμβαίνοντα **ἐσκέψω**; 'Why don't you answer one by one and **consider** the consequences in each case?' The Stranger confronts Theaetetus with three possible positions concerning the ability of entities to combine with each other. He then invites him to consider each option and see what the consequences of each view are. The verb σκέπτομαι 'consider' is atelic (one can keep considering ad infinitum), but the aorist suggests that each line of enquiry should be pursued to the end.

Third, Pl. *Leg.* 753a τί δῆτα οὐ καὶ σύ τε καὶ ὁ Μέγιλλος, ὦ ξένε, **ἐκοινωνησάτην** ἡμῖν τῆς πολιτείας; 'Why then don't you and Megillus, stranger, take part in our state?' κοινωνέω 'have part in' is atelic, but the aorist is ingressive, that is, it signals a transition from not having part in something to having part in that something. Compare Pl. *Cra.* 383a βούλει οὖν καὶ Σωκράτει τῷδε **ἀνακοινωσώμεθα** τὸν λόγον; 'Do you want **to make** Socrates here **part** of our discussion?'

2.2.2 The present in hortative questions

The present (imperfective aspect) generally construes the designated event as unbounded. Such a construal is favoured especially when the verb phrase is atelic (unless there is a special reason to emphasize the boundaries of the event; see above

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[16] Compare Xen. *Hier.* 1.3 τί οὖν … οὐχὶ καὶ σύ, ἐπεὶ νῦν γε ἔτι ἰδιώτης εἶ, **ὑπέμνησάς** με τὰ ἐν τῷ ἰδιωτικῷ βίῳ; 'Why **don't you**, seeing as you are as of now still a private citizen, **remind** me of the affairs in private life?' Simonides wants Hiero to tell him about the difference between the private life and life as a ruler. Hiero suggests that Simonides first expound the qualities of the private life. When that is complete, Hiero will be able to give an account of the differences with the tyrannical life (οὕτως γὰρ ἄν σοι οἶμαι μάλιστα ἐγὼ δύνασθαι δηλοῦν τὰ διαφέροντα ἐν ἑκατέρῳ). Another example is Xen. *Mem.* 4.6.14 τί οὖν οὐκ ἐκεῖνο πρῶτον **ἐπεσκεψάμεθα**, τί ἐστιν ἔργον ἀγαθοῦ πολίτου; 'Why **do we not consider** that first, what the function of a good citizen is?' Completing the line of enquiry suggested by Socrates here is a prerequisite for judging the question who the better citizen is.

on the aorist). An example is Ar. *Thesm.* 1193 τί οὐ **κατεύδει** παρ' ἐμέ; 'Why **doesn't she sleep** with me?' The verb καθεύδω 'sleep' designates an atelic action, and there is no reason why the Scythian would be interested in the temporal boundaries of his intercourse with the girl.[17] An unbounded construal is also preferred in the case of habitual occurrences: Pl. *Euthyd.* 272d καὶ σὺ τί οὐ **συμφοιτᾷς**; 'Why **don't** you too **accompany** me [as a student to Euthydemus and Dionysiodorus]?' Socrates is thinking of repeated visits, extending indefinitely forward in time; note also the present infinitive φοιτᾶν in *Euthyd.* 272c.

I will discuss in more detail one instance where the aspectual interpretation of the present has been criticized by Lloyd (n. 6): Xen. *Cyr.* 4.1.11 τί οὖν οὐ **διώκομεν** ὡς τάχιστα, καταδήλων γε οὕτω τῶν ἀγαθῶν ὄντων; 'Why **don't we chase** them as soon as possible, as the advantages are so obvious?' I previously argued ([n. 5], 103) that the chase 'is naturally presented as unbounded; it is unclear how long it will take and whether the enemy will be caught'. Lloyd (n. 6), 418 objects: '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?' But there is a difference between declining to express certainty about the result of a certain course of action, and implying that that course of action is unlikely to have any useful effect. Similarly, if someone were to say *Let's try to catch them!* the implication of uncertainty conveyed by the word *try* would not amount to the implication that the effort would be unlikely to be successful. More generally, διώκω 'chase' is atelic (a chase can be extended indefinitely), and the imperfective aspect is preferred with this verb: a search in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* on the indicative forms of this verb in the historiographers Thucydides, Herodotus and Xenophon yields sixty instances of the imperfect against thirteen instances of the aorist.

The boundaries of the designated event may be kept out of focus for contextual reasons. An interesting case is that of Xen. *Mem.* 3.1.10 τί οὖν οὐ **σκοποῦμεν** … πῶς ἂν αὐτῶν μὴ διαμαρτάνοιμεν; 'Why **don't we consider** how we can avoid being mistaken about these?' A young man has studied generalship with Dionysiodorus. Socrates points out, however, that he has not learnt the most important thing: to distinguish good from bad men. He suggests making an enquiry. Before they make much progress, however, the young man is unable to answer questions, and Socrates suggests that he go back to Dionysiodorus. It seems that Socrates did not envision a complete enquiry from the start, but wanted to progress as far as necessary for the young man to realize that he had not been taught well by Dionysiodorus.

A category of verbs where we often find the present in hortative questions is that of verbs of 'saying'. The aspectual variation with such verbs is one of the most elusive problems in classical Greek linguistics. Discussing Xen. *Cyr.* 4.1.12 τί οὖν … οὐκ ἐλθὼν Κυαξάρῃ **λέγεις** ταῦτα; 'Why **don't you** go and **tell** Cyaxares this?', Lloyd argues: '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

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[17] Compare Ar. *Av.* 828 τί δ' οὐκ Ἀθηναίαν **ἐῶμεν** Πολιάδα; 'Why **don't we let** Athena Polias [wear the peplos]?': the suggestion is that Athena is allowed to wear the peplos for an indefinite amount of time. Eur. *Andr.* 443 τί δῆτά σ' οὐ **καταστένω**, τέκνον; 'Why **don't I bewail** you, my child?': there is no reason why Andromache should conceive of boundaries to her lament for her child, who is fated to die. Xen. *Cyr.* 3.2.25 τί οὖν οὐ καὶ νῦν παρ' ἐμοὶ **μισθοφοροῦσιν**; 'Why **don't they** even now **enter my service**?': the soldiers are invited to stay in Cyrus' army for an unspecified amount of time.

with the aorist quoted above [ἔλεξας in 2.1.4; see note 15].' But the same would seem to be true, *prima facie*, of Thucydidean speech introductions with the phrase ἔλεγε τοιάδε 'he spoke words such as the following' (ten instances) as compared to those with the phrase ἔλεξε/εἶπε τοιάδε (five); nevertheless, the aspectual variation is there. With respect to the example under discussion: in the following discourse, when the soldiers tell Cyaxares the idea, Xenophon uses the imperfective aspect as well: καὶ **ἔλεγον** οἷα ἐπιτήδεια ἐδόκουν εἶναι ὑπὲρ ὧν ἐδέοντο 'and **they told** him what they thought was expedient with respect to what they were asking for'.

The point is that the aspectual usage of verbs of 'saying' in general is difficult to understand; therefore, the fact that an aspectual interpretation of verbs of 'saying' in hortative questions does not always conform to our basic intuitions about aspect does not, in itself, refute the validity of such an interpretation. We have to consider the aspectual usage of verbs of 'saying' in general and compare that to the variation between the aorist and the present in hortative questions. The use of the imperfective aspect with verbs of 'saying' is typically explained in terms of anticipating a reaction, while the perfective aspect has a more definitive force.[18] In the case of Xen. *Cyr.* 4.1.12, the unbounded construal is motivated by the uncertainty of Cyaxares' reaction: 'Why don't you tell Cyaxares [and see what he says]?'

I will discuss three further examples that will illustrate how the imperfective aspect can convey different nuances with verbs of 'saying'. First, Ar. *Ach.* 358/9–61 τί οὖν οὐ **λέγεις**, ἐπίξηνον ἐξενεγκὼν θύραζ', ὅ τι ποτ', ὦ σχέτλιε, τὸ μέγα τοῦτ' ἔχεις; 'Why then **don't you** bring an executioner's block outside and **say** what it is, wretch, this big thing that you have?' The import of the imperfective aspect may be 'let's see if you have something to say'. Dicaeopolis himself uses the present infinitive λέγειν to refer to his anticipated speech a few lines earlier (355 ἐμοῦ 'θέλοντος ὑπὲρ ἐπιξηνίου **λέγειν** 'me being willing **to speak** with my head over a butcher's block') and the chorus do the same a few lines later (365 ἐγχείρει **λέγειν** 'attempt **to speak**').

Second, Pl. *Lys.* 211d τί οὖν … οὐκ **ἐρωτᾷς**; 'Why then **don't you ask** him?' Socrates uses the present infinitive to designate the same question in the previous line: ὅδε γάρ τι ὧν λέγω οὐ μανθάνει, ἀλλὰ φησιν οἴεσθαι Μενέξενον εἰδέναι, καὶ κελεύει τοῦτον **ἐρωτᾶν**, 'This man here does not understand something that I am saying, but he says he thinks Menexenus knows, and he urges me **to ask** him.' The import of the present ἐρωτᾷς 'asks' may be 'ask him and see if he has something interesting to say'.[19]

Third, Pl. *Grg.* 504c τί δὲ οὐκ αὐτὸς **λέγεις**, ὦ Σώκρατες; 'Why **don't you say** it yourself, Socrates?' Here an 'immediative' interpretation of the imperfective aspect seems appropriate.[20] In the imperative, the immediative use of the imperfective aspect entails that the expression is merely a prompt to carry out the designated action, when the speaker already takes it for granted that this is a desirable course of action. For example, in Dem. 24.32, Demosthenes asks the clerk to take law and read it aloud, using the aorist imperative (ἀνάγνωθι … λαβών). After a relative subordinate

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[18] A. Rijksbaron, *The Syntax and Semantics of the Verb in Classical Greek* (Chicago, 2006), 18–19.

[19] Compare Xen. *Hell.* 4.1.11 τί οὖν … οὐ **πυνθάνη** εἰ καὶ ἐκείνῳ βουλομένῳ ταῦτ' ἐστί; 'Why then … **don't you ask** him if it is pleasing to him as well?' With the verb πυνθάνομαι there is a tendency for the imperfective to mean 'ask' and the aorist to mean 'learn' (as with μανθάνω).

[20] For the term 'immediative', see Rijksbaron (n. 18), 17. While the term is helpful, Rijksbaron's examples are somewhat infelicitous; my discussion of the phenomenon is based rather on C.J. Ruijgh, 'L'emploi "inceptif" du thème du présent du verbe grec', *Mnemosyne* 36 (1985), 1–61 = *Scripta minora ad linguam Graecam pertinentia* (Amsterdam, 1991–6), 2.535–95.

clause in which he describes the law, he uses another imperative, but this time the present, ἀναγίγνωσκε, whose value can be rendered 'now read'.[21] Generally, the immediative use of the imperfective can convey a certain impatience: 'do X already'.[22] A similar interpretation is available in the case of Pl. *Grg.* 504c. Callicles is tired with Socrates' question-and-answer game and tells him to answer his own question. The use of the imperfective aspect in the hortative question is analogous to the 'immediative' use in the imperative: Callicles knows that Socrates knows the answer and asks him to 'say it himself already'.[23]

A similarly recalcitrant category of verbs with respect to aspectual usage is constituted by verbs of movement. There is a relevant example in Pl. *Prt.* 310e ἀλλὰ τί οὐ **βαδίζομεν** παρ' αὐτόν, ἵνα ἔνδον καταλάβωμεν; 'Well, why **don't we go** to him, so that we may find him inside?' The phrase 'go to someone' is telic, but verbs such as βαδίζω, πορεύομαι and χωρέω are often used in the imperfective, and the aorist of the first is particularly rare (in the classical dramatists and historians, there is only the aorist optative at Ar. *Ran.* 135).[24] In *Prt.* 311a, we find the present subjunctive ἴωμεν 'let's go' three times; and when the party finally decides to go in *Prt.* 314c, we find the imperfect ἐπορευόμεθα.

Finally, we are left with two more difficult instances. First, Ar. *Eq.* 1207–8 τί οὐ **διακρίνεις**, Δῆμ', ὁπότερός ἐστι νῷν | ἀνὴρ ἀμείνων περὶ σὲ καὶ τὴν γαστέρα; 'Why **don't you judge**, Demos, who of us two is a better man to you and to your stomach?' Demos uses the present infinitive κρίνειν in his reply, asking how he will be able to judge in a manner that will seem wise to the audience (1210). This corresponds aspectually with the use of the present in the hortative question. The verb διακρίνω 'judge' is telic; the imperfective aspect could be said to focus on the course of action that Demos is to adopt ('make an enquiry') rather than on the result ('make a decision who is better'); but this is admittedly somewhat ad hoc.

Second, Ar. *Av.* 149–50 τί οὐ τὸν Ἠλεῖον Λέπρεον **οἰκίζετον** | ἐλθόνθ'; 'Why **don't you** go to Lepreum in Elis and **settle** there?' This is the most difficult case to explain aspectually. The aorist would seem to be more straightforward, and we find it further on when Pisthetaerus suggests to the Hoopoe that the birds should found a city (172 οἰκίσατε, 173 οἰκίσαιμεν). It may be that the concept of 'settling' is conflated with the concept of 'living' (οἰκεῖν), which is an atelic situation (note the present forms οἰκοῖτε in line 127 and κατοικεῖν in line 153). Alternatively, the present may convey the nuance 'try to settle there and see how you like it'.

2.3 Hortative questions, aspect and politeness

The preceding discussion has shown that an aspectual account of the variation between the present and the aorist in hortative questions is perfectly appropriate. That does not mean that it is obvious in every single instance why the perfective or the imperfective aspect is used, but this is due to the difficulty of pinning down classical Greek aspectual

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[21] See Ruijgh (n. 20), 31.

[22] On politeness, aspect and imperatives, see A. Keersmaekers and T. van Hal, 'Aspectual choice in Greek imperatives: a corpus-based review of existing theories', *LEC* 84 (2016), 19–51.

[23] In Pl. *Lach.* 181d ἀλλ', ὦ Νικία, τί οὐ **λέγει** πότερος ὑμῶν; 'But, Nicias, why doesn't one of us **speak**?', the verb, used without an (implied) object, denotes an activity ('speaking' can be extended indefinitely).

[24] Compare Allan (n. 10).

usage in general. It may be objected that my approach is then unfalsifiable. While this may be true in terms of the impossibility of a single instance falsifying the entire theory, readers may judge for themselves whether the weight of the evidence as a whole speaks for or against an aspectual account of the variation between the aorist and the present in hortative questions.

Moreover, an interpretation of this variation purely in terms of politeness is open to similar objections. Specifically, a difficulty with Lloyd's account in terms of politeness is the use of the aorist with first-person verbs. Lloyd argues that hortative questions are potentially face-threatening to the addressee, and the aorist serves to mitigate this. However, when the addressee is the speaker himself (Soph. *OT* 1003), there is no face threat. In the case of the plural, Lloyd argues that the use of the first person (rather than of the second person) serves to mitigate the face threat, so here the present can be used more freely. But aorists are used in such cases as well, and here the criterion of politeness becomes rather too subtle to be meaningful.

Nevertheless, my aim is not to invalidate Lloyd's claim that the aorist in hortative questions is, typically speaking, more polite in tone than the present. Lloyd's discussion of the evidence from a politeness perspective does indeed suggest that this may be a factor. The question is from what semantic properties of the tense forms this pragmatic difference derives. Lloyd suggests that the politeness value of the aorist indicative lies in its being a past tense. He points to the existence of the 'attitudinal past': the use of the past tense in questions such as *I wanted to ask you something*, instead of the more direct *I want to ask you something*. The problem with adducing the attitudinal past as a parallel is that it is confined to specific contexts and specific verb types, and in those cases it is easy to find an intuitively plausible explanation for why the past tense came to carry the implication of politeness. Such a grammaticalization path from past time value to polite-ness is hard to postulate in the case of the hortative aorist.

Let us take the example *I wanted to ask you something*. Why does the use of the past tense convey politeness? We can imagine a scenario where a graduate student is at a conference and spots a professor from another university he has been wanting to speak to. The student walks up to the professor, but feels awkward putting his question to her directly. To mitigate the directness, he does not communicate his current desire, but refers back to an unspecified moment in the past where he felt he wanted to ask the professor a question. We may take this moment to be the moment the student saw the professor and decided to go up to her. The import of the past tense *wanted*, then, would be something like *I saw you and at that moment I was aware of a desire to come and ask you something*. Through such scenarios, we may imagine how the past tense with verbs of states of mind or intention came to convey politeness.

Such an explanation is unavailable in the case of the hortative aorist. As I have argued in section 2.1, when the aorist is used as a genuine past tense in questions with τί οὐ, it serves to express indignation at the fact that something did not occur in the past. There is no implication of politeness in such questions. If the hortative use of the aorist derived from this more 'literal' use, we would expect the hortative aorist to convey impatience, suggesting that the designated event should have occurred already. This is why the traditional interpretation of the hortative aorist—which Lloyd rightly rejects—is precisely that it conveys impatience.[25]

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[25] See e.g. Rijksbaron (n. 18), 31.

Another objection is that this account leaves unexplained why there is no hortative imperfect tense (section 2.1). It is unclear why this should be so if politeness in hortative questions is conveyed by the past tense.

When we interpret the hortative aorist not as a past tense but as the perfective counterpart of the imperfective present, the aspectual distinction in hortative questions becomes analogous to the case of the imperative and other moods.[26] If the aorist is more polite in tone, while the present is more impatient, this can be explained on the grounds that the distinction between the indignant and hortative interpretations is much more difficult to make in the case of the present than in the case of the aorist. With the aorist, there are basically two options: either it refers to something that did not occur in the past and a hortative interpretation is blocked (because the window of opportunity for carrying out the designated action has expired) or it is hortative. However, questions in the present such as τί οὐκ ἀποκρίνῃ; are ambiguous between 'What is your deal that you are not answering' and 'I suggest you answer'. Therefore, the present may be felt to be more impatient in tone than the aorist. Another factor is the immediative interpretation that is open with the present, which also may convey a note of impatience (section 2.2.2).

3. THE TRAGIC AORIST

3.1 Introduction

In this section I revisit the tragic aorist. The arguments will be in the same vein as in the previous sections, so I will be more brief here. To begin with, I fully agree with Lloyd's analysis of the tragic aorist in terms of politeness. At the same time, I believe that, semantically, the difference between the tragic aorist and its present competitor is aspectual. Lloyd has made no attempt to falsify this explanation by considering the broader evidence for the aspectual behaviour of the verbs in question, so I will present a case study of a key verb in this connection: ὄμνυμι 'swear'. First, however, some preliminary remarks need to be made about the nature of the utterances in question.

3.2 Two groups

Lloyd argues that tragic aorists are always *performative*. Performative verbs are verbs in utterances that do not describe something but perform an act. For example, to say *I promise* is to perform the act of making a promise; to say *I swear* is to perform the act of swearing.

Lloyd's cases of the tragic aorist can be classed under two headings (these do not entirely correspond to his 'notional actions' vs 'polite aorists'). The first concerns cases where the verb is not in itself performative. These are cases such as ἤσθην 'I enjoy', ἀπέπτυσα 'I spit out', ᾤμωξα 'I lament'. The verbs ἥδομαι 'enjoy', ἀποπτύω 'spit out' and οἰμώζω 'lament' are not performatives in themselves; for example, in Eur. *IA* 1613 ὡς **ἥδομαί** τοι ταῦτ' ἀκούσασ' ἀγγέλου 'How **pleased I am** to hear that from the messenger' the verb ἥδομαι describes the attitude of the speaker (the

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[26] For the comparison with the imperative, cf. N. Denyer, *Plato Protagoras* (Cambridge, 2008), 67 (I owe the reference to Lloyd).

chorus); in Aesch. *Cho.* 1014 νῦν αὐτὸν αἰνῶ, νῦν **ἀποιμώζω** παρών 'Now, being present, I praise him, now **I bewail** him' the verb ἀποιμώζω describes Orestes' present feelings regarding his father.

However, in the aorist, Lloyd argues, these verbs can function as performatives. For example, the expression ἥσθην 'I enjoy' can be used as a restrained alternative to actually laughing, like saying *Ha ha*. Similarly, ὤμωξα 'I lament' is a restrained alternative to crying οἴμοι and ἀπέπτυσα 'I spit out' is an alternative to actually spitting. Thus these expressions have the value of actions.[27]

In my view, the performative function of the aorist is to be related to its perfective aspect.[28] Because the perfective aspect limits the designated event to the boundaries of the utterance itself, the utterance and the event become one and the same. Bary (n. 4) provides evidence from other languages to establish the link between performativity and perfective aspect. According to Lloyd, on the other hand, the performative aorist is a kind of 'attitudinal past'. But it is unclear why the past tense should be polite with performative verbs, and if tense is the key factor, it is unclear why there is no performative imperfect.

The second group concerns cases where the verb is inherently performative, such as ὄμνυμι 'swear' or ἐπαινέω 'praise': saying *I swear* constitutes an act of swearing, and saying *I praise* constitutes an act of praising. In these cases both the present and the aorist are performative. According to Lloyd, the aorist is more formal or reserved in tone than the present. Bary, on the other hand, argues that there is no difference: both the primary present indicative and the secondary aorist indicative are suboptimal forms for the non-existent primary aorist indicative.

Lloyd's explanation for the difference in tone between the aorist and the present is convincing. For example, we find the performative aorist in Eur. *IT* 1023, where Iphigeneia rejects Orestes' proposal to kill Thoas: οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην· τὸ δὲ πρόθυμον **ᾔνεσα** 'I would not be able to; but **I praise** your enthusiasm'. Here the praise is merely a matter of courtesy intended to mitigate the rejection. We find the present, by contrast, in Eur. *Phoen.* 1683, where Oedipus seems to reject Antigone's offer to join him in exile: ὦ θύγατερ, **αἰνῶ** μέν σε τῆς προθυμίας 'Daughter, **I praise** you for your enthusiasm'. Here the praise can plausibly be interpreted as more heartfelt: Oedipus is touched that his daughter wants to join him in exile. Oedipus does not explicitly reject Antigone's offer, and, indeed, ultimately accepts it.

This difference, however, is a matter of aspect, not of tense. The aorist is more reserved in tone because it binds the verbal content to the utterance itself: as soon as the utterance has been made, the matter is dropped.[29] The imperfective aspect of the present, on the other hand, signals that the designated event transcends the moment of speech in its duration, suggesting a greater commitment on the part of the speaker to the designated verbal content. This is analogous to how, in English, the progressive of a performative verb seems to convey stronger insistence than the simple present: *I am begging you* vs *I beg you*.

If this account is correct, then it should be corroborated by the evidence of the aspectual behaviour of these verbs in categories other than the indicative. I argue that this is in fact the case, taking the imperative of ὄμνυμι 'swear' as the prime example.

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[27] Colvin (n. 3), 119 argues that this 'stretches the notion of the performative utterance beyond its useful limits', but the concept does have explanatory value in this case.
[28] Cf. Bary (n. 4), Nijk (n. 5).
[29] Cf. Rijksbaron (n. 18), 29.

3.3 The case of ὄμνυμι 'swear'

According to Lloyd (n. 2), 30, 'the most solemn and explicit oaths in Greek drama' are in the present tense. For example, when, in Eur. *Med.* 752–3, Aegeus swears to Medea that he will protect her, he uses the present tense in an emphatic oath: **ὄμνυμι** Γαῖαν φῶς τε λαμπρὸν Ἡλίου | θεούς τε πάντας ἐμμενεῖν ἅ σου κλύω '**I swear** by the earth and by the shining light of the sun and by all the gods that I will abide by your words'. Oaths performed with the aorist are more perfunctory, as in Eur. *Or.* 1516 τὴν ἐμὴν ψυχὴν **κατώμοσ'**, ἣν ἂν εὐορκοῖμ' ἐγώ '**I swear** by my life, an oath I would keep'.[30]

This difference is mirrored in the imperative; I have found five instances of (κατ)όμοσον and three instances of ὄμνυ in the dramatists. To begin with, Aegeus' use of the performative present ὄμνυμι in *Med.* 752 corresponds to Medea's use of the present imperative ὄμνυ some lines earlier (746–7): **ὄμνυ** πέδον Γῆς, πατέρα θ' Ἥλιον πατρὸς | τοὐμοῦ, θεῶν τε συντιθεὶς ἅπαν γένος '**Swear** by the plain of Earth, by Helios, the father of my father, and add the entire race of the gods'. Conversely, the Phrygian who makes his oath with the performative aorist in Eur. *Or.* 1516 was instructed to do so with the aorist imperative: **ὄμοσον**—εἰ δὲ μή, κτενῶ σε—μὴ λέγειν ἐμὴν χάριν '**Swear**—if you will not, I will kill you—that you do not say that to please me'. Finally, there is a similar correspondence in Soph. *Trach.* 1185–8:

> HP. **ὄμνυ** Διός νυν τοῦ με φύσαντος κάρα—
> ΥΛ. ἦ μὴν τί δράσειν; καὶ τόδ' ἐξειρήσεται;
> HP. ἦ μὴν ἐμοὶ τὸ λεχθὲν ἔργον ἐκτελεῖν.
> ΥΛ. **ὄμνυμ'** ἔγωγε, Ζῆν' ἔχων ἐπώμοτον.

> Heracles   Now **swear** by Zeus who gave birth to me—
> Hyllus   To do what? Will this be revealed?
> Heracles   … that you will perform the task I tell you.
> Hyllus   **I swear**, having Zeus as my witness.

Heracles uses the present imperative to instruct Hyllus to swear an oath, and Hyllus answers with a present tense performative.[31]

In one case, there is a discrepancy between the performative verb and the corresponding imperative (Ar. *Av.* 444–7):

> ΧΟ. διατίθεμαι 'γώ.
> ΠΙ.   **κατόμοσόν** νυν ταῦτά μοι.
> ΧΟ. **ὄμνυμ'** ἐπὶ τούτοις, πᾶσι νικᾶν τοῖς κριταῖς
>   καὶ τοῖς θεαταῖς πᾶσιν, —
> ΠΙ.   ἔσται ταυταγί.
> ΧΟ. εἰ δὲ παραβαίην, ἑνὶ κριτῇ νικᾶν μόνον.

> Chorus   Agreed.
> Pisthetaerus   Now **swear** to that.

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[30] It is interesting in this connection that the trustworthiness of the speaker in the second example is in question: A.J. Bayliss, 'Servile swearing', in A.H. Sommerstein and I.C. Torrance (edd.), *Oaths and Swearing in Ancient Greece* (Berlin and Boston, 2014), 179–95, at 186–7.

[31] The idea that the imperfective aspect makes the oath more emphatic fits the fact that it is preceded by a clasping of hands, which was 'an integral part of many oath rituals': A.H. Sommerstein and A. Bayliss, *Oath and State in Ancient Greece* (Berlin and Boston, 2013), 156 n. 18.

Chorus   **I swear** on the following condition, that I will win with all the votes
           of the judges and by the judgement of all the spectators —
Pisthetaerus   It will be so.
Chorus   … and if I violate the oath, may I win by only one vote.

Pisthetaerus uses the aorist imperative κατόμοσον: his request is not particularly
emphatic (he does not mention gods or conditions), in contrast with those of Medea
and Heracles discussed above. The chorus, on the other hand, take the opportunity to
make an emphatic oath with the present, which takes up two and a half lines and
includes a self-curse.[32]

Three cases of the aorist imperative are found in Ar. *Ran.* 305–6:

ΞΑ.   ἤμπουσα φρούδη.
ΔΙ.   **κατόμοσον**.
ΞΑ.   νὴ τὸν Δία.
ΔΙ.   καὖθις **κατόμοσον**.
ΞΑ.   νὴ Δί'.
ΔΙ.   **ὄμοσον**.
ΞΑ.   νὴ Δία.

Xanthias   Empousa is gone.
Dionysus   **Swear**!
Xanthias   Yes, by Zeus.
Dionysus   **Swear** again!
Xanthias   By Zeus.
Dionysus   **Swear**!
Xanthias   By Zeus.

Dionysus is not asking for a full, official oath: he merely wants Xanthias to utter an
affirmative. In so far as he is not satisfied with Xanthias' oaths, it is not because he
desires a fuller one; he simply wants multiple affirmations.

We are left with one instance of the imperative: Eur. *IT* 743 **ὄμνυ**· σὺ δ' ἔξαρχ'
ὅρκον ὅστις εὐσεβής '**Swear**: you, begin an oath which is pious'. The phrase ἔξαρχ'
ὅρκον 'begin an oath' suggests a full-fledged ritualistic oath.[33]

In conclusion, the aspectual variation between the aorist and the present in the
performative first-person indicative of the verb ὄμνυμι 'swear' is mirrored by the
aspectual variation of the same verb in the imperative.

3.4 The genre issue

At the end of his article, Lloyd (n. 6), 424 puts forward a theoretical objection to an
explanation of the tragic aorist in terms of aspect: that such an explanation 'integrate[s]
[the performative aorist] into a general account of the Greek aorist so successfully
that one would expect it to be much more widespread than it actually is'. He points
out that 'the performative aorist is only used in a limited stylistic and chronological
context'.

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[32] On self-curses see K. Konstantinidou, 'Oath and curse', in A.H. Sommerstein and I.C. Torrance
(edd.), *Oaths and Swearing in Ancient Greece* (Berlin and Boston, 2014), 6–47.
[33] Note that the oath contains self-curses made by both parties (see note 32 above). Also, the fact
that Iphigeneia invokes Artemis, whose priestess she is and whose temple is on the scene, adds solem-
nity to the oath: see I.C. Torrance, 'Ways to give oaths extra sanctity', in A.H. Sommerstein and I.C.
Torrance (edd.), *Oaths and Swearing in Ancient Greece* (Berlin and Boston, 2014), 132–55, at 135.

This criticism is valid in so far as Bary's account is concerned. She argues that there is no difference between the performative aorist and its present counterpart, and under that account we would indeed expect the distribution between performative aorists and presents to be about fifty–fifty, which is not what we find. Lloyd is right that there is a difference and that the performative aorist has a distinct semantic and pragmatic value. While my account is not vulnerable to this objection to the same extent that Bary's is, the potential criticism remains that it may seem to make a grammatical normality out of a rare usage. Let me offer three thoughts on this point.

First, I do not think the rarity of the usage of the performative aorist affects the discussion concerning its semantics. The politeness value of the performative aorist must derive from its grammatical properties one way or the other. Why would it be acceptable for the past tense to be used in a polite manner only in certain genres but not for the perfective aspect? We can maintain both that the performative aorist is bound to certain genres and that its use is aspectually motivated.

Second, I agree with Colvin (n. 3), 116–17 that 'it should be clear from looking at the examples that the phenomenon is grammaticalized, and calls for a different order of explanation [different than one in terms of style]'.

Third, and most importantly, we should be careful in our evaluation of the negative evidence. Take, for example, the following observation by Lloyd (n. 6), 423–4: 'To take just three verbs, there are no examples in Plato and Xenophon of the performative aorist of ὄμνυμι ('I swear'), δέχομαι ('I accept') or ἐπαινῶ ('I approve'), although there are numerous opportunities in their works for swearing, accepting and thanking.' What needs to be shown for this argument to be effective, however, is the following:

a. That first-person forms of these verbs are used in the first place. The fact that the aorist is not used is meaningless if the present is not used either.
b. That, if we do find first-person present forms with these verbs, the consistent use of the present instead of the aorist cannot be explained in terms of the different values of the two categories. There may be swearing, accepting and approving, but not in the reserved tone that warrants the use of the performative aorist.

With regard to the second point, Colvin (n. 3), 118 argues that Platonic dialogue 'lacks the interactive and reactive features of dramatic dialogue, and the linguistic markers of (realistic) turn-taking'. This would account at least partly for the absence of performative aorists in these texts. Lloyd (n. 6), 424 n. 31 objects: '[B]ut 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.' The question is: do we find swearing, accepting or approving in those passages in Plato? In the beginning of the *Lysis*, we do not. And when we do, can the use of the present not be explained in terms of the unreserved tone it conveys?

A brief look at the evidence for ὄμνυμι in Plato and Xenophon will illustrate this point. There is only one instance of ὄμνυμι in Plato (*Phdr.* 236e); it does not stand at the beginning of a speaker's turn, and the fulness of the oath fits the profile of the present as discussed by Lloyd (see section 3.3). In Xenophon, we find eight instances, none at the beginning of a turn—except in *An.* 6.6.17, where Hagasias rises to speak and makes an oath without being prompted:

ἐγώ, ὦ ἄνδρες, **ὄμνυμι** θεοὺς καὶ θεὰς ἦ μὴν μήτε με Ξενοφῶντα κελεῦσαι ἀφελέσθαι τὸν ἄνδρα μήτε ἄλλον ὑμῶν μηδένα.

Men, **I swear** by the gods and goddesses that verily Xenophon did not command me to take away the man, nor did any other of you.

Neither this nor any other oath in Xenophon is of the perfunctory nature that explains the use of the aorist in some cases in drama. Overall, I believe that Lloyd's objection to an aspectual account of the performative aorist on the ground that the phenomenon is limited to certain genres is invalid.

4. CONCLUSION

The aim of this article has been to argue that the difference between the aorist and the present in hortative questions and performative utterances is to be explained semantically in terms of aspect, and that the difference in politeness between the two forms of the indicative (the aorist being more polite than the present) derives from their particular semantic value. I hope to have been successful in this endeavour and that this may be a step forward in the debate concerning the semantics and pragmatics of the classical Greek verb.

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APPENDIX: MAIN CLAUSE VERBS IN ΤΙ ΟΥ QUESTIONS

The list below includes all instances of questions with the phrase τί οὐ in the corpus specified in section 2.1. Cases I consider indignant questions are marked with an asterisk. The dramatic fragments were not considered because in those cases the context for determining the exact nature of the question and the motivation for the aspectual choice is lacking. Platonic *spuria* were left out as well.[34]

*Aesch. *Eum.* 604 ἤλαυνες; *PV* 37 στυγεῖς;[35] Ar. *Ach.* 359 λέγεις, 592 ἀπεψώλησας; *Eq.* 160 ἐᾷς, 1207 διακρίνεις; *Vesp.* 213 ἀπεκοιμήθημεν, *273 φαίνετ(αι), ὑπακούει; *Av.* 149 οἰκίζετον, 828 ἐῶμεν; *Lys.* 906 κατεκλίνης, 1103 καλοῦμεν, *1160 παύεσθε, 1161 διηλλάγητε; *Thesm.* 1121 ἐᾷς, 1193 κατεύδει; *Ran.* 33 ἐναυμάχουν; *Eccl.* 1151 ἄγεις; Eur. *Heracl.* 805 εἰάσαμεν; *Hipp.* 1060 λύω; *Andr.* 443 καταστένω; *Hec.* 1213 ἔκτεινας, ἦλθες; *Supp.* 1080 ἔστιν; *Phoen.* 1217 εἴασας; *Rhes.* 557 πλάθει; Pl. *Phd.* 86d ἀπεκρίνατο; *Cra.* 402d μέλλει; *Tht.* 159c μέλλει, 185c μέλλει; *Soph.* 224d μέλλω, 251e ἐσκέψω; *Plt.* 279c ἐδράσαμεν, ἤλθομεν, *283b ἀπεκρινάμεθα; *Prm.* 136c διῆλθες, 136d διῆλθες; *Phlb.* 54b ἀπεκρίνω; *Symp.* 173b διηγήσω; *Lach.* 181d λέγει; *Lys.* 211d ἐρωτᾷς; *Chrm.* 154e ἀπεδύσαμεν, ἐθεασάμεθα; *Alc. I* 114b ἀπέδειξας; *Euthyd.* 272d συμφοιτᾷς; *Prt.* 310a διηγήσω, 310e βαδίζομεν, 317d ἐκαλέσαμεν; *Grg.* *468c ἀποκρίνῃ, *468d ἀποκρίνῃ, 503b ἔφρασας, 504c λέγεις, 509e ἀπεκρίνω; *Meno* 92d ἔφρασας; *Menex.* 236c διῆλθες; *Resp.* 338c ἐπαινεῖς, 394e μέλλει, 405a μέλλει, 469a

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[34] I did not include Xen. *Cyr.* 2.1.7 νομίζεις because here τί οὖν should be separated from οὐκ: 'What then? Don't you think …'
[35] I do not necessarily regard the *Prometheus* as authentically Aeschylean, but, as Aristophanes parodies it in his comedies, it must have been a genuine fifth-century tragedy, which is all that matters for linguistic purposes. For an overview of the issue, see I. Ruffell, *Aeschylus: Prometheus Bound* (London, 2012), 13–19.

μέλλομεν, 494b μέλλει, 530a μέλλει, 566d μέλλει, 568a μέλλουσιν, 605c μέλλει; *Criti.* 108a μέλλομεν; *Leg.* 753a ἐκοινωνησάτην; Soph. *OT* 1003 ἐξελυσάμην, *1392 ἔκτεινας; *Ant.* 448 ἔμελλον, 1308 ἔπαισεν; Xen. *Hell.* 4.1.6 μέλλω, 4.1.11 πυνθάνῃ, *6.1.7 στρατεύεις; *Mem.* 3.1.10 σκοποῦμεν, 3.11.15 ἐγένου, 4.6.14 ἐπεσκεψάμεθα; *An.* *2.5.22 ἤλθομεν, *3.4.40 ἦγες; *Cyr.* 2.1.4 ἔλεξας; *3.1.6 καταβαίνεις, 3.2.25 μισθοφοροῦσιν, 4.1.11 διώκομεν, 4.1.12 λέγεις, 5.4.37 ἐποιήσαμεν; *Oec.* 18.1 μέλλω, 19.9 μέλλει; *Hier.* 1.3 ὑπέμνησας; *Vect.* 4.28 καινοτομοῦσιν.