HOW TO CONTROL THE PRESENT: A UNIFIED ACCOUNT OF THE NONPAST USES OF THE AORIST INDICATIVE

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Abstract: This article addresses the asymmetry between the two main aspectual paradigms in the Classical Greek verbal system: the imperfective and the aorist (perfective). Whereas the imperfective has separate indicative forms for present and past time reference, i.e. the 'primary' and the 'secondary' indicative, the aorist only has a secondary ('past') indicative. I argue that this asymmetry is not only morphological but also semantic. That is, while the secondary imperfective indicative (the 'imperfect') is confined to past time reference, the secondary aorist indicative is used not only to refer to the past but also to the present. It then enters into aspectual competition with the primary imperfective indicative (the 'present'). Based on R.W. Langacker's (2011) Cognitive Grammar account of aspect, I distinguish five types of context in which a present tense form with perfective aspect is a desideratum, and argue that here the secondary aorist indicative is used to fulfil this function. Moreover, I present a diachronic account of the origin of this remarkable asymmetry, arguing that the aorist indicative was never a past tense to begin with.

Keywords: Greek linguistics, aorist, cognitive linguistics, PIE linguistics

I. Introduction

There are several remarkable uses of the aorist indicative in Classical Greek where its time reference is a matter of debate. It seems that here the aorist enters into competition with the present tense and in one case even the future tense. Four of these 'nonpast' uses of the aorist are generally distinguished in the standard grammars.

(a) 'Instantaneous' or 'dramatic/tragic' aorist. For analytical purposes it is important to make a distinction here already between two types.[1] First is the aorist with *performatives*, for example:

χαίρειν **προσεῖπα** πρῶτα τὸν γεραίτατον.[2]
My first words to the eldest: Greeting![3] (Euripides *Cyclops* 101)

The utterance is not really a description but rather an act: saying χαίρειν προσεῖπα constitutes a greeting. Note that the alternative here is the present προσεννέπω (Euripides *Electra* 552), not the imperfect. This suggests that the aorist was chosen for its aspectual contribution rather than for its past time value.

The other type is found in *reports*:

ἔπτηξα θυμόν· οὐρανία γὰρ ἀστραπὴ φλέγει πάλιν.
My spirit cowers, for again lightning blazes in the sky! (Sophocles *Oedipus Coloneus* 1466)

[1] I owe this distinction to Lloyd (1999). However, Lloyd confines the denominations 'tragic' and 'instantaneous' to the performative use.

[2] The editions used are listed in the bibliography.

[3] Translations from the dramatists are taken from the Loeb editions (modified where noted to make my interpretation of the text clear): Euripides: Kovacs (1994–2002); Aeschylus: Sommerstein (2008); Aristophanes: Henderson (1998–2007); Sophocles: Lloyd-Jones (1994). Translations of incidental quotations from other authors are my own.

In such cases it is usually not so problematic to have the aorist refer to the past (even though a translation with a present tense often seems more natural from our perspective). However, I will argue that there are some examples of the instantaneous aorist in reports where this is unlikely.

(b) Aorist in hortative questions:

> τί οὖν … οὐ καὶ Πρόδικον καὶ Ἱππίαν **ἐκαλέσαμεν** καὶ τοὺς μετ’ αὐτῶν, ἵνα ἐπακούσωσιν ἡμῶν;
> Why then don’t we invite Prodicus and Hippias as well and those with them, so that they may listen to us? (Plato *Protagoras* 317d)

The question is really a suggestion to carry out the described action. The alternative here is the present καλοῦμεν (Aristophanes *Lysistrata* 1103, see section II.iii below); the imperfect cannot carry the hortative function.

(c) Generic aorist (including the aorist in ‘gnomic’ statements, in (Homeric) similes, and in other descriptions of what typically occurs):[4]

> Ἐπεὰν ὦν ἀπίκωνται πλέοντες ἐς τὴν Βαβυλῶνα καὶ διαθέωνται τὸν φόρτον, νομέας μὲν τοῦ πλοίου καὶ τὴν καλάμην πᾶσαν **ἀπ’** ὦν **ἐκήρυξαν**, τὰς δὲ διφθέρας ἐπισάξαντες ἐπὶ τοὺς ὄνους <u>ἀπελαύνουσι</u> ἐς τοὺς Ἀρμενίους.
> After they arrive at Babylon and dispose of their cargo, they sell the ribs of the boat and all the reed; then they load the hides upon the asses and drive them back into Armenia. (Herodotus 1.194.4)

In generic passages the aorist is coordinated with the present (here ἀπελαύνουσι), not the imperfect. Subordinate clauses in such generic passages always have the subjunctive (ἀπίκωνται, διαθέωνται), not the optative which is normally found when the reference is to the past.[5]

(d) Future aorist:

> εἰ μέν κ’ αὖθι μένων Τρώων πόλιν ἀμφιμάχωμαι,
> **ὤλετο** μέν μοι νόστος, ἀτὰρ κλέος ἄφθιτον ἔσται.
> If I stay here and fight around the city of Troy,
> then my return home will(?) perish, but my fame will be undying. (Homer *Iliad* 9.413)

Here the subordinate clause creates the frame of an envisioned future, and the aorist seems to refer to an event occurring within that time frame.

These uses have received widely diverging treatments in the standard grammars. The state of affairs is depicted in figure 1 below. At one end of the spectrum are those who believe that the aorist functions as a past tense in each and every instance, even though in translation we often have to use a present or future tense. While it is granted that the message conveyed by these sentences, taken as a whole, concerns the present or future rather than the past, these scholars believe that this nonpast interpretation is the result of a certain interaction between the past value of the aorist and the context. For example, R. Kühner and B. Gerth argue in the case of the instantaneous aorist with verbs of speaking – προσεῖπα in the example under (a) – that the aorist forcefully suggests that what is said is unalterable because it already belongs to the past ((1898) 164–65). We may call this the *pragmatic* solution.

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[4] For these three subtypes, *cf.*, for example, Duhoux (2000) 391.

[5] These points were rightly pressed by Moller (1853) 116–19.

	Instantaneous	*Hortative*	*Generic*	*Future*
Kühner and Gerth[6]	Past	Past	Past	Past
Goodwin	Past	Past	Past	Past
Smyth	Past	Past	Past	Past
Stahl	Past	Past	Past	Past
Duhoux	Past	X	Past	Past
Gildersleeve	Past	Unclear[7]	Unclear	Unclear
Schwyzer and Debrunner	Ambiguous[8]	X	Ambiguous	Past
Ruipérez	Past	X	Nonpast	Past
Rijksbaron	Past	Past	Nonpast	X
Crespo et al.	Ambiguous[9]	X	Nonpast	X[10]
Bornemann and Risch	X	X	Nonpast	X
Humbert	Nonpast	X	Nonpast	X
Moorhouse	Nonpast	Nonpast	Nonpast	X

Fig. 1. The nonpast uses of the aorist in the grammars. Works are listed according to their place in the spectrum of interpretations, from consistent attribution of past value to consistent attribution of nonpast value.

Others advocate a *semantic* solution. They argue that the aorist does not always have past time value but can be used solely for its aspectual contribution. Such ideas have been around for a long time.[11] In the mid 19th century, E. Moller already argued that the aorist indicative is not, in and of itself, a past tense (1853).[12] Accordingly, it can be used to refer to the present when a 'present aorist' is needed.

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[6] Kühner and Gerth (1898); Goodwin (1889); Smyth (1920); Stahl (1907); Duhoux (2000); Gildersleeve (1980); Schwyzer and Debrunner (1950); Ruipérez (1954); Rijksbaron (2002); Crespo et al. (2003); Borne-mann and Risch (1978); Humbert (1945); Moorhouse (1982).

[7] Gildersleeve does not explicitly comment on the temporal value of the aorist; this would seem to suggest, however, that he believes it to carry its regular past value (as described at (1980) 103).

[8] Schwyzwer and Debrunner's discussion ((1950) 281–85) is hard to pin down. They take the aorist in these cases to refer to the (immediate) past ('unmittelbare Vergangenheit'), but they argue that this use ultimately derives from an ancient timeless use of the aorist (285). With respect to their category 4 (281–82), which includes

the performative aorist, they point out that in the case of first person verbs a sharp distinction between past and present cannot be drawn. In the case of the future use (282–83), however, it is clear that they attribute past value to the aorist.

[9] Crespo et al. speak of '[e]l aoristo referido al presente o al pasado imediato' ((2003) 261).

[10] The one example given under the heading 'aoristo referido al futuro' is a case of the future perfect use of the aorist, where the aorist refers to the past as seen from a vantage point in the future (Crespo et al. (2003) 261). This is not a genuine nonpast use; see n.35.

[11] See Schwyzer and Debrunner (1950) 285–86 for a useful overview.

[12] *Cf.* more recently A. Rijksbaron in his 1988 and 2012 articles on the imperfect; also Bakker (1997).

We can see that in the grammars this interpretation is most common with the generic aorist. Nonpast value is only sparingly attributed to the other uses. The generic aorist has received the lion's share of attention in the rest of the literature as well.[13] The future use is mentioned in a number of studies in close connection with the generic use, also as having a nonpast value. This is in contrast with the treatment in the grammars, where it is always interpreted as referring to the past (when it is discussed at all).[14] The instantaneous aorist with performatives has recently been explained by C.L.A. Bary in terms of present time reference (2012). A drawback of her account, however, is that it fails to explain the aspectual difference between the aorist and the present with these verbs (see section II.i). The instantaneous aorist in reports is touched upon here and there, especially in commentaries; there is little agreement here with respect to its temporal value. Finally, the hortative aorist has received little attention outside the grammars (but see Denizot (2011) 459–60).

In this article I have two main aims. The first is to provide a systematic and unified account of all nonpast uses of the aorist in terms of *present* time reference. That is, I take the idea that the aorist indicative is not inherently a past tense to what I believe to be its logical conclusion. My method consists of three steps.

(1) Showing that the nonpast uses of the aorist are found in exactly those types of contexts in which a present form with perfective (aoristic) aspect is a desideratum. The use of a present perfective is restricted for semantic reasons: it can only be used in what may be considered special cases. If we find the nonpast uses of the aorist in exactly these special cases, this gives the idea that the aorist is used as a present tense here some *prima facie* plausibility. I will make use of Langacker's (2011) Cognitive Grammar account of tense and aspect, and the English present tense in particular, to explain the restrictions on the use of a present perfective and define the contexts where it is in fact allowed.

(2) Explaining why it is better to interpret the aorist as a present tense than as a past tense in these cases. The main problem with the latter interpretation is that the supposed effect of the use of the past tense in these contexts (for example 'urgency', 'immediacy') is not borne out by the evidence. If we take the aorist as a present tense instead, we do not have to read into the text things that are not there.

(3) Accounting for the difference in meaning between the aorist and its competitors: the present (aspectual opposition) and, in the case of the future aorist, the future (temporal opposition).

My second aim is to account for the morphology of the aorist. The claim that the aorist indicative is not inherently a past tense raises the question of why the form shares the characteristics of the augment and secondary endings with the genuine past tenses (i.e. the imperfect and the pluperfect). I will argue that this peculiarity can be understood in terms of reconstructed developments in the Proto-Indo-European tense and aspect system. In doing so I am following up on a suggestion that is in fact quite old: that the nonpast uses of the aorist go back to an ancient time when the aorist indicative had no temporal value at all.[15]

II. The aorist as a present tense

Present tense forms with perfective aspect are a cross-linguistic rarity. A. Timberlake notes that when such forms do exist they usually do not refer to the actual present, but have some special function ((2007) 298–99). For example, they may be used to refer to a habit or to an 'imminent' or 'potential' event. The reason for this peculiarity is that there is a tension between present time

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[13] Apart from Moller see, for example, Péristérakis (1962); McKay (1988).

[14] Meltzer (1904) 272: 'Der Aoristus gnomicus berührt sich eng mit dem sogenannten Aoristus pro futuro und seine Erklärung darf von der des letzteren nicht losgerissen werden.' *Cf.* Wackernagel (1926) 177, Péristérakis (1962) 13–18.

[15] Already Moller (1853) and, for example, Herbig (1896) 250–64 (both writing about the generic aorist); *cf.* Schwyzer and Debrunner (1950) 285–86; Péristérakis (1962) 3.

reference and perfective aspect, as has often been noted.[16] Briefly put, it is not normally possible to present an event as bounded (perfective aspect) within the here and now (present tense). In this article I approach the problem from the Cognitive Grammar (CG) perspective as developed by Langacker (2011) in his account of the English present tense. The advantage of this account is that it explains very precisely, on the one hand, what the restrictions on the use of a present perfective are, and, on the other, in what types of contexts it can be used felicitously.

The diagrams in figure 2 represent tense and aspect combinations according to CG. As a whole, they depict a portion in the domain of time, the *domain of instantiation* for events.[17] The arrow with the 't' depicts the direction of time. The *maximal scope* (MS) is the portion of the domain that fully covers the meaning of a particular expression. Conceiving of events as located somewhere in time – past, present or future – requires activating a larger conceptual substrate within which this selective focus is meaningful. The maximal scope has no clear boundaries but necessarily includes the *ground*, i.e. the moment of speaking (denoted by the box with the squiggly lines), as well as some portion of the past and future.

Within this larger scope, attention is directed to a particular portion for the purposes of viewing the event actually designated by the verb. This is the *immediate scope* (IS), the 'onstage region'. The tenses locate the immediate scope with respect to the ground. The past tense imposes an immediate scope prior to the moment of speaking; the present tense imposes an immediate scope that coincides with the moment of speaking.

'Aspect' concerns the relation between the designated event and the immediate scope. A perfective event is conceived as *bounded* within the immediate scope. This means that when we mentally scan the immediate scope we get a picture of the event in its entirety. This is depicted in the diagrams by the upper boxes with the heavy lines. An imperfective event, by contrast, is conceived as *unbounded* within the immediate scope. Here attention is directed only to an arbitrary subpart of the event. If we look at the lower boxes, the heavy lines depict the part of the event that is actually designated.
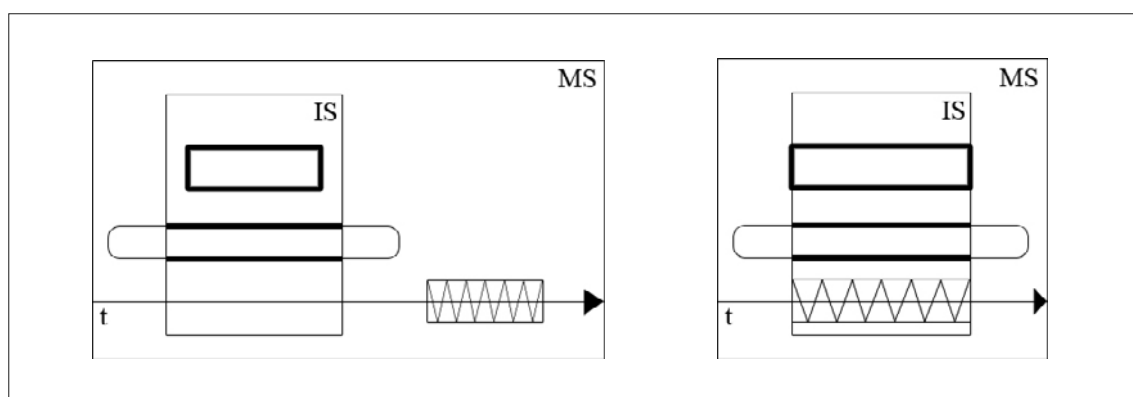

Fig. 2. Diagrams for tense and aspect combinations in CG. Left: past tense with perfective (above) and imperfective (below) aspect. Right: present tense with perfective (above) and imperfective (below) aspect.

[16] *Cf.*, for example, the account in Bary (2012).
[17] I use the term 'event' in a broad sense, that is, to refer to the 'entity' denoted by the verb, whatever its constitution (i.e. whether it be a state, process, activity or event in a stricter sense). The term normally used in CG is 'process'; other suggestions include 'eventuality', 'situation', 'state of affairs'. All terms are potentially misleading, but I think the term 'event' can most naturally carry the general meaning.

Now, past perfectives are not a problem because, in the case of the past tense, the immediate scope can be of any size. It may be a specific time ('yesterday at 13:00'), a whole day ('two days ago'), a whole year ('last year') or indeed a period of any length ('in the period from 100,000 BC to 1000 BC'). This means that any past event, no matter how long its duration, can be fitted inside an immediate scope in its entirety. In English this means that the simple past with telic verbs (verbs that designate an event with an inherent endpoint) is usually unproblematic. For example, 'The process of evolution took millions of years'. With the present tense, by contrast, the immediate scope is fixed, being identified as the moment of speaking. Not all events can be arbitrarily construed as being bounded within this period of time.

There are two problems here. First is the *durational* problem. This entails that most events we happen to talk about last longer than a moment of speaking, so that they cannot naturally be presented as bounded within this moment. In English this means that the simple present is generally not allowed with telic expressions, except under a habitual reading. For example, 'He mows the lawn (regularly)' is fine, but 'He mows the lawn (right now)' is ungrammatical.

Second is the *epistemic* problem. This entails that we do not normally know when an event will occur. So even if an event is short enough in its duration to be bounded within a speech moment (we can think of lightning flashing, for example), the moment we observe it we are already too late to begin a description of the event that exactly coincides with it. For example, it would be hard to find a context where it is felicitous to say 'Lightning flashes (right now)'.

There are several special circumstances, however, in which the durational and epistemic problems are circumvented and where a present perfective can be used. In English this is borne out by the fact that here the (non-habitual) use of the simple present with telic verbs is possible. I will try to show that it is exactly in these contexts that we find the nonpast uses of the aorist.

II.i. Instantaneous aorist with performatives

The first 'exception to the non-occurrence of present-tense perfectives' discussed by Langacker concerns performatives ((2011) 59). For example, the sentence 'I order you to destroy those files' is not a description of an event, but an act: saying 'I order' constitutes an order. This means that the designated event is *the utterance itself*. So the event and the utterance exactly coincide and the durational problem does not arise. Moreover, the epistemic problem does not arise because the speaker is the one who controls the 'occurrence' of the event. These factors justify the use of the simple present of the telic verb 'order'. Langacker contrasts the sentence 'I am ordering you to destroy those files', which is rather a description of what the subject is actually doing.

The instantaneous aorist with performatives has recently been accounted for by Bary along the same lines (2012). According to this interpretation, when Odysseus uses the expression χαίρειν προσεῖπα to address the old satyr in Euripides' *Cyclops* (cited above under (a)) he simply means 'I greet', without a hint of pastness. Similarly, the 'tragic' ἐπήνεσα means 'I praise', ὤμοσα means 'I swear', etc. The aorist is used as a present perfective, signaling that the designated event and the utterance exactly coincide.

The problems with the traditional interpretation of these aorists in terms of past time reference have been discussed by Lloyd (1999) and Bary (2012), so I will be brief here. According to Kühner and Gerth the aorist in these cases refers to the immediate past ((1898) 163–65). Thus, with verbs expressing judgment (for example ἤνεσα, 'praise') and emotion (for example ὤμωξα, 'lament'), the aorist supposedly refers to the forming of that judgment or emotion during the words of the interlocutor. The effect is an excited tone. With 'Verben des Sagens, des Befehlens, des Anratens, des Schwörens' (Kühner and Gerth (1898) 164–65; for example ἀνεῖπον, 'declare'), the aorist forcefully suggests that what is said is unalterable because it already belongs to the past.

M. Lloyd has shown in detail that this interpretation does not work (1999). Far from conveying excitement or forcefulness, the tone of the aorist is distanced, dignified, polite; it is actually the

competing present that is forceful. Indeed, in the example from Euripides' *Cyclops* just mentioned, it is hard to see why Odysseus should give the satyr a particularly forceful greeting.

Now, Lloyd does suggest that the politeness effect of the aorist derives from it being a past tense ((1999) 33). He adduces the English 'attitudinal past', as in, for example, 'I *wondered/was wondering* if you could help me', as a rough analogy. In those cases the speaker makes the (already implicit) request more indirect by leaving it open for the addressee to infer whether he is still 'wondering' at the present time. However, it is not easy to see how this would work for the performative aorist. It seems to me that locating a greeting (for example) in the past would be confrontational rather than polite: as if the speaker says 'I (have) greet(ed) you whether you like it or not'. Moreover, the idea that the politeness effect depends on the past tense value of the aorist leaves unexplained why the aspectual competitor for the performative aorist is the present and not the imperfect.

If we interpret the performative aorist as a present tense then the difference between the 'forceful' present and the 'polite' aorist must lie in their aspectual values. Bary does not see how this would work and rejects the difference in meaning altogether (2012). According to her, the present and the aorist are both suboptimal alternatives with performatives: the present lacks the perfective aspect marking, the aorist lacks the present tense marking. She leaves open what may have motivated the choice of one or the other.

I would suggest that the difference in tone between the aorist and the present can in fact be understood from their respective aspectual values. The present signals that the event referred to transcends the bounds of the moment of speaking. This implies insistence on, or commitment to, the verbal content of the utterance. The aorist, by contrast, strictly binds the designated event to the utterance itself. As soon as the utterance has been made, the matter is dropped. An exaggerated paraphrase of the aorist would be 'I complete the formality of …' or 'I do … and leave it at that', while the present suggests 'With full commitment/insistence I …'.

Let us compare an aorist with a present to see how this works. In Euripides' *Iphigeneia Aulidensis* (440) Agamemnon receives the messenger who brings news of the arrival of Clytaemnestra and Iphigeneia:

> **ἐπήνεσ'**, ἀλλὰ στεῖχε δωμάτων ἔσω.
> I thank you. But go inside the tent.

As Lloyd notes, Agamemnon does not really welcome this news at all ((1999) 40). After all, he is to deceive his wife and sacrifice his daughter. The words 'I thank you', spoken to the messenger, are nothing but a formality and do not reflect Agamemnon's feelings.

Things are different in the following example. Here Megara, the wife of Heracles, thanks the chorus of old Theban men for supporting her against the threats of Lycus, who wants her and her children dead:

> γέροντες, <u>αἰνῶ</u>· τῶν φίλων γὰρ οὔνεκα
> ὀργὰς δικαίας τοὺς φίλους ἔχειν χρεών.
> Old sirs, I thank you. It is good that friends
> should make a just display of anger on behalf of their friends. (Euripides *Heracles* 275–76)

Here Megara's praise reflects her attitude, which is witnessed by the fact that she goes on to motivate it.

In my view, then, a present reading of the performative aorist yields the most natural interpretation of the utterances in question, and the pragmatic effect of the aorist in contrast with the present can be understood in terms of its aspectual value.

II.ii. Instantaneous aorist in reports

We have just seen that with performatives the utterance exactly coincides with the designated event because the two are actually one and the same. But it is also possible for the utterance to coincide with external events. Langacker provides some helpful examples ((2011) 59–60). A chess player may say 'I move my rook to b3, and capture your knight' as he performs this move. Here the durational problem does not arise as the move and the speech act temporally coincide. The epistemic problem does not arise because the speaker knows beforehand he will execute the move, so he will not be too late to initiate a description that exactly coincides with it.

Similarly, a sports commentator who reports events as they are happening will use the simple present for bounded events: 'He hits it into the hole', 'Jeter makes a nice stop', 'He fires to first, and gets him by a step'. When the event is not bounded within the immediate scope of the here and now, the commentator will use the progressive: 'The manager is walking slowly towards the mound'. The events referred to with the simple present are short enough for the temporal problem not to be a factor. The epistemic problem, however, is very real; technically, the commentator can only report events when they have already happened. Langacker suggests several factors play a role here. In the first place, the events are 'stereotypized' and can to a certain extent be anticipated. Also, the commentator may uphold the pretence of direct reporting for the sake of 'vividness'. I would say we accept this pretence because of the commentator's privileged knowledge deriving from his presence at the scene.

Two unfortunate circumstances make it hard to establish a present time reference for the instantaneous aorist in reports. In the first place, contexts similar to the ones described by Langacker are rare in Classical Greek. References to the here and now are mostly confined to events naturally conceived as unbounded. Second, in most cases it is impossible to rule out a past interpretation. For example (from the introduction (a)):

ἔπτηξα θυμόν · οὐρανία γὰρ ἀστραπὴ φλέγει πάλιν.
My spirit cowers, for again lightning blazes in the sky! (Sophocles *Oedipus Coloneus* 1466)

According to A.C. Moorhouse, the aorist here 'should be taken as contemporary' ((1982) 195).[18] But to me it seems that there is no way to exclude reference to the immediate past: 'My spirit cowered (just now)'. Similarly, συνῆκα and ἔγνως, found a number of times in drama, could be taken to mean 'I/you understand (in this moment)', but there is not really anything wrong with having them refer to the past.[19] I do agree with Moorhouse that in such instances the choice of the aorist is mainly motivated by aspectual concerns – i.e. because συνίημι or γιγνώσκεις would be aspectually inappropriate; but that is not enough to legitimize rejecting a past time interpretation altogether.[20]

Despite these problems, there are two instances where I believe the context makes a 'contemporary' interpretation of the aorist likely. The reports in which these aorists are found are rather special, and it is precisely their unusual character that allows for the durational and epistemic problems to be circumvented.

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[18] See his discussion for more examples: Moorhouse (1982) 195–96.

[19] *Cf.* Lloyd (1999) 43–44.

[20] An interesting instance of the aorist is Aesch. *Ch.* 423–24: **ἔκοψα** κομμὸν Ἄριον ἔν τε Κισσίας | νόμοις ἰηλεμιστρίας, 'I strike/struck myself blows like an Arian and in the manner of a Cissian wailing woman'. It is possible that the chorus strike their heads and simultaneously utter the word ἔκοψα, 'I strike'; this is defended by Sommerstein (1980) 66–67. Unfortunately, a textual problem makes the temporal interpretation of the aorist uncertain. Page (1972), Garvie (1986) and West (1990) all read δ' ἦν ἰδεῖν at 425, admittedly an easy emendation for the manuscript reading δὴν εἰδεῖν. This locates ἔκοψα in the past. It does require emending the transmitted ἐπιρροθεῖ to ἐπερρόθει at 428, but this is less invasive than reading, for example, δή 'στ' for δήν at 425 (Sommerstein). I agree, on the other hand, with Sommerstein that the past interpretation is awkward in this context.

The first passage is Aristophanes *Vespae* 1216–20. Here Bdelycleon teaches his father Philocleon how to dine, guiding him through an imaginary dinner:

Βδ.	ὕδωρ κατὰ χειρός· τὰς τραπέζας εἰσφέρειν·
	<u>δειπνοῦμεν</u>· <u>ἀπονενίμμεθ'</u>· ἤδη <u>σπένδομεν</u>.
Φι.	πρὸς τῶν θεῶν, ἐνύπνιον ἐστιώμεθα;
Βδ.	αὐλητρὶς **ἐνεφύσησεν**· οἱ δὲ συμπόται
	εἰσίν …
Bd.	Water for our hands; serve the tables;
	now we're dining; now we've cleaned up; now we're pouring libations.
Ph.	Good heavens, are we dining on dream food?
Bd.	The girl piper starts to play. Your drinking companions are …
	(tr. modified; Henderson: 'has started to play')

Normally the aorist is translated with a past tense: 'The girl piper has started to play'.[21] In my view this interpretation is infelicitous in light of the surrounding discourse. In this 'dream dinner', time advances in a particular way. Each new clause introduced by Bdelycleon up to this point has advanced the 'now' to the time of the designated event: 'Now we're dining', 'Now we've cleaned up', etc. In this situation, where Bdelycleon is conjuring up the events, it is natural to expect each event to be referred to *as it occurs*, not after it has occurred. Understanding the aorist as a past tense requires the addressee to make a rather circumlocutory inference: 'We are now at a new point in time, seen from which the event of the girl piper starting to play lies in the past'. If that was Bdelycleon's aim, we would have expected him to provide some temporal anchor from which this past event is to be seen. With ἀπονενίμμεθα, for example, the perfect aspect does the job of anchoring the past event in the new present. In the case of the aorist a temporal adverb (perhaps ἤδη, 'already', ἄρτι, 'just') would have been helpful. Another option would have been simply to say 'The girl piper is playing'.[22]

In my view, then, a present interpretation of the aorist is more natural. Because the events are imaginary, the epistemic problem does not arise: Bdelycleon is in full control of the occurrence of the events. As for the durational criterion, the moment the girl starts playing (I interpret the aorist as ingressive) is short enough to be naturally conceived as bounded in the present.

The other passage is Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 1191–93. Here Cassandra reports her vision of the Furies besetting the house of Agamemnon:

<u>ὑμνοῦσι</u> δ' ὕμνον δώμασιν προσήμεναι
πρώταρχον ἄτην, ἐν μέρει δ' **ἀπέπτυσαν**
εὐνὰς ἀδελφοῦ τῷ πατοῦντι δυσμενεῖς.
Besetting the chambers of the house, they sing a song
of the ruinous folly that first began it all, and one after another they show their abhorrence
of the brother's bed that worked harm to him who defiled it.

E. Fraenkel remarks that 'ἀπέπτυσαν is here, as has long been observed, not past in sense, but is rather used like the well-known colloquial ἀπέπτυσα' (1950). He is followed by D.A. Raeburn and O.R.H. Thomas, who note that 'the verb seems to be a rather unusual example of a "dramatic" aorist which refers to the present' (2011). Note also A.H. Sommerstein's (2008) translation with a present tense. J.D. Denniston and D. Page interpret the aorist as referring to the past but without further comment (1957). In my view this interpretation is less natural in this context. Cassandra

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[21] Interestingly, Meineck (1998), who aims at a performable translation, opts for the present.

[22] MacDowell (1971) notes that the girl piper would begin to play immediately after the libations.

is reporting a vision: she sees how the Furies are living in the house of Agamemnon. In the preceding lines she describes how they never leave (1186: οὔποτ' ἐκλείπει, 1187: οὐ … λέγει); having drunk mortal blood, they stay in the house (1189: μένει). Then she pictures them engaged in the activity of singing (ὑμνοῦσι). A transition to a reference to something done at an unspecified point in the past seems odd.

Again, this is not a normal report. As a seer, Cassandra has a privileged view of what is invisible to other mortals. A slight temporal mismatch between the time of the observation of the event and the time of the utterance will not be noted by her addressees. Moreover, it fits a seer to keep up the pretence of 'immediacy', of serving as a direct channel of information. In this way the epistemic problem is overcome.

The act of spitting is, in itself, short enough in duration to warrant the use of a present perfective. However, the phrase ἐν μέρει seems to be a problem: the Furies spit 'in turn'. But this does not necessarily mean that they keep spitting continuously or spit regularly. In that case we would have expected the imperfective aspect. I submit that the aorist is used to mark this as a single observation in the present: the three Furies all spit once.[23] The time it takes for three acts of spitting to occur in close succession is still short enough to be more naturally conceived as bounded within the immediate scope of the here and now than as unbounded (the more so as there is some wiggle room here due to the unusual status of the report).

This is the evidence I have found for the existence of an 'instantaneous aorist' in reports. It will be a matter of judgment whether it is counted as enough. But I think it is telling that, in the exceedingly rare cases of reports in Classical Greek that fit the profile of a context where a present perfective is felicitous, we find these unusual instances of the aorist.

II.iii. The aorist in hortative questions

Hortative questions are not discussed by Langacker, but I would say they are a special case of simultaneous reports. When a speaker says 'Why don't I/you/we etc. do X', he signals that a certain event is not occurring in the here and now. Pragmatically this constitutes an invitation to carry out the described action. The epistemic problem does not arise because it concerns the non-occurrence of an imagined event. Such non-occurrences do not have a fixed location in time; in a sense, the non-occurrence is only there when it is observed. The speaker is never 'too late' to note that something he wishes to occur fails to occur.

The durational problem is circumvented for similar reasons. Even if the actual occurrence of the event referred to would take up a long time, it still can be said to 'not occur' in a moment. It might take me years to write an entire novel, but I can 'not write' an entire novel in a second. What matters is only how the event referred to is conceived: as a bounded whole (perfective aspect) or as unbounded (imperfective aspect).

The aorist in hortative questions is generally taken as semantically referring to the past by those who actually discuss it.[24] A. Rijksbaron argues as follows: 'The aorist indicative is more emphatic than the present: the speaker observes that a state of affairs which he apparently wants to occur has, in fact, not occurred, and he asks his interlocutor why it has not. Pragmatically speaking the

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[23] Lloyd ((1999) 27) rejects Denniston and Page's interpretation ((1957) *ad loc*) but also disagrees with Fraenkel ((1950) *ad loc*) that the aorist is instantaneous. He argues that 'the present of ἀποπτύω is normally used in the second and third persons when the reference is to the present'. In my view, however, the instances of the present cited by Lloyd can be accounted for in terms of imperfective aspect. So the possibility of a 'present aorist' to fill the perfective slot is open.

[24] In his 1988 article Rijksbaron argues that the aorist refers to the future in such cases (245, *cf.* his n.3). However, the fact that '[q]uestions introduced by τί οὖν οὐκ are, from a pragmatic point of view, urgent variants of the imperative' does not necessarily mean that semantically the verbs in these questions refer to the future. Moorhouse takes the hortative aorist to refer to the present ((1982) 196) but his interpretation of the effect of the aorist is rather similar to that of those who take the aorist as a past tense.

question signifies "the state of affairs should have been realized long ago" and hence "the state of affairs cannot be realized quickly enough"' ((2002) 31). Thus, the past value of the aorist yields the pragmatic effect of urgency, which the present lacks.

There are two problems with this interpretation. From a semantic point of view, the interpretation 'Why hasn't X occurred yet' reads too much into the aorist. If a speaker wishes to express that at the moment of speaking something *has* (not) *already* occurred he would normally emphasize this in some way, for example by using a perfect or the adverb ἤδη (or, in the case of a negation, οὔπω).[25]

Second, the idea that the aorist conveys more urgency than the present is contradicted by the evidence. On the one hand, the aorist is used when there is no reason to believe the question is particularly urgent. Moreover, it seems to me that a past tense reading ('Why hasn't X occurred yet') would have an impolite effect.[26] Let us reconsider the example cited in the introduction (b):

τί οὖν … οὐ καὶ Πρόδικον καὶ Ἱππίαν **ἐκαλέσαμεν** καὶ τοὺς μετ' αὐτῶν, ἵνα ἐπακούσωσιν ἡμῶν;
Why then don't we invite Prodicus and Hippias as well and those with them, so that they may listen to us? (Plato *Protagoras* 317d)

Why should we interpret the tone of Socrates' suggestion to invite Prodicus and Hippias to come and listen as urgent? It seems more reasonable to expect Socrates to use the type of polite restraint suited to civilized conversation – especially as he only makes this suggestion in order to do Protagoras a favour. Similar considerations apply in the following instance:

τί οὖν … οὐ καὶ τὴν δύναμιν **ἔλεξάς** μοι εἰ οἶσθα, πόση τις ἡ προσιοῦσα … ;
Why then don't you tell me about the upcoming forces, if you know, how great they are?
(Xenophon *Cyropaedia* 2.1.4)

It is unlikely that the young Persian Cyrus would strike an impatient tone with the Median Cyaxares, the supreme commander of the collected armed forces.

On the other hand, the present is used in questions that do seem urgent. For example:

τί οὐ <u>καλοῦμεν</u> δῆτα τὴν Λυσιστράτην,
ἥπερ διαλλάξειεν ἡμᾶς ἂν μόνη;
So why don't we invite Lysistrata,
since she's the only one who can reconcile us? (Aristophanes *Lysistrata* 1103–04)

There is much at stake here (peace between Athens and Sparta) and the particle δῆτα, which marks this as an obvious question, signals impatience. Another example:

Τί οὖν οὐ <u>διώκομεν</u> ὡς τάχιστα, καταδήλων γε οὔτω τῶν ἀγαθῶν ὄντων;
Why then don't we chase them as soon as possible, as the advantages are so clear?
(Xenophon *Cyropaedia* 4.1.11)

The phrase ὡς τάχιστα can be used to signal urgency both with the present and the aorist.[27] So this nuance does not seem to be a matter of tense difference.

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[25] For the perfect see, for example, Ar. *Pax* 956–58 Τρ. ἄγε δή, τὸ κανοῦν λαβὼν σὺ καὶ τὴν χέρνιβα | περίιθι τὸν βωμὸν ταχέως ἐπιδέξια. | Οι. ἰδού· λέγοις ἂν ἄλλο· περιελήλυθα, 'Tr. Now then, take the basket and the lustral water, and make a quick circuit of the altar, left to right. Sl. There you are. I've done the circuit, what now?'

For ἤδη, see lines 962–63 of the same play: Τρ. … καὶ τοῖς θεαταῖς ῥῖπτε τῶν κριθῶν. Οι. ἰδού. | Τρ. ἔδωκας ἤδη, 'Tr. … and throw the spectators some of the barley pips. Sl. There. Tr. You've tossed them already?'

[26] *Pace* Denizot (2011) 460, with n.18.

[27] With the aorist, for example Ar. *Lys*. 181–82.

These problems disappear if we take the aorist in these questions as a present tense. The difference between the present and the aorist is then purely aspectual; the aspectual variation in hortative questions is fully parallel to that in the hortatory subjunctive (for example καλῶμεν versus καλέσωμεν). In Xenophon *Cyropaedia* 2.1.4, the aorist ἔλεξας signals that Cyrus would like a *complete* account of the armed forces. At 4.1.11, by contrast, the present διώκομεν is used because the desired chase is naturally presented as unbounded; it is unclear how long it will take and whether the enemy will be caught. With καλέω the difference is more subtle. In Aristophanes *Lysistrata* 1103–04, καλοῦμεν is used to refer to a course of action that needs to be taken; whether the call will be successful and Lysistrata will come to reconcile the two parties, is unclear. In the instance from Plato, by contrast, Socrates suggests calling two people who are present at just a short distance and who will certainly be willing to come and listen.[28]

II.iv. Generic aorist

With generics we enter into the domain of *virtual events* (Langacker (2011) 64).[29] Take the following example: 'A man proposes to a woman' (i.e. that's how it's done). Technically the present form 'proposes' refers to a single occurrence involving two individuals: 'a man' and 'a woman'. However, this is not an actual occurrence, nor are the man and woman actual people. Rather, this 'event' is 'conjured up' to express a generalization (Langacker (2001) 270). It is a virtual event, involving virtual entities, that represents an open-ended set of actual occurrences.

The present tense is used because this generalized representation is conceived as being presently accessible. To make this tangible we might speak of a mental 'script' that represents the way things go in the world. The individual generalizations are 'entries' in this script. A virtual occurrence consists in 'reading off' such an entry. Actually, this 'reading off' consists simply in mentally activating the designated event.

While an actual proposal would take up some time, it only takes a moment to mentally conjure up a virtual proposal. The event can be conceived as a single whole within the time it takes to make the utterance. So the durational problem does not arise. The epistemic problem does not arise because the event 'occurs' as the speaker makes the utterance. So, again, the speaker is in control of its occurrence.

The aorist in generics can be analysed in the same way. A classic example is the following:

παθὼν δέ τε νήπιος **ἔγνω**.
A fool learns after having suffered. (Hesiod *Opera et Dies* 218)

The indefinite reference to 'a fool' (νήπιος) makes it clear that this is a generalization, a virtual event representing an open-ended set of actual occurrences.[30] The moment this generic fool realizes something (ingressive aorist ἔγνω) is naturally conceived as bounded.

According to Kühner and Gerth ((1898) 159) and others the generic aorist refers to a fact of experience. The gnomic statement cited above then should be taken to mean 'It has occurred that a fool learned after having suffered'. It is then inferred that this is a general truth. It is questionable, however, whether the aorist in and of itself can carry the meaning 'It has occurred at an indefinite point in the past that …'. To my mind this would require an explicit signal that the speaker is thinking of a specific instance that *actually occurred* at some point in the past (for example a temporal adverb such as ἤδη or ποτέ).

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[28] *Cf.* Stork (1982) 138–39 on the variation between the present infinitive αἰτέειν in Hdt. 3.1.2 and the aorist αἰτῆσαι in Hdt. 9.109.1–2.

[29] On the notion of 'virtual entities', *cf.* Langacker (2001) 265–67 with references.

[30] For the aorist as singling out a 'concrete instance' or 'token' of a 'type', see Rijksbaron (1988) n.14.

What is more, the 'past experience' reading does not imply general truth. 'It has occurred that …' suggests 'It may occur again that …'. What we are looking for in the case of the fool, however, is 'As a rule, it happens that …'. The point is not that a fool 'may' understand when it is too late; rather, it is *characteristic* of the fool to understand things when it is too late.

The impossibility of interpreting the generic aorist as a past tense becomes even more apparent when we look at its use in a more extended passage. As noted in the introduction, the competing imperfective form is always the present, not the imperfect, and subordinate clauses in such passages carry the subjunctive, not the optative. I reproduce the example cited under (c):

Ἐπεὰν ὦν ἀπίκωνται πλέοντες ἐς τὴν Βαβυλῶνα καὶ διαθέωνται τὸν φόρτον, νομέας μὲν τοῦ πλοίου καὶ τὴν καλάμην πᾶσαν **ἀπ' ὧν ἐκήρυξαν**, τὰς δὲ διφθέρας ἐπισάξαντες ἐπὶ τοὺς ὄνους <u>ἀπελαύνουσι</u> ἐς τοὺς Ἀρμενίους.
After they arrive at Babylon and dispose of their cargo, they sell the ribs of the boat and all the reed; then they load the hides upon the asses and drive them back into Armenia. (Herodotus 1.194.4)

As for the variation between the aorist and the present, it is purely aspectual. The aorist presents the selling of the parts of the boat as bounded, which is fitting in the light of πᾶσαν: they sell *all of it*. The journey home, by contrast, is presented as unbounded. The boundary of the event is only reached when the Armenians arrive back in their home country. This occurs further on in the discourse (1.194.5): ἐπεὰν δὲ τοὺς ὄνους ἐλαύνοντες ἀπίκωνται ὀπίσω ἐς τοὺς Ἀρμενίους, 'When they have driven their asses back into Armenia'.[31]

II.v. Future aorist
Finally we have the 'scheduled future' use of the present (Langacker (2011) 62–63). Here too we are dealing with virtual events. Take the example 'The plane leaves in ten minutes'. The present form 'leaves' construes the future event as being in some form readily accessible in the here and now of the speaker. It seems plausible that supporting this construal is the idea of a schedule. The entry in the schedule that contains the departure time of the plane represents the actual event in the future. However, the 'schedule' need not exist physically; as Langacker puts it, 'what matters is the existence of a schedule as a mentally and socially constructed entity – an accepted plan expected to govern the timing and occurrence of future events' (Langacker (2011) 62). Using the present to refer to a future event conveys the idea that this event is fixed.

As with the generic present, the fact that it concerns a virtual event means that the durational and epistemic problems are circumvented. The virtual event 'occurs' when someone 'reads off' the relevant 'entry', i.e. mentally activates the designated event; this occurrence coincides with the time of speaking.

The Classical Greek language also has a use of the present to refer to the future, although it is hardly as entrenched as the English scheduled future present. By suggesting that the anticipated event is somehow already presently available, the present conveys the nuance of certainty.[32] An example:

εἰ αὕτη ἡ πόλις ληφθήσεται, <u>ἔχεται</u> καὶ ἡ πᾶσα Σικελία.
If this city is taken, the whole of Sicily is in their hands. (Thucydides 6.91.3)

Here Alcibiades is trying to persuade the Lacedaemonians to fight the Athenians in Sicily. In order to make his message more forceful he uses the present to convey the idea that, if Syracuse should be taken, the Athenians will *certainly* have all of Sicily.

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[31] For more examples, see Péristérakis (1962); McKay (1988).

[32] For the future present and the future aorist as expressing certainty, see already Eustathius on *Il*. 4.161; *cf.* n.39.

In the previous example, the reference was to a state (ἔχεται, 'is in their hands') so the imperfective aspect was fitting. When a perfective form is called for, the aorist is used:

εἰ μέν κ' αὖθι μένων Τρώων πόλιν ἀμφιμάχωμαι,
ὤλετο μέν μοι νόστος, ἀτὰρ κλέος ἄφθιτον ἔσται.
If I stay here and fight around the city of Troy,
then my return home perishes, but my fame will be undying. (Homer *Iliad* 9.412–13, cited above)

The 'present' aorist expresses that Achilles is certain about his fate, having learned it from his goddess mother. The perfective is used because the loss of the return home is naturally conceived as bounded.

Those who stick to the past value of the aorist in this case suggest that it refers to the past as seen from a moment in the future. It should be translated with a future perfect. The aorist presents the main clause event as *already having happened* at the moment in the future projected by the subordinate clause. This means that the main clause event follows immediately and inexorably from the fulfilment of the condition in the subordinate clause.[33]

Again, I think this gives the aorist a value which it does not have. In order to convey that at some point in time a certain event already belongs to the past, the perfect is used. An example:

κἄν περὶ ἀνδρῶν γ' ἐμπέσῃ
λόγος τις, <u>εἴρηκ'</u> εὐθέως ἡ σὴ γυνὴ
ὅτι λῆρός ἐστι τἄλλα πρὸς Κινησίαν.
        And whenever the conversation
turns to men, your wife speaks right up and says,
'Compared with Cinesias, all the rest are trash!' (Aristophanes *Lysistrata* 858–60)

Here the perfect εἴρηκα comically suggests that Cinesias' wife has already spoken even before the conversation has started.[34] This is reinforced by the adverb εὐθέως.[35]

I do think that the effect of 'Y follows inexorably upon X' is there with the future aorist. But the effect is due not to the use of a past tense but to the use of a 'present' tense. In Thucydides 6.91.3 the future tense ἕξεται would suggest that the conquest of Sicily will follow the taking of Syracuse; the present ἔχεται suggests that when Syracuse is taken, then *that in itself* means the loss of Sicily. Similarly, in *Iliad* 9.413 the 'present' aorist signals that if Achilles stays, then *eo ipso* he loses his return.[36] The future ἔσται, by contrast, refers to the immortal fame that awaits him later.

I will discuss one other case here that neatly illustrates the difference between the aorist and the future tense. It concerns two instances in an inscription from Heraclea in Italy from the late fourth or early third century (*IG* XIV 645).[37] The relevant part deals with the lease of land belonging to the sanctuary of Dionysus. It contains instructions for the contractors and states penalties in case they should fail to fulfil their obligations. These scenarios are introduced with the formula αἰ/*hóstis* δέ κα (μή), 'and if/whoever (does not)'; the apodosis normally contains the future tense. For example:

[33] See, for example, Schwyzer and Debrunner (1950) 284.
[34] *Cf*. Péristérakis (1962) 208 with some more examples; McKay (1988) 202.
[35] The aorist can, however, be used for neutral past time reference as seen from a projected future (i.e. without the nuance 'already belongs to the past' conveyed by the perfect): see Hdt. 8.102.2: κατεργάσαντο. Scholars sometimes fail to distinguish between this *aoristus pro futuro exacto* (where the aorist has its regular past time value) and the *aoristus pro futuro* which is the subject of the present discussion, for example Péristérakis (1962) 18; Duhoux (2000) 395; *cf*. Wackernagel (1926) 177.
[36] The perfect would express that Achilles' return *is already lost* if he stays. I see no reason to read such an effect into the text.
[37] *Cf*. Wackernagel (1926) 177. Schwyzer and Debrunner advocate a future perfect interpretation here ((1950) 282).

hόστις δὲ κα μὴ ποτάγει πρωγγύως ἢ μὴ τὸ μίσθωμα ἀποδιδῷ κὰτ τὰ γεγραμμένα, τό τε μίσθωμα διπλεῖ <u>ἀποτεισεῖ</u> τὸ ἐπὶ τῶ ϝέτεος καί …
And whoever does not bring the surety or does not pay the rent in accordance with what has been written, then he will pay the rent for the year in double and … (*IG* XIV 645, ll. 108–10)

However, there are two cases where a penalty is referred to with the verb καταδικάζω, 'convict', and here we find the aorist. I cite one, the other is identical for all present purposes:

αἰ δέ κα μὴ πεφυτεύκωντι κὰτ τὰ γεγραμμένα, **κατεδικάσθεν** πὰρ μὲν τὰν ἐλαίαν δέκα νόμως ἀργυρίω πὰρ τὸ φυτὸν *h*έκαστον, πὰρ δὲ τὰς ἀμπέλως δύο μνᾶς ἀργυρίω πὰρ τὰν σχοῖνον *h*εκάσταν.
And if they have not planted (the plants) in accordance with what has been written, they are convicted, with respect to the olive tree, to a penalty of ten coins of silver for each plant, and with respect to the vines, to a penalty of two minae of silver for each schoenius. (*IG* XIV 645, ll. 122–24)

Why do we find the 'present' aorist here and not elsewhere in this text? The future is mainly used to give instructions. It can be translated 'he is to/they are to'. These instructions obviously depend on the relevant participants for their being carried out. In the passages with the aorist, however, a sentence is pronounced *by the text*. The message is not that, should the contractors fail to fulfil their obligations, someone is to pass a sentence on them. Rather, the sentence stands written in the here and now. If the contractors have not cultivated the land in accordance with the agreement, then that automatically entails a penalty. The effect is almost 'they are hereby sentenced' (virtual event); but the sentence only takes effect (actual event) when the condition is fulfilled.

There is one complication to this account of the future aorist. I have explained the difference between the aorist *pro futuro* and the present *pro futuro* in terms of aspect. However, there is a restriction on the use of the aorist. The aorist is only used when there is a conditional subordinate clause or a preceding future tense form to help disambiguate time reference. In the absence of such a signal, the present tense is used at the expense of aspectual distinctions.[38] An example is the following 'oracular' present:

ὁ χρησμὸς ἄντικρυς λέγει
ὡς πρῶτα μὲν στυππειοπώλης <u>γίγνεται</u>,
ὃς πρῶτος ἕξει τῆς πόλεως τὰ πράγματα.
        The oracle explicitly says
that first there arises a hemp seller,
who will be the first to manage the city's affairs. (Aristophanes *Equites* 128–30)

The event referred to by the verb is naturally conceived as bounded (note also ἀπόλλυται in 127 and 135, ἐπιγίγνεται in 135). It is perhaps not hard to see why an aorist ἐγένετο would have been infelicitous here: confusion as to its time reference was bound to arise.

No doubt this is the main reason for why the future aorist is so rare in Classical Greek. I hope that, nevertheless, my analysis of two key instances has made the case for its existence convincing.[39]

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[38] Note that the same happens with the present *pro praeterito*.

[39] Space does not permit me to consider the rest of the evidence in detail. See further *Il*. 4.161: ἀπέτισαν. This is, however, a difficult case; already in the scholia we find discussion with respect to its time reference. In Ar. *Ec.* 255, Praxagora is asked τί δ' ἢν Νεοκλείδης ὁ γλάμων σε λοιδορῇ, 'What if Neocleides the squinter abuses you?' She answers: τούτῳ μὲν **εἶπον** εἰς κυνὸς

πυγὴν ὁρᾶν, 'To him I say, go squint up a dog's butt'. The 'present' aorist suggests that Praxagora has her answer fully prepared. R.G. Ussher explains the aorist as performative (1973); I do not disagree but think that this is another side of the same coin. 'I say' introduces a speech act, but in this case the speech act represents what the speaker will say in the future (it is a sort of 'try-out'). Similar is Eubulus *fr.* 117 Kock 11: ἀντέθηκα. I am not sure whether ἀπωλόμην ἄρ', εἴ με δὴ λείψεις, γύναι (Eur.

III. The diachronic perspective

How can a form that shares the morphological characteristics of the augment and secondary endings with the real past tenses (i.e. the imperfect and the pluperfect) be used for present time reference? One answer is that the secondary aorist indicative could be used as a *substitute* for the unavailable primary indicative,[40] with its past morphology being ignored in those cases.[41] This is a rather bold suggestion. It is unclear how such a use could be tolerated; it would be helpful if there were clear parallels for this kind of substituting in other languages.

But the deeper question is why the Greek language did not have a primary aorist indicative to begin with. The common explanation for the absence of a primary aorist indicative is that there is a semantic tension between perfective aspect and present tense: there are few circumstances where it is possible to refer to an event as bounded within the immediate scope of the here and now.[42] But we have just seen that there are contexts in which a present perfective is felicitous. It is rather contradictory to maintain both that the Classical Greek language had no need for a primary aorist indicative and that the Classical Greek language went so far as to use a past tense to refer to the present for the sake of maintaining aspectual distinctions.[43]

In this section I approach the problem from a diachronic perspective. First I will try to account for the asymmetry in the Classical Greek tense and aspect system (two different indicative forms in the imperfective versus one indicative form in the perfective) by looking at reconstructed developments in Proto-Indo-European (PIE). Then I will argue that the use of the augment with nonpast instances of the aorist is not as problematic as it is generally believed to be.

III.i. Secondary endings

A plausible view of tense in PIE is that originally it was not an inflectional category.[44] That is, in the beginning there was only a single indicative form (the 'eventive') that had no specific temporal value. It consisted of a root with personal endings. These were the endings we now call 'secondary'. For example, $*h_2weh_1\text{-}t$ ('blow', third person). Time reference was disambiguated by adverbs, particles, the semantics of the verb and the context.

The present tense was an innovation that emerged through the grammaticalization of a deictic marker -*i*, presumably meaning 'here and now'.[45] This yielded a binary system where the unmarked form was opposed to a marked present characterized by endings with the suffix -*i* ('primary' endings), for example $*h_2weh_1\text{-}ti$ ('blow', third person).

It is debated whether aspect was already grammaticalized before any distinction in tenses came into being.[46] While my account, I think, fits both interpretations equally well, I find K. Strunk's view more plausible (1994). He argues that originally there was only a semantic distinction between telic and atelic verb roots: for example $*g^weh_2$, 'step', was telic, $*h_1es$, 'be', was atelic. Morphologically the indicatives belonging to these verbs were indistinguishable: they simply

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Alc. 386; cf. *Med*. 78), listed by some as an example of the future use of the aorist, is a valid instance. I think the conditional here does not create a future time frame but rather means 'If it is true that'. I would interpret: 'Then it seems (ἄρ') I am lost [for the perfect use of this verb in Euripides, see, for example, *Andr*. 71, 74], if it is true (εἰ δή) that you will leave me, woman'.

[40] The primary indicative is the present indicative, marked with primary endings (thematic -ω etc., athematic -μι etc.); the secondary indicative is the 'past' indicative, marked with the augment (ἐ-) and secondary endings (-ν etc.).

[41] See already Meltzer (1904) 239; most recently Bary (2012).

[42] For example Kühner and Gerth (1898) 154; Rijksbaron (2002) 5; Bary (2012) 41–43.

[43] It has been argued that there actually was a primary aorist indicative: the sigmatic future (see Hewson and Bubenik (1997) 24–45). This is controversial, but, even if it is true, then we are dealing with a later innovation, postdating the grammaticalization of the -σ- as a marker of aoristic aspect. I am concerned with much earlier developments.

[44] See, for example, Shields (1992) 13–18.

[45] See, for example, Shields (1992) 25–26. Pooth (2009), however, argues that the original function of the suffix was aspectual; *cf*. n.50.

[46] See, for example, Willi (2007) with references.

consisted of the root plus 'secondary' endings. Telic verb roots could be atelicized, however, by reduplication or affixes/infixes. This situation is labelled phase I in figure 3 below, which depicts my view of the prehistory of the Greek tense and aspect system.

When the present tense came into being it was made with atelic verbs but not with telic ones. This is why in Greek we do not have, for example, the forms **βῆμι, **στῆμι or **δῶμι. This opposition between stems with two indicatives and stems with one indicative later translated into the asymmetry between the imperfective and perfective systems when aspect became grammaticalized.[47] But why was no primary indicative made for these telic verbs, when, as I have argued, good use could be made of such a form?

The crucial point is that, if this picture is correct, the present tense evolved against the backdrop of an unmarked form which could refer to any time frame. So the 'choice' the language faced was not whether to create a present perfective next to a past perfective, but whether to create a *marked* present perfective next to a *nontemporal* perfective that presumably could also refer to the present.

It is likely that present tense, as a newly formed category, was originally more restricted in meaning than it would become in Classical Greek. This is in accordance with the grammaticalization principle of 'semantic reduction': younger grammatical categories are more specific in meaning than older ones.[48] We can hypothesize that originally the present denoted something like an actual event occurring in the here and now of the speaker. The unmarked form was used for nonpresent time reference, as well as for 'present' habituals and generics. Moreover, it is not unlikely that in the beginning it was also used to refer to the actual present when no additional marking was felt necessary.

If this is correct then the absence of a present perfective may be readily understood. First, if the present tense was originally used to refer to an actual event in the here and now, then the generic and future uses of the perfective did not qualify.[49] As the generic use is the most frequent nonpast use of the perfective this leaves open very limited possibility for the creation of a present perfective.

Second, if the suffix *-i* was indeed a deictic marker meaning 'here and now', it is likely that progressive meaning was part of its original semantics. J. Bybee and colleagues point out that progressives are usually, perhaps always, formed by locative elements ((1994) 129–33).[50] Now,

	Time reference	Formal 'aspectual' distinctions	
Phase I	*Present/Past*	Unmarked form (telic and atelic verbs)	
		Telic verbs	*Atelic verbs*
Phase II	*Present (restricted)*	Incompatible	Marked present
	Present (general)	Unmarked form	Unmarked form
	Past	Unmarked form	Unmarked form
		Perfective aspect	*Imperfective aspect*
Phase III	*Present*	Aorist (secondary)	Present (primary)
	Past	Aorist (secondary)	Imperfect (secondary)

Fig. 3. The prehistory of the Classical Greek tense and aspect system.

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[47] If aspect was already grammaticalized when the present was formed, we can simply say that it was made for the imperfective but not for the aorist.

[48] Bybee et al. (1994) 6–7.

[49] *Cf.* Péristérakis (1962) 4–5.

[50] R. Pooth argues that marking progressive aspect was in fact the original function of the suffix, with the present time interpretation being 'only pragmatically and contextually motivated' ('mit nur pragmatisch und kontextuell motiviertem aktuellem Zeitbezug') ((2009) 400).

while a present perfective is not an impossibility, a present progressive perfective is, so it makes sense that it was not made (the result of the developments sketched here is phase II in fig. 3).

With time the present tense extended its domain at the expense of the secondary imperfective. It took on the generic, habitual and iterative/distributive meaning components as well, until it came to denote present time in a broad sense (again, semantic reduction). This meant that in the imperfective the distinction between the primary and secondary indicatives came to stand for the distinction between present and past time reference. With the perfective indicative things were different because there was no primary indicative to tread upon the ground of the secondary indicative. So the secondary indicative retained its 'present' meanings, such as generic reference. This yielded an asymmetry between the perfective and imperfective systems (phase III in fig. 3).

From the synchronic point of view of Classical Greek the secondary indicative is strongly associated with past time reference: the imperfect always refers to the past, and with the aorist this is the default interpretation. Nevertheless, my view is that the nonpast uses of the secondary aorist indicative betray its origin as the temporally unmarked perfective in the PIE tense and aspect system.

III.ii. The augment

The prevalent view concerning the augment is that it is the marker of past time reference. Presumably it was originally a deictic particle marking distance: 'there' (cf. ἐ-κεῖνος) or 'then' (with verbs).[51] This would make for a nice contrast with the 'here-and-now' marker -i in the present endings.

However, even if the augment was *originally* a marker of past time reference (and there are differing opinions on this point; see below), what matters is its function in a given *synchronic* situation where it is attached to the aorist in its 'nonpast' uses as well. After all, it is possible that the augment was originally not allowed with the nonpast aorist, but was added only after its original meaning had become less specific or as the result of some standardization process.

In my view, the presence of the augment is not a valid argument against interpreting the aorist as a present tense in the texts that we have. The reason for this is that there is no period of the Greek language from which we actually have data where the augment is a distinctive marker of past time reference.

To begin with, in the Homeric epics, where there is still variation between augmented and unaugmented forms, the augment is not used to distinguish between past and nonpast reference. In the imperfective, the secondary indicative (imperfect) always refers to the past, whether it is augmented or not. The idea that the augment is used to mark past time reference more clearly or something similar has little explanatory value.[52] With respect to the aorist, moreover, it is remarkable that the augment is practically obligatory in the generic use. Even if the generic aorist does refer to the past (which I think is impossible), it is hard to understand why this past value should be so consistently marked in a generic context.[53] I would say that if the augment in Homer had anything to do with past time reference then the first thing we would expect it to do is to distinguish between generic and 'normal' aorists.

It is no wonder, then, that the augment has been explained in other ways. L. Basset (1989) and others argue that it signals some kind of relevance to the moment of speaking.[54] Another view is

[51] See, for example, Shields (1992) 26–27.
[52] *Cf.* Basset (1989) 11–22 for the problems with the traditional interpretation (advocated by, for example, Chantraine (1958) 479–84) of the augment in Homer as a marker of past time reference.
[53] The issue is complicated by the possibility that the generic passages in Homer belong to a relatively recent compositional stratum, by which time the augment had

already become obligatory: see Shipp (1972); West (1989) 137. Arguably, such an explanation fits the remarkably consistent use of the augment in generic passages better than the functional explanations mentioned below; in those cases we would expect at least some variation due to metrical license.
[54] Basset refers back to Platt (1891) and Drewitt (1912); *cf.* Bakker (2005).

that the augment is a kind of *realis* marker, emphasizing the truth of the statement.[55] Under either of these views the use of the augment with nonpast aorist forms is no longer a problem.

Then there is the post-Homeric situation in which the augment had become obligatory with the secondary indicative (except in poetry). It is almost unanimously agreed that this means that the augment had become the standard marker of past time reference. In my view, this need not be so. The situation in which the augment is obligatory need be nothing more than the result of a process whereby the marked form became standardized when the difference in meaning between augmented and unaugmented forms has been lost.

Note that even here the augment is not a *distinctive* marker within the indicative system. The secondary endings already distinguish the secondary indicative from the primary indicative; within the secondary indicative, the augment has no distinctive function. In so far as the augment is distinctive at all, it serves to separate the indicative from the imperative in some cases (for example ἔβαλλε versus βάλλε). So the augment may be said to mark the secondary indicative as an indicative, but there is little reason to ascribe a more specific semantic function to it.[56]

To conclude, the Classical Greek texts we have provide no evidence for a stage of linguistic development at which the augment was the distinctive marker of past time reference. Consequently, the objection to the analysis of the aorist as a present tense on the basis of the accompanying augment is without justification.

IV. Conclusion

In this article I have argued that the Classical Greek aorist can be used as a present tense perfective in the contexts where such a form is needed. Moreover, I have sought to provide a diachronic explanation for these uses based on the idea that the aorist was never a past tense to begin with.

I have distinguished five uses: instantaneous aorist with performatives; instantaneous aorist in reports; hortative aorist; generic aorist; and future aorist. At the same time, I would argue that these five uses are, in essence, one. To view an event as bounded within the immediate scope of the here and now always requires some special conditions. In order to conceive of an event as a whole the speaker has to be able to view it with some measure of 'distance'. This is not normally associated with present time reference; so how is this to be achieved? The factor that unites the five uses seems to be that that the speaker must be somehow 'in control' of the occurrence. With performatives, the speaker makes the event occur by his very utterance. Virtual events are dependent for their occurrence upon the mental activation of the speaker (generic use, future use). A non-occurrence is, in a sense, created by the observation of the speaker (hortative use). Reports may also be fictitious; in other cases it may be the privileged viewpoint of the reporter that allows him to keep up the pretence of perfectly coincidental narration.

To conclude, I hope to have presented a convincing case for a principled distinction between the use of the aorist as a past tense and its use as a present tense. It is my hope that future grammars of Classical Greek will take into consideration the arguments presented here.

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[55] Wackernagel (1926) 181; Schwyzer and Debrunner (1950) 285; Mumm (2004).

[56] *Cf.* Moller (1853) 122; *cf.* also M.L. West's explanation of the use of the augment with the generic aorist in Homer ((1989) 137).

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