Semantic theory and the gnomic aorist in Ancient Greek

Gerry C. Wakker, University of Groningen

One of the vexed questions in Ancient Greek linguistics is the description of the so called gnomic Aorist and especially the question how this use of the aorist stem fits into the system of Greek aspect and time reference. It is widely accepted that the aorist stem expresses that the state of affairs in question is presented as completed (perfective value) and the present stem that the state of affairs is presented as not completed (imperfective value); moreover it is widely accepted that the primary indicative (ind. I) refers to the non past, whereas the secondary indicative (ind. II) refers to the past. Within this framework the gnomic aorist in general truths and descriptions of habits seems an anomaly, compare e.g. the proverbial

(1) παθὼν   δέ   τε   νήπιος ἔγνω.
     pathōn$_{ptc.AOR}$ de$_{prt}$ te$_{prt}$ nēpios **egnō**$_{indII.AOR}$
     ('But once he has suffered the fool realizes this', Hes. *Op.* 218)

Example (1) is part of a passage illustrating the advice to follow the path of justice (*Op.* 213). We are dealing with a general or omnitemporal passage with present indicatives with general value about the nature of violence (*hybris*) and its counterpart justice (*dike*); cf. also the epic particle τε, which indicates that permanent characteristics are described). Given this context it is clear that the ind.II AOR is omnitemporal and does not refer to the past. How to explain this? Closely connected with this question are the following ones:

1. What is the origin of this use of the ind.II Aorist?

2. What is the original value of the augment, that obligatorily characterizes in classical Greek all secondary indicative forms (in *e-gno* the augment is *e-*), but is still optional in epic poetry (e.g. Homer and Hesiod)?

3. How to explain that both ind.I PR. and ind.II AOR are used in timeless statements? Which factors influence the choice between the two options? It is sometimes argued that the value of the gnomic aorist is always completed/confective. Is this the decisive factor?

All these questions have been dealt with before in handbooks and articles on Ancient Greek, but there is as yet no definite solution. Would it be helpful to try to explain the use of the gnomic aorist by employing formal semantic

theory? Corien Bary (2009: 121-32; 175), who uses Discourse Representation Theory (DRT) to describe Greek aspect in a formal semantic way, suggests the following: Greek has no ind.I Aorist because "the possibilities for using aoristic aspect to refer to the present time are very restricted for semantic reason" (126), for there are few situations that hold exactly at the moment of speaking. Whenever this need however arises Greek has to choose a suboptimal form, being either the primary present indicative or the secondary aorist indicative that in these cases looses its past time reference. She concludes by stating "the real challenge is to explain its aspect feature" (175).

It is my aim to study the above questions in one corpus, Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, in order to be able to incorporate all possible examples into this study. This may also be helpful to evaluate the contribution of formal semantics to the description of the gnomic aorist.

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