The tense of the subjunctive in Greek is, as all grammars point out,¹ not a matter of time past or present, but of the nature of the event described—the Aktionsart, "kind of action". This is equally true of the imperative, the infinitive, and the optative, and also of certain uses of the indicative and participial forms, but the subjunctive usage has several distinctive features which merit separate attention from the other Aktionsart forms. Aktionsart in all its forms deserves attention if only because it has no consistent parallel in English, and the shades of meaning can be (and often have been) lost in translation.

The purpose of this paper is to re-survey the ways in which the present and aorist subjunctives are used in NT Greek, proposing some revisions to the generally accepted paradigms of usage, and to identify distinctive usages by different authors.

Aktionsart

Aktionsart is not easy to define with precision, and there have in fact been few attempts to analyse Greek usage at any period in depth. It is a feature of all periods of Greek from the classical to the modern, though patterns of usage have changed, and the position

is made more complex by the fact that individuals in all periods differ in their application of Aktionsart, since its use is in some measure a matter of "Sprachgefühl" and style. Moulton defined the aorist Aktionsart as "punctiliar" and the present as "linear". As a shorthand these definitions are useful, but Moulton amplified his definitions to give some indication of the variety of nuance contained in the two forms. In summary, the aorist normally refers to one action or event, usually limited in time, and having a definite beginning, termination, or both, though occasionally the stress on the action itself seems to be without reference to time at all. The present on the other hand refers to a state, of indefinite or unspecified duration, or to repeated or distributive action extending over an indefinite or unspecified time. Occasionally a conative notion is implied ("to try to ... "). To use a slightly different shorthand, the aorist stresses an action, the present stresses a state.

These will do as provisional definitions; as we shall see later the actual practice in NT Greek is more complex than any of these definitions might imply.

"Lexical" and "Non-Lexical" Verbs

In considering paradigms of usage it will be helpful to begin by identifying those verbs whose meaning appears to some extent to predetermine their Aktionsart possibilities. Such a category, though often noted, does not seem to have previously been fully elaborated, but is an important factor in Aktionsart at all periods. The limited quantity of NT material does allow some detailed analysis.

To pursue this analysis we shall need to consider subjunctive usage under two categories:

(a) "lexical", and
(b) "non-lexical"

To take each in turn:

(a) Lexical usage is here taken to mean that a word is used entirely, or almost entirely, in either the present or the aorist subjunctive, and the usage is determined by the basic meaning of the word, which produces a greater propensity for either linear or punctiliar forms. The clearest and best attested examples in the NT are:

2 J. H. Moulton, loc. cit.