

Light, Darkness and the Tense Sequence in John 1,5; The Semantic and the Deictic

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RESUMEN El reconocimiento de la importancia del aspecto en griego helenístico está frecuentemente conectado con la negación de cualquier vínculo entre el tiempo indicativo como categoría gramatical y el tiempo indicativo como categoría temporal. Esto ha implicado una clara distinción entre semántica y pragmática, en la que la semántica está restringida a un núcleo de invariable sentido. Es mejor pensar en una palabra o forma como un depósito de significado potencial. Los indicadores déicticos y contextuales guían al oyente / lector a la hora de tomar la decisión correcta de las elecciones semánticas del depósito. En este contexto, la elección de tiempos verbales en Juan 1,5 guarda sentido en cuanto a las ideas expresadas.

PALABRAS CLAVE Tiempo, semántica y pragmática, luz y oscuridad, Juan 1,5.

SUMMARY *Recognition of the importance of Aspect in Hellenistic Greek is frequently connected with the denial of any link between indicative tenses and time. This has involved a sharp distinction between Semantics and Pragmatics in which Semantics is restricted to an unvarying core meaning. Better to think of a word or form as a reservoir of potential meaning. The deictic and contextual indicators guide the bearer/reader to make the right choice out of the semantic choices from the reservoir. Against this background the choice of tenses in John 1,5 is pregnant with significance for the thought expressed.*

KEYWORDS *Aspect and Tense, Semantics and Pragmatics, light and darkness, John 1,5.*

I. INTRODUCTION

This is a study of John 1,5 with a particular interest in the tense sequence for the actions respectively of the light and the darkness: present to aorist. The sequence seems to me to be striking and unusual, and crying out

for clarification. Focussed on this matter, the present study leaves aside many issues of importance in the study of the Johannine Prologue. It works as well with some assumptions about aspects of meaning and structure in the Prologue that cannot be defended here. Finally, the work depends upon an approach to indicative tenses in Hellenistic Greek that has more kinship with approaches that are at times now considered out of date than with the aspectual approach of Porter and others; this will be defended, at least in outline.

Away from John 1,5 itself, the work concentrates on issues of sequence, development and structure in the opening verses of the Prologue¹.

1. TENSES: TIME AND ASPECT

Discussion on the approach taken here to indicative tenses is a necessary preliminary. Traditionally Greek tenses have been understood for the Hellenistic period as pointing in the indicative to time—among other things. On this basis an intricate understanding has been built up of how the tenses function. A generous number of special cases where time is not marked in the expected way has been recognised and categorised. But the fundamental role of time has been maintained.

More recently, however, the importance of aspect for the Greek tenses has come into focus. Verbal aspect has to do with how a writer wants an action to be viewed, not with a claimed quality of the action as such. It is this concern with viewpoint on action and not with difference of kinds of action (*Aktionssart*), as thought at times by older grammarians, that is said to be responsible for tense choice. This focus on aspect is a welcome development. The new perspectives have their foundation in the structural linguistics approach of J. Holt². The relevance for New Testament Greek was recognised by J. Mateos

1 The considerable literature on the question of possible chiasmic arrangement in the Johannine Prologue might be thought relevant for the present discussion, but scrutiny of this literature has offered nothing. The fresh challenge by P. J. WILLIAMS ("Not the Prologue of John": *JSNT* 33 [2011] 375-86) to John 1,1-18 as the scope of the Prologue is not of importance for this study, but he does emphasise the significant break between 1,5 and 6 (383), which fits well with the approach here. See also M. C. DE BOER, "The Original Prologue to the Gospel of John": *NTS* 61 (2015) 448-67, which DE BOER argues is w 1-5.

2 J. HOLT, *Etudes d'aspect* (Acta Jutlandica Aarskrift for Aarhus Universitet, 15:2; Copenhagen 1943).

and K. L. McKay³. However, the present context of discussion is primarily due to the work of S. E. Porter, B. M. Fanning and then C. R. Campbell⁴.

In the first instance aspect offers itself as an alternative to *Aktionsart* and not directly to time reference. But time reference has a relationship to *Aktionsart*—can be thought of as a kind of *Aktionsart*. And recognition of the importance of aspect has led to a reconsideration of the traditional attribution of a time reference to the indicative tenses. Getting rid of time reference for the indicative tenses can be seen as a carrying through to its logical conclusion of the discovery of the aspectual role of tenses. Of the three key scholars here, only Fanning keeps a significant place for time in the use of the indicative tenses (Campbell allows that the future marks time and Porter comes close to assigning a time reference to the indicative imperfect⁵).

In the recent discussion an important distinction is made between semantics and pragmatics. If time were part of the semantics of indicative tenses then, it is argued, the time reference would be automatically encoded in the particular grammatical form. But if the kind of time reference were to be only permitted by a word or form but actualised only when certain deictic or contextual indicators are present, then time reference belongs not to the semantics of tenses, but to the pragmatics of texts containing verbs in the various tenses. Once the discussion has been set up in these terms it is easy to see how the ready recognition by all grammarians that indicative tenses do not always have a fixed relationship to time virtually becomes automatically a denial of a place for time in the semantic significance of tenses. Semantics has been defined not in terms of what is characteristic but in terms of what is unvarying⁶. And pragmatics is left to supply the rest.

3 J. MATEOS, *El aspect verbal en el nuevo testamento* (Madrid 1977); K. L. MCKAY, *Greek Grammar for Students: A Concise Grammar of Classical Attic with Special Reference to Aspect in the Verb* (Canberra 1974); "On the Perfect and Other Aspects in New Testament Greek": *NovT* 23 (1981) 289-329; "Time and Aspect in New Testament Greek": *NovT* 34 (1992) 209-228.

4 S. E. PORTER, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood* (SBG 1; New York 1989); B. M. FANNING, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (OTM; Oxford 1990); C. R. CAMPBELL, *Verbal aspect, the indicative mood, and narrative: soundings in the Greek of the New Testament* (New York 2007).

5 M. B. OLSEN, *A Semantic and Pragmatic Model of Lexical and Grammatical Aspect* (Outstanding Dissertations in Linguistics Series; New York 1997), grammaticalizes time for the imperfect, pluperfect, perfect and future.

6 There is a softer version of this approach which makes a distinction between prototypical uses which exhibit every standard feature of the word or tense in view and uses where the lack of one or more of the prototypical features causes a reader/hearer to make use of pragmatic features of the context to determine the meaning. See, e.g., S. E. RUNGE, "The Verbal Aspect of the Historical Present Indicative in Narrative", in: *Discourse Studies & Biblical Interpretation*. FS S. H. LEVINSON, ed.

But does language work quite like this? In particular, is the semantics of a word or form as fixed as apparently assumed in the analyses we are being offered? A better image might be to think of a word as a reservoir of potential meaning, established from its use over time as something that has had a living impact on its hearers and readers. The deictic and contextual indicators guide the hearer/reader to make the right choice out of the semantic choices to be found within the reservoir (cf. the language of actualisation used above). That precision is only possible from the pragmatics does not mean that deictic and contextual indicators are contributing all the meaning beyond some lowest common denominator semantic element—if there is one.

Developments in lexicography would seem to generally support my line of thinking⁷. The impact of Relevance Theory and Cognitive Linguistics is beginning to place a fresh emphasis on the users of language as writers/speakers and readers/listeners, and one of the effects of this is to place in question any rigid idea of core meaning for words (or in our case forms). Lexicons and grammars can offer us a bank of characteristic uses; they may even be able to identify typical and atypical uses⁸. But actual language use and language understanding is finally a matter of specific concept formation on the fly, which can not only reproduce, but also extend or move what already exists in the repertoire of experienced language. Knowledge of what gets into our lexicons and grammars enables linguistic competence, but is not finally determinative of intended meaning in a particular utterance. Any sharp distinction between semantics and pragmatics seems inappropriate. In a survey article G. L. Green talks of the need for a “more context-oriented and dynamic approach to understanding the relationship between lexemes and concepts, and the nature of concepts, in the communication of meaning”⁹.

S. E. RUNGE (Lexham Press, 2011) 190-222. This has clear advantages, but is probably still too rigid in the priority it assigns to an alleged prototypical meaning.

7 See, for example, the discussion of the approach intended for the *Semantic Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew* by R. DE BOIS, the editor of the project, in “Lexicography and Cognitive Linguistics: Hebrew Metaphors from a Cognitive Perspective”, SBL 2002, available at <http://www.sdbh.org/framework/index.html>.

8 DE BOIS works with a category of attributes of a lexeme, which he distinguishes from components of meaning. The latter distinguishes and is necessary; the former is a cognitive feature of a lexeme, but may or may not be actual in relation to a specific use of the lexeme. He illustrates with features of a “bird”, not all of which may be present in a particular bird, but which nonetheless have a place in the semantics of the word “bird”. See “Lexicography”, 4.

9 G. L. GREEN, “Lexical Pragmatics and the Lexicon”: *BBR* 22 (2012) 315-33 (quote from 317).

If we apply such thinking to indicative tenses, then patterns of connections with time of indicative tenses, as well as patterns where a time reference is not part of the picture can reasonably be considered to belong to the semantic reservoir. These things are not only products of associated deictic and contextual indicators, but deictic and contextual indicators do guide the choice between options, as well as making their own contribution to the identification of the precise meaning intended.

This suggests an approach in which we do not press so sharply for a distinction between the semantic and the pragmatic determination of meaning. Writing about Porter and Fanning, Silva has suggested that both have failed “to address directly and solve the biggest conundrum of all: how does one distinguish between the information conveyed by the aspect itself and the information conveyed by the context as a whole”¹⁰. When the distinction is so sharply made between semantic contribution and contextual contribution such a criticism is serious. But if context determines choice within a set of semantic options then a rigid distinction is neither possible nor helpful.

Along the same lines a comment about tenses and *Aktionsart* can be made. If indicative tenses are after all somewhat related to time and if time has to do with *Aktionsart* and not with aspect, then it may be that the old *Aktionsart* perspective was not as faulty as is now regularly claimed. As a whole system it was seriously flawed, but as part of the story, somewhat along the lines of my suggestion about a semantic contribution to time reference for indicative tenses, there might be further *Aktionsart* semantic options for tenses, activated in particular cases by deictic and/or contextual indicators¹¹.

Whatever its defects, all the careful and sensitive work of past grammarians deserves more from us than to be relegated into general insignificance on

10 M. SILVA, “A Response to Fanning and Porter on Verbal Aspect”, in: *Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics: Open Questions in Current Research*, ed. S. E. PORTER and D. A. CARSON (JSNTSup 80; Sheffield 1993) 74-82 (quote from 81).

11 Except at the small scale level we do not have New Testament translations yet that seek to operate with a consistent Porter style aspectual approach to indicative tenses. But there might be significance in an observation by T. HATINA that a move from a time based understanding of Greek indicative tenses to an *Aktionsart* approach did not produce English translations that were essentially different (“The Perfect Tense-Form in Colossians: Verbal Aspect, Temporality and the Challenge of Translation”, in: *Translating the Bible: Problems and Prospects*, ed. S. E. PORTER and R. S. HETH (JSNTSup 173; Sheffield 1999) 224-52 (here 226). Once pragmatics were added to semantics it all came out much the same. I wonder whether the same might be true for translators who at the theoretical level are persuaded by a Porter-style aspectual approach.

the basis of the distinction between semantics and pragmatics¹². They did not simply imagine into existence all the subtle uses of the indicative tenses that they differentiated. They may have gotten the interplay between semantics and pragmatics wrong to some degree. (But then I think our most recent round of scholars have made a parallel mistake in the opposite direction.) However, they have identified sense patterns in the use of indicative tenses on the basis of careful analysis of the thought of New Testament texts. Strict delineation of the semantic component of patterns in individual cases may be impossible, but if in the use of the living language such senses do in fact emerge then surely they become part of the expectation range that a competent speaker/listener/reader would bring to the task of speaking/listening/reading, and to that degree they belong to semantics.

The danger is that once we have said that in the aorist “the action is conceived of by the language user as a complete and undifferentiated process” and said of the present and imperfect that “the action is conceived of ... as in progress” and said with respect to the perfect and pluperfect that “stative aspect is the meaning”¹³, we will think we have exhausted the contribution of the tense choice to meaning and move our attention away from the choice of verb tense and look only elsewhere for further contributions to meaning in the sentence¹⁴. I intend to use below an approach to tense meaning that is more in line with an approach such as that of D. B. Wallace, than of Porter, Fanning or Campbell¹⁵. Because, while there is no doubt an important distinction to be made between semantics and pragmatics, what I am interested in is how

12 Compare the remarks of E. R. MUELLER, “The Semantics of Biblical Hebrew: some remarks from a cognitive perspective”, 18: “Perhaps I am not the only one that is constantly surprised by the amazing penetration in the texts and by the solid humanistic scholarship that previous generations display, ...” available at <http://www.sdbh.org/framework/index.html>.

13 The language is from S. E. PORTER, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Second edition; Biblical Languages: Greek 2; Sheffield 1994) 21. The future tense is considered separately by PORTER: “the future form grammaticalizes the semantic (meaning) feature of expectation” (44). And PORTER has as well his system of foregrounding, frontgrounding and backgrounding (23).

14 M. SILVA, “Discourse Analysis and Philippians”, *Discourse Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek*, ed. S. E. PORTER and D. A. CARSON (JSNTS 113; Sheffield 1995) 102-116 (here 105) makes what I take to be a related point: “One must question what appears to be an indiscriminate use of aspects Regardless of one’s theoretical approach ... it is indisputable that, in fact, temporal reference is at least associated with the indicative forms [of the aorist] in the overwhelming majority of cases, and it makes no sense whatever to ignore that element when analyzing the text”.

15 D. B. WALLACE, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids 1996). In a brief appendix, “An Assessment of Time in Verb Tenses” (504-12), WALLACE offers what I consider to be trenchant critique of the denial of any link between indicative tense and time.

tenses would have been able to function in a text like the Johannine Prologue. The possible meanings I attribute to Greek indicative tenses should be seen as resulting from the interplay of semantics and pragmatics. How much to which does not matter a great deal for my practical purposes, as long as it is allowed that pragmatics are not contributing everything. For my purposes, it is a matter of semantics that the tense sequence in John 1,5 from present to aorist is striking.

2. WORKING ASSUMPTIONS

In the interests of focus and to limit the scale, this present study proceeds necessarily on the basis of a set of working assumptions. There are three key matters here.

There is first that of whether δ γέγονεν (“what has come to be”) at the end of John 1,3 belongs with the material before in v 3, or with the material to come in v 4. There is no clear scholarly consensus on this. The claim has been made that most recent scholarship has favoured the latter¹⁶. There is,

The major recent grammar of H. VON SIEBENTHAL (*Griechische Grammatik zum Neuen Testament*. Neubearbeitung und Erweiterung der Grammatik Hoffmann [Giessen 2011]) despite its clear recognition of the aspectual nature of Greek tenses, insists that the indicative tenses combine aspect and time (§193a). See also T. BROOKINS, “A Tense Discussion: Rethinking the Grammaticalization of Time in Greek Indicative Verbs”: *JBL* 137 (2018) 147–68.

16 G.R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *John* (Nashville 1999) 2, claims the majority for this view. P.M. PHILLIPS, *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel: A Sequential Reading* (LNTS 294; London 2006) 162 n 92, provides a good list of supporters of the two views, and argues for the “majority” view. M. ENDO, *Creation and Christology: A Study on the Johannine Prologue in the Light of Early Jewish Creation Accounts* (WUNT 2/149; Tübingen 2002) 196 n 55, should be added to his list of supporters of the “minority” view, and J. LEONHARDT-BALZER, “Der Logos und die Schöpfung: Streiflichter bei Philo (Op 20-25) und im Johannesprolog (Joh 1,1-18)” in: J. FREY – U. SCHNELLE – J. SCHLEGEL (eds.), *Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums: das vierte Evangelium in religions- und traditions-geschichtlicher Perspektive* (WUNT 2/175; Tübingen 2004) 295-319 (314); M. Hengel, “The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth” in: R. BAUCKHAM – C. MOSSER (eds.), *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids 2008) 265-94, to the “majority” view. Most recently D. NÄSSELQVIST, “The Question of Punctuation in John 1:3–4: Arguments from Ancient Colometry”: *JBL* 137 (2018) 175–91 offers a fresh line of argumentation. Despite the large number of papers on aspects of the Johannine Prologue found here, no real attention to this question is paid in J. G. VAN DER WATT – R. A. CULPEPPER – U. SCHNELLE (eds.), *The Prologue of the Gospel of John Its Literary, Theological, and Philosophical Contexts. Papers read at the Colloquium Ioanneum 2013 Der Prolog des Johannesevangeliums. Seine literarischen, theologischen und philosophischen Kontexte. Beiträge vom Colloquium Ioanneum 2013* (WUNT 359; Tübingen 2016).

however, still spirited defence of the former view¹⁷. I side with the scholars who favour the latter.

The second working assumption is drawn from conclusions reached in an earlier discussion of the thought development through John 1,3c-4. In this case I have offered my arguments elsewhere and there is no need to repeat them here¹⁸.

My assumption is that in John 1,4b it is the mystery of animate life that is seen as the light for humanity. This is so by virtue of its connection with the Logos. To find the Logos and thence God in creation, the place to focus is on that which is alive, or perhaps better, on the life with which it is alive. In part the language is crafted in relation to what is yet to come: this light-function since the world began will find its more intense counterpart in the Logos become flesh; one human life will become in an ultimate sense the light of the world.

My third working assumption follows on from the second. It is that there is continuity of thought from John 1,3c-4 to v 5. The flow of parataxis continues and “the light” is clearly resumptive. A clear break is evident between vv 5 and 6¹⁹.

So, the thought of John 1,3c-4 is our take off point for what comes in v 5. and follows on from the material of vv 1-3b. To the verbs and tenses and time perspectives of this larger block, and their contribution to understanding the sequencing of the material, we now turn.

II. VERBS, TENSES, PERSISTENCE AND THE AUTHOR’S PRESENT IN JOHN 1,1-5

The string of verbs and their tenses in the opening section of the Johanne Prologue (John 1,1-5) makes an immediate contribution to the structuring

17 See e.g. D. A. CARSON, *The Gospel according to John* (Leicester 1991) 13-38, 118, who appeals to the more detailed argumentation of R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel according to St John* (New York: Crossroads, 1981), 1:239-40. The most careful recent defence of this view is that of H. THYEN, *Studien zum Corpus Iohanneum* (WUNT 214 2007) 411-17. Recently J. F. McHUGH, *John 1-4* (ICC; London 2009) 14-15, 104-7, leans in the same direction, but without definite resolution of the question.

18 J. NOLLAND, “The Thought of John 1:3c-4”: *Tyndale Bulletin* 62 (2011) 295-311.

19 The view of K. WENGST, *Das Johannesevangelium* (Stuttgart 2004) 51, that there is a significant break between John 1,4 and 5, is eccentric.

of the material, and sets the background for the verbs and tenses of v 5. In these verses there is a dominant use of the imperfect of εἰμί (“be”)—six uses. There are two uses of the aorist of γίνομαι (“become”)—the second echoes the first. There is a single use of the perfect of γίνομαι—this picks up on the aorist uses preceding it, possibly with reference to a subset of all that came to be in creation. And then at the end of this block, in v 5, there is a present use of φαίνω (“shine”) and an aorist use of καταλαμβάνω (“overtake/take hold of”), which is where our study focuses.

The uses of ἦν (“was”) are divided into two uneven sets by the introduction of the three uses of γίνομαι which stand between the first set and the second. The first string of uses of ἦν seem to identify an original state of affairs, “in the beginning” (ἐν ἀρχῇ). The Logos (ὁ λόγος) is introduced as belonging to this initial state of affairs. Then, the Logos is located in relation to God. Next, the Logos is identified as divine. Finally, the location of the Logos in relation to God is reiterated. Four features suggest that this last clause serves as a kind of digest of what precedes, and thus as a foundation for what is to follow. First, there is no linking καί (“and”) this time; second, the Logos is introduced not with a fresh use of ὁ λόγος but resumptively with οὗτος (“this one”); third, the point made is a repetition—**proj ton qeon** (“with God”); fourth, the opening ἐν ἀρχῇ is repeated. (Though the Logos is directly of concern in vv 3-4, and indirectly of concern thereafter, ὁ λόγος will not recur until v 14.)

The text makes no comment on the extent to which this original state of affairs persisted or still persists. But though the focus of vv 1-2 is on how things were at the beginning, the reader assumption must be of persistence unless or until instructed otherwise²⁰.

The three uses of γίνομαι that follow seem to be intended to mark a change introduced into that original state of affairs (but not a change that disrupts anything of the state of affairs in vv 1-2). Creation (πάντα) comes into being through the Logos; there is not a single exception (οὐδὲ ἓν) in all creation to this mode of origin. As already noted, there are different views as to how the third use of γίνομαι functions—a perfect following two aorists. For our present purpose what matters here is whether both ἦν clauses of v 4 are statements about the situation after creation (the perfect linked into the

20 By persistence I mean continuation over time without any distinction between continuation that has now come to an end and continuation that persists into the time of the writing.

syntax of v 4), or whether the first is timeless (“in [the Logos] was life”—the perfect kept with v 3), still part of how things were at or from the beginning, and only the second relates to the situation after creation, concerned as it is with the impact on the human part of creation of the timeless reality identified in the first. If $\delta \gamma\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omicron\nu\epsilon\nu$ belongs with v 4 then both $\tilde{\eta}\nu$ statements in v 4 deal with aspects of the situation after creation has come into existence.

John 1,3a-b looks back to creation through the Logos. The created order is clearly intended to be understood as persistent (but not as continuing to be created). But no persistent role for the Logos is evident at this point. Persistence is, however, brought into the picture by vv 3c-4; this is how things were from the time of creation’s first existence. The reference is to the past, but the reader will assume persistence unless or until instructed otherwise. Precisely because it originates from the Logos, animate life provides light capable of leading people from the mystery of life to the divine Logos.

So the initial—persistent—state of affairs is marked by a set of uses of $\tilde{\eta}\nu$, identifying different aspects of this state of affairs; a change in the situation is marked by a set of uses of $\gamma\acute{\iota}\nu\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$; and aspects of the new—persistent—state of affairs thus created are described by a fresh set of uses of $\tilde{\eta}\nu$.

Though the original state of affairs is looked back on, the natural assumption is that what was so at the beginning is considered to still be so in the writer’s present. The natural assumption will also be that the new state of affairs introduced by the uses of $\gamma\acute{\iota}\nu\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$, and looked back upon as well, is to be understood as spanning unaltered into the writer’s and readers’ present. Persistence is the default view, until or unless one is informed otherwise. But the statements are in the first instances statements about states of affairs in the past.

But with its use of the perfect is $\delta \gamma\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omicron\nu\epsilon\nu$ at the end of v 3 already a marker of the link with the writer’s present? It looks as though a significant part of the textual witness found the transition from $\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omicron\nu\epsilon\nu$ in v 3 to $\tilde{\eta}\nu$ in v 4 difficult, and replaced the $\tilde{\eta}\nu$ with **estin** or its equivalent²¹. For the scribes involved $\delta \gamma\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omicron\nu\epsilon\nu$ seems to have meant “what has come to be and therefore now is”. To follow with $\tilde{\eta}\nu$, indicating a looking back into the past (whether or not what was referred to was understood to persist into the present), seemed to them quite inappropriate. A perfect to imperfect transition of this kind would

21 D Old Latin syr^c cop^{sa, fay} and many early ecclesiastical writers.

come naturally if one wanted to say that what exists now in the present is no longer what it was earlier (e.g., “what has come to be used to be life, but after a time was so no longer”)²². But this is not possible for John 1,3c-4²³.

The scribes, however, need not have been so concerned. It is clear that γέγονεν could serve where we might have expected ἐγένετο²⁴. And, given that the New Testament and the LXX together can only muster six uses of the pluperfect of γίνομαι, it seems likely that at times the perfect γέγονεν might have done duty for the pluperfect²⁵. Either way the perfect does not provide a clear marker of a time link with the writer’s present. If the time reference for γέγονεν in John 1,3 is just the same as for the uses of ἐγένετο, the change to γέγονεν may well be to mark the persistent existence (but not specifically persistence to the writer’s present) of the new state of affairs as distinct from the achievement of the state of affairs—marked by the uses of ἐγένετο.

While the creation account echoes create a presumption of persistence into the writer’s present, we reach v 5 without any clear and definite marker that anything of what has been spoken of persists into the writer’s present.

John 1,5 introduces new verbs and also, with the first of the verbs, a new tense. The switch to the present with φαίνει is striking. In some way or

22 See, for example, *The Clementine Homilies*, 1.1.4: καὶ ἄρα ποτε γέγονεν ὁ κόσμος καὶ πρὸ τοῦ γενέσθαι τί ἄρα ἦν (“has the world been made at some time and before it came to be what was then?”). A similar timeshift, though here in terms of alternatives rather than change, is being offered in GAIUS MUSONIUS RUFUS, *Dissertationum a Lucio digestarum reliquiae*, Discourse 9, line 85: τοῦτο κακοδοξίας αἴτιον, ἐν ᾧ τινες ἐνδοξότεροι γεγόνασιν, ἢ πρότερον ἦσαν (“the cause of this the ill repute, into which certain ones held in great esteem have come, or formerly were”). (Both cited after *TLG*.)

23 If ὁ γέγονεν used to be life, but no longer was/is so, then we are left wondering what it is now. We are introduced to a feature of ὁ γέγονεν which belongs only to its prehistory. And the present tense in John 1,5 is inexplicable.

24 For examples see DIODORUS SICULUS, *Bibliotheca historica*, 36.2.2.2: ... γέγονέ τις, ἦν Τίτος ... (“... a certain person came. It was Titus ...”); JOSEPHUS, *Ant.* 2.178: τρεῖς δὲ Λευὶ γεγόνασιν υἱοί, ... Ἰουδα δὲ παῖδες ἦσαν τρεῖς, ... (“three sons came to Levi, ...; to Judah there were lads, ...”). (Both cited after *TLG*.)

25 It is true that one of the two New Testament uses of the pluperfect of γίνομαι is in John (6,17). In 6,17 the pluperfect is matched with a pluperfect of ἔρχομαι. The pluperfect of ἔρχομαι comes in the phrase οὕτω ἐληλύθει, which John uses three further times (7,30; 8,20; 11,30). John is rather fond of the pluperfect of ἔρχομαι, with five of the seven New Testament uses. The pluperfect of γίνομαι in John 6,17 may, then, not be a natural choice, but one constrained by other factors.

Apart from the uses of οἶδα and ἵστημι, where the pluperfect is a stand-in for the imperfect, John has the pluperfect also in 4,8; 9,22; 11,13.19.44.57—arguably all the uses in chap 11 belong to a linked set rather than being individual choices of the pluperfect. By contrast with this small number of uses of the pluperfect John has well over a hundred uses of the perfect. But clearly John is well capable of choosing the pluperfect when it particularly suits his needs.

other action in progress is being marked; but persistence has already been involved in the things that have been spoken of in the uses of the imperfect of εἶμι. The choice of the present tense for φαίνεῖ does not by itself guarantee a clear bridge to the writer's immediate present. That, nonetheless, a link with the writer's present is intended suggests itself on the basis of the choice of present tense over imperfect. The present tense would most naturally be seen as making explicit the persistence into the writer's present of the role introduced for the light in the previous verse. The imperfect would have been the natural tense for simply bringing into focus the persistence over time of the activity of the light (as with the previous imperfections)²⁶.

It is the following coordinated aorist verb that creates uncertainty. Subject, however, to a satisfactory account of the following aorist verb, a deliberate bridge to the writer's present makes best sense of the choice of the present tense here.

III. RECOGNITION OF THE PROBLEM OF THE PRESENT TENSE TO AORIST TRANSITION IN JOHN 1,5

Commentators have so much to comment on in John 1,5 that for the most part no space is spared for the transition from present to aorist that is our concern here. There are, however, some exceptions²⁷. In his study of the Prologue Phillips takes note of the difficulty: "The aorist seems puzzling, particularly when we consider the preceding use of the present tense in φαίνεῖ"²⁸. Much earlier, Bultmann identified the use of the present of φαίνω as "harsh", and made the point that referring this verb to the author's present would require a following present tense rather than the aorist as found²⁹. Haenchen

26 There is no need to treat here the complex issues involved in the discussion of how φαίνεῖ in John 1,5 relates respectively to a creation framework and an incarnation framework. Vital as they are, these matters have no impact on the questions being addressed here.

27 R. SCHNACKENBURG, *John*, 1:245, identifies the problem of John 1,5 as that the verbs there "envisage a different level of time than the ἦν of v. 4".

28 PHILLIPS, *Prologue*, 173.

29 R. BULTMANN, "The History of Religions Background of the Prologue to the Gospel of John (1923)" in: *The Interpretation of John*, ed. J. ASHTON (Edinburgh 1997), 44 n 6. Later in his commentary, BULTMANN (*The Gospel of John* [Philadelphia 1971],

identified the present tense of φαίνω as a puzzle, but for him the puzzle is, at least in part, that “it is followed immediately by the aorist”³⁰. Showing awareness that the aorist might be considered a problem, Carson, representing a totally aspectual approach to indicative tenses, denies the existence of any problem: “That the tense is aorist is of little significance in itself, since that tense merely establishes that the writer looks on the action holistically”³¹. After the pattern breaking introduction of a present tense the reverting to an aorist for the next verb should hardly be handled so dismissively. Carson’s comment here illustrates well the loss that I have lamented in *1.1 Tenses: time and aspect* above³².

IV. THE FORCE OF THE LINKING ΚΑΙ

Seeing the transition from present to aorist in John 1,5 as striking works with the assumption that the linking και has its normal coordinating role, whether this is seen as connective (“and”) or contrastive (“but”). So far as I can tell this assumption has never been placed in question in Johannine scholarship. But another possibility needs to be introduced. What if there were a causal use of και, and that was the use intended here? “The light shines [on] in the darkness because the darkness did not gain control of it”.

A causal και is not documented in the grammars or dictionaries, but there is a causal ׀ in Biblical Hebrew, and I have been able to identify eight uses of a causal και in the Septuagint³³. Of these just two look like carefully considered uses of a causal και (as distinct from formal equivalence for a

45-46) does refer φαίνεῖ to the author’s present, and loses sight of the difficulty created for the following aorist. But perhaps his judgement that the source form would have had the imperfect rather than the present in John 1,5a (45 n 4) is a tacit recognition of the problem.

30 E. HAENCHEN, *John 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 1-6* (Philadelphia 1984) 114-115. Of course it is not the tense sequence as such that is striking—that can be matched often enough in the LXX and elsewhere—but the tense sequence with the kind of thought sequence that is coming to expression through the verbs involved.

31 CARSON, *John*, 138.

32 Our study assumes that the writer of the Johannine Prologue has been careful in his use of tenses, specifically the choice of aorist in John 1,5 rather than perfect. John has a high rate of uses of the perfect (24.6 percent as many as indicative aorists; NT overall has 14.2 percent; Greek OT has 5.3 percent; Psalms have 1.2 percent).

33 For details see J. NOLLAND, “In search of undocumented uses of Greek connectives: the case of a causal kai”. *Estudios Bíblicos* 72 (2014) 237-56.

Hebrew ו). In one of these we have a $\kappa\alpha\iota$ with a double function in the kind of poetic context in which writers regularly take license to bend the rules of syntax in favor of their poetic art (Ps 94,4 [MT and ET, 95,4]). But the other text (Ezek 18,28) shows evidence of considered reformulation, which may stand as evidence that this translator was consciously comfortable with a causal $\kappa\alpha\iota$.

The basis is too modest to send us looking for uses of causal $\kappa\alpha\iota$ in the New Testament. And the paratactic style that otherwise predominates in John 1,1-5 is unlikely to be broken in the case of the final $\kappa\alpha\iota$ of the set. So we can with reasonable safety set aside this exotic possibility. The tense sequence is still to be considered striking.

V. OTHER TRANSITIONS FROM PRESENT TO AORIST IN JOHN

Does the Gospel of John have anything similar elsewhere to the move in John 1,5 from the present to the aorist? The sequence is well represented in John, but overwhelmingly instances involve a present tense that has a past time reference, i.e. an historic present³⁴. The possibility that $\varphi\acute{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\iota$ is an historic present has all but been eliminated above.

Closest is 10,8, a verse in which there is a measure of parallel of thought structure³⁵, if not thought content, to 1,5. In the kaleidoscopic movement of images in John 10, sitting in between the two verses on the gate for the sheep, v 8 resumes the shepherd thread from vv 1-6, which will be taken on further in v 10. The relevant part of v 8 may be translated “all ... are ($\epsilon\iota\sigma\omega$) thieves and bandits, but the sheep did not listen ($\sigma\upsilon\kappa\ \eta\gamma\kappa\omicron\upsilon\sigma\sigma\alpha\nu$) to them”. An easier transition between the two verbs would have been achieved with “they were” ($\eta\tilde{\iota}\sigma\sigma\alpha\nu$): all would become comment on the past. But the thought as articulated intends to connect with present time. This could be by giving figures from the past a quasi-present reality on the basis of an enduring (negative) significance. Or it could be that the intention is to include figures that are

34 See, e.g., John 13,4. 5; 18,28; 20:5.6.8. There are, as well, many cases where the historic present is $\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\epsilon\iota$. The sequence, aorist to historic present, is also common, while the sequence, aorist to futuristic present is found in 13,3.

35 In both cases the aorist is negated, and the failed action involves a negative relationship between the subject of the aorist verb and its object.

genuinely contemporary with Jesus, even if coming onto the scene earlier than he did³⁶. (We do not need to decide, but the former offers an easier transition to the following aorist verb³⁷.) Here the transition from present tense to aorist is aided by the aorist verb, ἦλθον (“came”), in the ὅσος clause that modifies πάντες (“all”). The “all” may have an identity of one sort or another in the present, but the action that is attributed to them (they came) is in the past. So it is natural enough to correlate the two aorist verbs: they came, but the sheep did not listen. Whereas in John 1,5 it is the aorist at the end which is surprising, in 10,8 it is rather the present tense intruded between two aorists that attracts attention. So only to a limited degree can we appeal to John 10,8 as offering a syntactical parallel to 1,5.

Two other verses in John are worth comparing. John 7,29 has, “I am (εἰμι) from him and he sent (ἀπέστειλεν) me”. The appropriateness of the aorist tense is based on the past action of “coming from” implicit in “am from him”. The aorist verb is used to expand upon this implied action in the past—something not matched in John 1,5. John 15,19 has, “You are not (οὐκ ἐστε) of the world; rather (ἀλλά), I chose (ἐξελεξάμην) you out of the world”. The aorist statement identifies the past event that underlies the negated statement about present status; this past event has created the present status—again a feature not matched in John 1,5. In any case the linking term here is ἀλλά not καί.

The way in which the tense moves from present to aorist in John 1:5 is, then, without close parallel in the rest of the Gospel of John; John 1,5 is all the more striking for this being so.

VI. TRANSITIONS FROM PRESENT TO AORIST IN THE OTHER GOSPELS

The other Gospels offer no really close parallels to John 1,5, but a field of useful comparison does begin to emerge.

Most common in present -> aorist sequences is a use of εἰμι (“be”) for the present tense. The following aorist points to what created, confirmed (or

36 Cf. the chronological relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist in John 1,15.27.

37 Those who are thieves and robbers are seen as the counterparts to Jesus who as the one speaking is operating in the present time of the story world here.

disrupted where εἰμί is negated) or makes intelligible the state of affairs to which the εἰμί points. So, e.g., in Matt 14,2 we find, “This is (ἐστίν) John the Baptist; he has been raised (ἠγέρθη) from the dead”³⁸. Also using εἰμί there is Matt 14,15, with, “This place is (ἐστίν) desolate, and the hour is now late (παρήλθεν)”. Here there is no intrinsic connection between what is said by the respective verbs. They are connected as each pointing to something that is true at the moment of speaking. And the move from the present to the aorist is based on a specific time idiom in which that time has passed is noted in order to indicate the lateness of the present hour.

In Luke 24,18 παροικέω provides the present tense: “Are you the only one who dwells (παροικεῖς) in Jerusalem who (καί) did not know (οὐκ ἔγνως) what happened?”³⁹. For the first time the aorist verb is negated as in John 1,5⁴⁰. Dwelling in Jerusalem creates the expectation that when a major public event took place a person living there would know about it. In this case the expectation appeared not to have been met, thus the question form. Jesus *seemed* not to have known. In Luke 15,27 it is ἦκω that provides the present tense: “Your brother has come (ἦκει), and your father killed (ἐγυσεν) the fatted calf”. In this case it is the particular perfect-tense-like sense of the present of ἦκω that stands behind the sequence of verb tenses⁴¹.

In Luke 7,5 ἀγαπάω provides the present tense: “He loves (ἀγαπᾷ) our people and he built (ὠκοδόμησεν) the synagogue for us”. We have two prongs of a commendation here, one that reports an abiding state of affairs and one that reports a particular event that has a natural coherence with the reported state of affairs. The tenses match the difference between an ongoing state and an event. Finally in Matt 23,23 ἀποδεκατόω provides the present tense: “You tithe (ἀποδεκατοῦτε) mint ..., and you abandoned (ἀφήκατε) the weightier matters”. Here the aorist is something of an initial surprise, as in John 1,5⁴².

38 See also Matt 3,17; 28,6; Mark 1,11; Luke 3,22; 24,6. Neither in Matt 14,2 nor in any of these is there a linking καί.

39 They translations typically make no attempt to render the aorist ἔγνως, settling for something like “does not know”.

40 The presence of the negative is potentially important because to say that an event did not happen is, generally, to speak of a “gap” and not of an event. (I say generally because in some cases a negated verb is equivalent to another non-negated verb, e.g. “He did not come” can be equivalent to “He absented himself”.) This asymmetry of function may have an impact on syntactical possibilities.

41 Some grammarians identify ἦκω forms as perfect, even when the endings used are not normal perfect endings.

42 The parallel material in Luke 11,42 has been substantially recast, but it is notable that the Matthean aorist is replaced by a present.

We might expect the interest to be in what these people do now, so why the aorist? It is likely that a contrast is being established between what is practiced in the present in continuity with the past and what is not practiced in the present because it has already been lost sight of in the past. The one practice continues; the other stopped. Nothing analogous is possible for John 1,5, given the negative and the semantic range of *καταλαμβάνω*.

The texts surveyed have not provided a close match with John 1,5⁴³, but a general picture has emerged of the kinds of thinking that might be involved in a move from a present tense to a coordinated aorist.

VII. KEY THOUGHT ELEMENTS OF JOHN 1,5

To be well placed to identify the role of the tense sequence we need some clarification in relation to key ideas being expressed in the verse. The light that in John 1,5 is said to shine has already been identified in v 4 as a function of the life in creation, alive with a life that comes from the Logos. To say that the light shines is only to draw out what is implicit already in the choice of the language of light. That the light shines in the darkness (*σκοτία*), while natural enough is, however, not an immediate corollary of choosing to speak of light. It will become quite clear in the latter part of the verse that something more than developing the basic imagery is involved when we are told what the darkness did or more specifically did not do with the light.

If light shines in the darkness, the natural outcome, in the basic imagery, would be that darkness is dispelled. But that is not what we have. That light and darkness here are images whose connection with insight and benightedness, good and evil is immediately and universally recognised⁴⁴. The kind of

43 All the texts in the Gospels with the tense sequence in which we are interested have been considered, but only enough are reported here to document the range that might be of potential relevance for John 1,5.

44 Well, almost universally. In his distinctive and important article D. BOYARIN ("The gospel of the Memra: Jewish binitarianism and the Prologue to John": *HTR* 94 [2001] 243-84) understands "darkness", at least in part, rather more prosaically. For him the darkness is simply the darkness of the world, into which the light of the preincarnate Logos continued to shine, but not powerfully enough or effectively enough for the world to comprehend and thus have its darkness dispersed (272, 274; cf. SCHNACKENBURG, *John*, 1:245). BOYARIN offers an attractively coherent reading of the whole Prologue, but "the world did not understand [the light]" is not the most obvious force for *ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν*.

darkness we are dealing with here is not merely an absence, an empty space to be filled with the light when it comes. This darkness involves a presence of its own; and this presence is one that (in line with the basic imagery) is of an opposite nature to the light. And beyond that the writer in John is already, with his treatment of darkness as a subject of action in the way he does here, beginning the personification that will prepare his readers for a coming personal identity for the light (and in a less developed way a somewhat parallel personal identity for the darkness). A primeval role for the darkness is likely to be already hinted at in the manner in which John 1,1-5 provides or fails to provide an “introduction”—by the syntax patterns chosen—of the main “players” of the piece. Everything is directly or indirectly “introduced”, except ὁ θεός (we are not told that in the beginning was God) and ἡ σκοτία (how has it come into the framework here?). We must, therefore, be prepared to move beyond a simple light and darkness imagery.

Against this background we come to καταλαμβάνω. In terms of its basic language imagery καταλαμβάνω involves overtaking and/or taking hold of something. It may, but need not, have overtones of hostility or conquest (it can be applied to making something one’s own). The use of καταλαμβάνω in John 1,5 has been understood as i) concerned with comprehension, ii) as implying hostility or iii) as being deliberately ambiguous.

In our text the darkness comprehending the light would be a possibility taken up to be dismissed. But what would this possibility mean? It would mean that the darkness welcomed the light into itself, that the darkness made the light its own. This would involve a loss of intrinsic identity and not just a transformation, since darkness is the absence of light. If the darkness made the light its own it would itself become light, or at least a place of light. Such a development would not be impossible, but with light and darkness as natural opposites, it remains at least an odd way of speaking, and even more so given the primeval place of God and the darkness as the backdrop for the Prologue.

Light and darkness are clearly already mythologized for Philo, who in *De Opificio Mundi*, 33-34, is able to appeal to “the mutual contrariety (τάς ἐναντιότητάς) and natural conflict (τήν ἐκ φύσεως αὐτῶν διαμάχην)” of light and darkness, which, if not kept apart would be “engaging with intense and never-ceasing rivalry (φιλονεικίαν) in the struggle for mastery (δυναστείας)”. In another way the same is true at Qumran: “In the hand of the Prince of Lights is dominion over all the sons of justice: they walk on paths of light. And in the hand of the Angel of Darkness is total dominion over the sons of deceit; they walk on paths of darkness” (1QS 3.20-21). Wis 7:29-30, with its claim that wisdom is superior to light, exemplifies the kind of thought background from which the mythologizing of light emerged.

Nonetheless a significant measure of support for understanding *καταλαμβάνω* positively and thus linking it with understanding may be drawn from the use later in the prologue of words using the *λαμβάνω* root: *οὐ παρέλαβον* is found in v 11 in what could be seen as a somewhat parallel manner (“he came to his own parts and his own people did not receive him”); the unprefixated *ἔλαβον* is used in the following verse, clearly in relation to the use of *οὐ παρέλαβον* in v 11. (It is also the case that each of these other negated aorist verbs is the negation of some desirable outcome.)

Things are a bit more straightforward with the option of *καταλαμβάνω* as implying hostility. Once we move beyond the natural imagery to include the moral and cognitive dimensions and give full weight to the darkness as a presence of the opposite and not simply an absence of the light, then a sense of *καταλαμβάνω* which implies hostility between darkness and light sits very naturally within the material. The only other use of *καταλαμβάνω* in John comes in 12,35, where it is also used in connection with *σκοτία* (“darkness”). The imagery there is of taking the opportunity to make one’s way while the light remains. The alternative to be avoided is for the darkness to overtake one, so that one finds oneself walking in the darkness and not knowing where one is going. Here it is the person who is overtaken by the darkness and not the light itself. But the negative overtones of being overtaken by the darkness match the hostility option for John 1,5.

Double entendres are considerably more difficult to evaluate. Ironic double meanings are a well-established feature of Johannine style. These typically involve a wrong meaning and a right meaning, a misunderstanding that needs in some way to be put right, but it is likely that in John 3,3 *ἄνωθεν* intended to refer both to a being born “again” and a birth from “above,” and that it is only the literalness of Nicodemus’ image of re-entry into a mother’s womb that represents misunderstanding. And certainly in v 14 the use of *ὑψόω* is intended to point at one and the same time to a literal lifting up (that turns out to be death on a cross) and to ideas of exaltation. What is interesting about these two instances is that one of the intended senses is the key to the right understanding of the other. Nicodemus’ literalness is overcome when one understands that being born again happens through birth from above. The cross is understood when the literal lifting up of a criminal in shame can be seen as, at the same time, exaltation to glory. So a double entendre along these lines might be a real possibility—provided that an adequate sense for it

can be clarified. Perhaps we are being told the darkness failed in its attempt to gain control over the light by act of aggression precisely because the only way to take hold of the light is by being transformed—involving, as we have seen, in the case of darkness, a loss of intrinsic identity—by its illumination.

Double entendre though there may well be, the primary sense for *καταλαμβάνω* is the negative one. Given the nature of the darkness being spoken of here, what has failed is the attempt of darkness to embrace the light with its own darkness and thus to turn it into darkness.

VIII. THE TENSE SEQUENCE IN JOHN 1,5: PRESENT TO AORIST

With some of the key thought elements in place we now turn our attention to the tense sequence in John 1,5. Though the role of the present to aorist sequence here has no close parallel elsewhere in John or the other canonical gospels, our survey of other uses above has offered an attuning exercise that provide us with something of a framework for considering this particular case. Against this background I want to offer a hypothetical sequence of steps in thought and articulation that one might go through to end up with John 1,5. Language choice is generally much more intuitive than this: the fitness of things is perceived in a rather more holistic manner. So I am not really suggesting that the author made his way through these steps. But I am offering the thought steps here as possibly clarifying for a reader of what is more likely to have been the poet's instinctive choice of tenses here.

What options would be available to John for expressing the kind of thing he is interested in articulating in 1,5? Broadly, he wants his readers to know that darkness tried to get control of the light but failed. He might have thought about saying, “the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has kept trying (unsuccessfully) to get control of it”. How might he bring this to expression? He could have considered using *φαίνει* (present) and *καταλάμβανε* (imperfect)—with no negative. The result would, it is true, be ambiguous; and the imperfect would need to be seen as at one and the same time durative and voluntative. But if he wanted to use a single verb form there does not seem to be any alternative. He could have tried the present *καταλαμβάνει*, again as both durative and voluntative, but the repetition of the same tense would favour

giving the same force to both uses: “the light shines in the darkness and the darkness gets control of it” or “the light has been shining in the darkness and the darkness has been getting control of it” or even “the light is [or has been] trying to shine in the darkness and the darkness is [or has been] trying to get control of it”. If the choice is between present and imperfect, the imperfect for *καταλαμβάνω* would be better.

It would be better, but its inherent ambiguity might well dispose a writer to offer a follow-on statement to complete the thought. So what if he now thinks about a follow-on statement that introduces a negative *οὐ* with a form of *καταλαμβάνω*, in order to make the point clearly that the ongoing attempts have all been failures? He does not want to say that the attempts have ceased, but nonetheless to declare a verdict on all the attempts.

If he were to choose a perfect form then he would be creating—given the use of the present tense *φαίνει*—a space for a possible coming change: the attempts have all failed *thus far*; this is a progress report. The perfect would not need to mean this—see the discussion above of the perfect in v 3—but it could be easily taken to mean this.

What about using a present form? The present really will not work; the effect of the tense sequence, imperfect -> (negated) present, with the same verbs would be just too enigmatic: an action that was and is not!

The aorist seems to be the best choice for making a decisive statement about the failure of the darkness: the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has kept trying to get control of it, but it did not succeed.

However, in a compact piece of poetic writing including both of these *καταλαμβάνω* statements would be disproportionate, and would throw too much emphasis on what is not the main thrust of development through the Prologue. Could we have just the first one? Not really. Only a context will allow the chosen imperfect verb to be rightly construed. Could we have just the second one? I think so. The unusual tense juxtaposition is there to draw attention to the need to fill out an ellipse. The statement of failure itself implies the attempt; and the attempt would most naturally be reported in the imperfect. So all that is necessary is in place to guide the reader towards the main shape of the needed ellipse⁴⁵.

45 Without specific comment on the aorist and with some syntactical awkwardness, B. LINDARS, *The Gospel of John* (NCBC; Grand Rapids 1992 = 1972) 87, has it that “whereas the light ... shines continuously (hence the present tense), there has

Of course we cannot and do not even need to know whether the writer either consciously or subconsciously went through these steps. Rather what the steps offer us, I suggest, is a way of seeing the appropriateness and the thrust of the tenses and the sequence of tenses in John 1,5. Ellipse is important in a good deal of compact expression. The precise nature of the ellipse is not necessarily something that authors clearly articulate in their own thought. It is the angle that the ellipse creates for viewing what is actually said that is of significance, not some precisely reconstructed ellipse.

IX. CONCLUSION

My starting point for this study has been a plea that the time role for indicative Greek tenses be restored. Aspect is important but aspect is not everything. We have seen that in John 1,1-5 the use of tenses and tense sequences to organise the flow of thought is strongly evident; and that the earlier verb sequence highlights the distinctiveness of the verb tenses and their sequence in v 5. A survey of John and the other Gospels of present to aorist sequences of coordinated verbs showed how unusual (except with historic presents) this tense sequence is. Where it is found it is never performing a role that could be applicable in John 1,5. Nonetheless such a survey opened up for inspection kinds of patterns of thinking that might be involved in creating such a sequence.

The light of John 1,5 is a function of the life introduced in v 4. It is the nature of light to shine. The darkness is, however, not simply the absence of light, but the presence of what is by nature opposite to and opposed to the light. The darkness failed to overcome the light. The author is likely to be suggesting, by means of a double entendre, that such a failure should be no surprise: one can get hold of the light by opening oneself up to its influence, but one cannot get control of it by any kind of act of aggression.

But what of the tense sequence? Retrospectively all that has been said about the past is validated for the present by the present tense in John 1,5. It is not, however, that there has been no threat to this continuing state of affairs.

never been an occasion when it was completely extinguished". He claims this as the interpretation of most of the Fathers.

The transition to the negated aorist makes best sense as intending to imply by ellipse the attempt to interfere with the shining of the light. The attempt is implied, the failure is affirmed, and the reader is assured that the process of life shining as light, set in place through the Logos' role in creation, continues undisturbed to the readers' present time and will continue.

However, in the story the author goes on to tell, this shining-since-the-world-began will find its more intense counterpart in the Logos become flesh; one human life will become in an ultimate sense the light of the world.

