

THE IRONIC FORCE OF THE PURE OPTATIVE IN ὄτι (ὥς) CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE PRIMARY SEQUENCE¹

GUY L. COOPER, III

University of North Carolina at Asheville

All oratio obliqua involves at least two speakers, the original speaker and the reporting speaker. Contrary to received opinion, the richly developed means of expression of O.O. in Classical Greek include forms which suggest scepticism on the part of the second or reporting speaker.² The more common of these forms of ironic or sceptical

¹ The following abbreviations are used to refer to some standard handbooks on syntax: Goodwin *MT* = W. W. Goodwin, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses of the Greek Verb* (Boston 1900²); Kühner-Gerth = R. Kühner u. B. Gerth, *Ausführliche Grammatik der griechischen Sprache*, Satzlehre in zwei Bänden (Hannover u. Leipzig 1898³ u. 1904³); SCG = B. L. Gildersleeve and C. W. E. Miller, *Syntax of Classical Greek* I and II (New York, Cincinnati, Chicago, 1900 and 1911); Schwyzler-Debrunner = E. Schwyzler u. A. Debrunner, *Griechische Grammatik* II, *Syntax und Syntaktische Stilistik* (München 1950); Stahl = J. M. Stahl, *Kritisch-historische Syntax des griechischen Verbums der Klassischen Zeit* (Heidelberg 1907 u. Hildesheim 1965).

² Accepted doctrine does recognize a similar nuance for the construction of the participle with ὥς (Kühner-Gerth 2.90 ff., Stahl 719 ff., Goodwin *MT* §§916–19). But this form of O.O. only gives the gist of the reported speech or thought without allowing the original form of statement or conception to be clearly perceived. There is no statement in any handbook or monograph known to me to the effect that the structures of ὄτι(ὥς) O.O. exhibiting pure optatives in primary sequence are sceptical in intention. This has led to a poor understanding of several passages in Attic authors. However, some commentators on Herodotus have gained this insight in relation to some passages of their author. The clearest and best of such commentators' remarks are those of Legrand cited *infra* in the text. There is, however, also an interesting even if rather confused comment by Stein which should be cited. He makes it in connection with a final sentence in primary sequence which has as its subject Nile fish swimming down-stream and up-stream, cf. Herodotus 2.93 ἐχόμενοι τῆς γῆς ἐπ' ἀριστερά καταπλώουσι ἐς θάλασσαν, καὶ ἀναπλώνοντες ὀπίσω τῆς αὐτῆς ἀντέχονται ἐγγριμπτώμενοι καὶ ψαύοντες ὥς μάλιστα, ἵνα δὴ μὴ ἀμάρτοιεν τῆς ὁδοῦ διὰ τὸν ῥόον (ἀμάρτοιεν codd. edd. pl. ἀμάρτωσι Stahl 482) where Stein says: "ἀμάρτοιεν: der Optativ nach einem Haupttempus zumal bei ἵνα keineswegs selten . . . bezeichnet die Absicht als eine vom handelnden Subjekt *gedachte*, und ist dann besonders an seiner Stelle, wenn es dem Sprechenden darauf

O.O. is the use of infinitives where they would normally be excluded, i.e., in subordinate sentences in infinitival O.O., in the *ὅτι (ὥς)* construction where finite forms would normally be expected, and as a narrative verbal form used in a situation where O.O. is implied.³ The second and less common form of sceptical or ironic O.O. is the use of the optative in primary sequence O.O. where the rules of temporal sequence would normally exclude it. To judge by the examples in the collection I have been able to assemble, the idiom is largely limited to literary and scientific disputation. It does not seem to be common, but where it does occur it is a valuable aid to interpretation. The passages will speak for themselves.

For Herodotus, faced with his constant problem of inadequate sources, the construction offers a welcome opportunity to recount less acceptable versions of historical events in such a way as to discount them, without actually rejecting them. By this device he is able to make it clear that he thinks the Lacedaemonian version of the disappearance of the gift bowl sent by them to Croesus is untrustworthy, cf. Hdt. 1.70.2 (bis) *Οὗτος ὁ κρητὴρ οὐκ ἀπίκετο ἐς Σάρδεις δι' αἰτίας*

ankommt zwischen jenem, dem grammatischen, und sich als dem redenden Subjekt zu scheiden. So würde hier *ἵνα μὴ ἀμάρτωσι* unentschieden lassen ob dies nicht auch nach Ansicht des Autors der Zweck ist, durch *ἀμάρτουν* aber wird dieser Zweck nur als ein von den Fischen vorgestellter bezeichnet. Der Erzähler verhält sich dazu ironisch (*δὴ scilicet*).” The peculiar thing is that while Stein correctly understands the force of the pure optative in this particular sentence, he is quite wrong to consider that the pure optative frequently has this force in final sentences. So far as I know there is only one other example, and that not certainly best so interpreted, Hyperides 3.23. If Stein had applied this analysis to one of the several examples of primary sequence O.O. mentioned below, he would have been able to make a sound generalization. For in O.O. the distancing force of the pure optative in primary sequence is regularly present. Kühner-Gerth 2.383 quote part of Stein’s remark in connection with the doctrine of final sentences. But Kühner-Gerth give no further discussion or comment on the matter, and the connection of Stein’s remark to the doctrine of O.O. is never made. I take it that there is a certain underlying alliance between final sentences and O.O. because the final clause itself is a purpose conceived in the mind of the subject of the leading clause. In this particular sentence that alliance is felt so strongly that the final sentence becomes virtually O.O. and thus the pure optative takes a force which is usually not found in final sentences.

³ This type of infinitival ironic O.O. has been discussed for Attic authors in Guy L. Cooper, III, *Zur syntaktischen Theorie und Textkritik der attischen Autoren* (Zürich 1971) 65–83, and in further detail specifically for Herodotus in Guy L. Cooper, III, “Intrusive Oblique Infinitives in Herodotus,” *TAPA* 104 (1974) 23–76. The fact that these infinitival types of ironical O.O. exist substantiates the existence also of the finite-form of ironical O.O. which this article develops.

διφασίας λεγομένης τάσδε· οἱ μὲν Λακεδαιμόνιοι λέγουσι ὥς ἐπείτε
ἀγόμενος ἐς τὰς Σάρδεις ὁ κρητῆρ ἐγίνετο κατὰ τὴν Σαμίην, . . .
 Σάμιοι ἀπελοίατο αὐτὸν . . . αὐτοὶ δὲ Σάμιοι λέγουσι ὥς, . . . οἱ
 ἄγοντες . . . ἀπέδοντο τὸν κρητῆρα ἐν Σάμῳ . . . τάχα δὲ ἂν καὶ οἱ
 ἀποδόμενοι λέγοιεν, ἀπικόμενοι ἐς Σπάρτην, ὥς ἀπαιρεθείησαν ὑπὸ
 Σαμίων.⁴ (ἀπελοίατο ABcP edd. ἀπελήσαντο RSV—cf. Legrand *ad loc.*: “Optativum, qui post λέγουσι displicere potest, ideo ni fallor scriptor adhibuit, ut significaret se Lacedaemoniorum dictis diffidere.”) Notice especially the brilliant contrast between the optatives used of the Lacedaemonian story, and the indicative ἀπέδοντο used for the opposed Samian version of the story. An important early criticism of Lacedaemonian venality is implicit.

Similarly the construction is found in a less likely version of Oebares' trick with the stallion of Darius, cf. Hdt. 3.87.1 Οἱ μὲν δὴ φασι . . . , (καὶ γὰρ ἐπ' ἀμφοτέρα λέγεται ὑπὸ Περσέων) ὥς τῆς ἵππου ταύτης τῶν ἄρθρων ἐπιψαύσας τῇ χειρὶ ἔχοι αὐτὴν κρύψας ἐν τῇσι ἀναξυρίσι . . . (ἔχοι codd. pl. edd. ἔχει PSV). Notice that this story goes off subsequently into ironical infinitival O.O. with an infinitive in a temporal ὥς clause.

In like fashion a dubiously historical anecdote concerning Pausanias is appended to the general account of the immediate consequences of the battle of Plataea, cf. Hdt. 9.82 Λέγεται δὲ καὶ τάδε γενέσθαι, ὥς Ξέρξης φεύγων ἐκ τῆς Ἑλλάδος Μαρδονίῳ τὴν κατασκευὴν καταλίποι τὴν ἑωυτοῦ. The aorist infinitive γενέσθαι is without influence on the sequence, since what follows after ὥς is O.O. and this cannot be introduced by a verb of happening.⁵

A final charming Herodotean example is not spoken in the author's own person but represents an attempt on the part of Demaratus' mother to discredit the stories of her son's illegitimacy, cf. Hdt. 6.69.4 Τῇ δέ σεο μάλιστα κατάπτονται οἱ ἔχθροι λέγοντες ὥς αὐτὸς ὁ Ἀρίστων, . . . πολλῶν ἀκουόντων οὐ φήσειέ σε ἑωυτοῦ εἶναι . . .

⁴ In a note on his parallel translation Legrand further remarks: “En émettant cette supposition (i.e. τάχα δὲ . . . Σαμίων), Hérodote invite à croire les Samiens plutôt que les Lacédémoniens. Déjà auparavant, l'emploi qu'il faisait d'une forme d'optatif tendait à jeter le discrédit sur la version lacédémonienne; voir la note critique à ἀπελοίατο.”

⁵ Sometimes a consecutive, not an O.O., particle follows γίγνεσθαι, but that is not the same. For γίγνεται ὥς=fit, accidit ut, cf. Kühner-Gerth 2.13.11.

αἰδρεῖν τῶν τοιούτων κείνος τοῦτο ἀπέρριψε τὸ ἔπος (φήσειέ ABCPD¹ edd. pl. φησί D²RSV).

Hippocrates thus presents a philosophical attitude to medicine which he himself rejects, cf. Hippocrates VM 20 (= Kühlewein I.24.5, Jones I.52) Λέγουσι δέ τινες ἰητροὶ καὶ σοφισταί, ὡς οὐκ εἴη δυνατόν ἰητρικὴν εἶδέναι ὅστις μὴ οἶδεν ὃ τι ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος . . . τείνει δὲ αὐτοῖς ὁ λόγος ἐς φιλοσοφίην, . . . ἐγὼ δὲ τοῦτο . . . ἦσσαν νομίζω τῇ ἰητρικῇ τέχνῃ προσήκειν ἢ τῇ γραφικῇ.

Repeatedly the author of the *Dialexeis* thus presents debaters' propositions which he himself refutes, cf. *Dialexeis* I.10–11 (Diels-Kranz⁸ 2.406) (*Περὶ ἀγαθῶ καὶ κακῶ*) καὶ μὰν καὶ ἅ τῶν θεῶν καὶ Γιγάντων λεγομένα μάχα καὶ νίκα τοῖς μὲν θεοῖς ἀγαθόν, τοῖς δὲ Γίγασιν κακόν.—ἄλλος δὲ λόγος λέγεται, ὡς ἄλλο μὲν τὰγαθὸν εἴη, ἄλλο δὲ τὸ κακόν, διαφέρον ὥσπερ καὶ τῶννυμα, οὕτω καὶ τὰ πράγμα.

Dialexeis 4.5–6 (Diels-Kranz⁸ 2.412) (*Περὶ ἀλαθέος καὶ ψεύδους*) δᾶλον ὦν, ὅτι ὁ αὐτὸς λόγος, ὅταν μὲν αὐτῷ παρῇ τὸ ψεῦδος, ψεύστας ἐστίν, ὅταν δὲ τὸ ἀλαθές, ἀλαθής . . . λέγεται δὲ καὶ ὡς ἄλλος εἴη ὁ ψεύστας λόγος, ἄλλος δὲ ὁ ἀλαθής, διαφέρων τῶννυμα.

Dialexeis 6.1–7 (bis) (Diels-Kranz⁸ 2.414) (*Περὶ τᾶς σοφίας καὶ τᾶς ἀρετᾶς, αἱ διδακτόν*) (1) λέγεται δέ τις λόγος οὗτ' ἀλαθής οὐτε καινός· ὅτι ἄρα σοφία καὶ ἀρετὰ οὐτε διδακτόν εἴη οὐτε μαθητόν. τοῖ δὲ ταῦτα λέγοντες ταῖσδε ἀποδείξεσι χρῶνται. (2) ὡς οὐχ οἶόν τε εἴη, αἷ τι ἄλλω παραδοίης, τοῦτο αὐτὸν ἔτι ἔχειν. . . . (7) ἐγὼ δὲ κάρτα εὐήθη νομίζω τόνδε τὸν λόγον . . .

Plato uses the construction to give the appropriate tone to a sketch of the fiction underlying a sophist's parable, cf. Plato, *Hipp. Maj.* 286b (*Ἰππίας*) πρόσχημα δέ μοι ἐστὶ καὶ ἄρχη τοιάδε τις τοῦ λόγου. *Ἐπειδὴ ἡ Τροία ἦλω, λέγει ὁ λόγος ὅτι Νεοπτόλεμος Νέστορα ἔροιτο ποῖά ἐστι καλὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα, ἃ ἂν τις ἐπιτηδεύσας νέος ὦν εὐδοκιμώτατος γένοιτο.*

Similarly Plato recounts part of Homer's story, cf. Plato, *Hipp. Min.* 365b *Ἐν τούτοις δηλοῖ τοῖς ἔπεσιν* (i.e., *Il.* 9.308–13) τὸν τρόπον ἑκατέρου τοῦ ἀνδρός, ὡς ὁ μὲν Ἀχιλλεὺς εἴη ἀληθής τε καὶ ἀπλοῦς, ὁ δὲ Ὀδυσσεὺς πολύτροπός τε καὶ ψευδής.

Then repeatedly in the *Phaedo* Plato uses the construction to suggest Socrates' sceptical attitude toward materialistic theories of the soul, cf. *Phaedo* 87D-E ἂν φαίη ἐκάστην τῶν ψυχῶν πολλὰ σώματα κατατρίβειν . . . (εἰ γὰρ ῥέοι τὸ σῶμα καὶ ἀπολλύοιτο ἔτι ζῶντος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἀλλ' ἡ ψυχὴ αἰεὶ τὸ κατατριβόμενον ἀνυφαίνει [O.R. εἰ . . . ῥεῖ . . . καὶ ἀπόλλυται . . . ἀλλ' . . . ἀνυφαίνει]) . . . ἀπολομένης δὲ τῆς ψυχῆς, τότε ἤδη τὴν φύσιν τῆς ἀσθενείας ἐπιδεικνύοι τὸ σῶμα καὶ ταχὺ σαπὲν διοίχοιτο. The optative O.O. here, introduced by γάρ, resumes then freely after intermediate O.R. with only a genitive absolute as introduction, cf. Kühner-Gerth 2.544.2).

Plato, *Phaedo* 95C-D κωλύειν φης πάντα ταῦτα μηνύειν . . . ὅτι . . . πολυχρόνιον . . . ἔστιν ψυχὴ . . . καὶ ταλαιπωρουμένη τε δὴ τοῦτον τὸν βίον ζῶι καὶ τελευτῶσά γε ἐν τῷ καλουμένῳ θανάτῳ ἀπολλύοιτο. At the unacceptable conclusion of the theory which is here paraphrased optatives succeed to an indicative.

Plato, *Phaedo* 96B ἘΑΡ', ἐπειδὴν τὸ θερμὸν καὶ τὸ ψυχρὸν σηπεδόνα τινὰ λάβη, ὥς τινες ἔλεγον, τότε δὴ τὰ ζῶα συντρέφεται, . . . ὁ δ' ἐγκέφαλός ἐστιν ὁ τὰς αἰσθήσεις παρέχων τοῦ ἀκούειν καὶ ὁρᾶν καὶ ὀσφραίνεισθαι, ἐκ τούτων δὲ γίγνοιτο μνήμη καὶ δόξα, ἐκ δὲ μνήμης καὶ δόξης, λαβούσης τὸ ἡρεμεῖν, καὶ ταῦτα γίνεσθαι ἐπιστήμην; This is a slightly freer passage where a parenthetical verb of speaking in the philosophical imperfect sets up an O.O. framework of virtually primary sequence (Kühner-Gerth 1.145, SCG 217 ff.). Present indicatives which then follow are succeeded by an optative and finally by an infinitive as the physical theory of intellection is perceived in its conclusions with increasing incredulity by its reporter—Socrates. Notice that the indicatives, the optative and the infinitive are parallel, and that the change of mood can only be explained within the primary sequence O.O. framework set up by ὥς τινες ἔλεγον.

Xenophon uses the construction to describe a deceptive report which is to be issued for tactical purposes during warfare, cf. *Cyr.* 2.4.17 Ἀλλ' ἔστιν, ἔφη ὁ Κῦρος, καὶ πρόφασιν κατασκευάσαι καὶ ἐνθάδε οὐκ ἄπιστον, καὶ ἣν τις ἐκεῖσε ἐξαγγείλῃ ὥς ἐγὼ βουλοίμην μεγάλαν θήραν ποιῆσαι.

Demosthenes uses it to introduce an unacceptable alternative position

during his exposition of his understanding of the best Athenian policy for the years 353–52, cf. Dem. 16.5 *Οὐ γὰρ ἐκείνo γ' ἂν εἴποιμεν, ὥς ανταλλάξασθαι βουλοίμεθα ἀντιπάλους Λακεδαιμονίους ἀντὶ Θηβαίων, οὐδὲ τοῦτ' ἔσθ' ὁ σπουδάζομεν, ἀλλ' ὅμως μηδέτεροι δυνήσονται μηδὲν ἡμᾶς ἀδικεῖν (βουλοίμεθα codd. Kühner-Gerth 1.257 Weil βουλοίμεθ' ἂν Kühner Butcher Croiset βουλόμεθα Madvig).*⁶

The consideration of these examples establishes two points—firstly that the pure optative in ὅτι (ὥς) constructions of the primary sequence does constitute a definite, recognizable and critically acceptable usage, and secondly, that the purpose and effect of this idiom is to allow the reporting speaker to take up a position of distance and reserve, even of scepticism towards the discourse he reports.⁷

⁶ It would not be palaeographically hard to add a conjectural ἂν here, because the repetition of the syllable ἀνταλλάξασθαι . . . ἀντιπάλους . . . ἀντι . . . makes the assumption of haplography plausible. And the optative could even be interpreted as potential without the addition of ἂν, because it may be the ear could be cheated by such a series of similar syllables, so that a syllable would be heard in one connection and understood in two (cf. B. L. Gildersleeve, *AJP* 12 (1891) 387 and Schwyzler-Debrunner 325²). But I would reject either expedient because both would result in giving βουλοίμεθα a potential sense, and that does not seem to suit the passage. Demosthenes is being deliberately subtle, and allowing both himself and his audience to enjoy the sensation of sophistication which *Realpolitik* provides. Only the oblique optative with the irony it suggests in this construction really fits those expressive purposes.

The same argument applies to the Xenophon passage just cited. In a fair number of places in Attic a pure optative stands with potential force, and so, although it would be exceptional, the optative in this passage might be potential too. But a potential optative would not serve Xenophon's purpose so well. He wishes to portray Cyrus as hatching a war-plot based on false rumors, and only the oblique optative gives the passage the appropriate tongue-in-cheek color.

⁷ I am most grateful to Dr. J. W. Poultney and to Dr. Alison Burford for reading and commenting on earlier drafts of this paper.