

## CHAPTER I

## THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

## (i) INDETERMINACY

The problem of Greek word order is so seldom discussed in this country that it is still possible to treat it as a fresh problem. In this respect it differs from all other problems of comparable magnitude in the study of the Greek language. Of the work so far published on Greek word order, much is cautious and limited in scope, confining itself to the minute analysis of a small number of particular phenomena. Work which aims more ambitiously at a high level of generalisation has borne little fruit. Sometimes this is because the 'rules' which it offers prove inadequate, or break down, as soon as one tries to apply them to a page of Greek in a text opened at random.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes the rules admit neither of proof nor of disproof, because the arguments on which they rest are circular.<sup>2</sup> More often, an objective general statement of the facts appears, to the seeker after rules, inconclusive in the extreme; it amounts to saying 'xyz and xzy occur, but, on the other hand, yxz, yzx, zxy, and zyx also occur.' General accounts of word order of the kind which we find in Schwyzer's grammar would have delighted Sextus Empiricus.

It may be argued that if attempts to establish general rules have ended in doubt and confusion, that is the fault not of the enquirers after the truth but of the truth itself, Greek word order being 'free', 'arbitrary' or 'indeterminate'. I do not suggest that such a view is unscholarly or disreputable. It speaks, after all, with the voice of experience and can draw upon a superabundance of evidence. We find an Attic boundary-stone which proclaims itself (*IG*, 1<sup>2</sup>, 877) [ho]δῶ hō[ρ]os; we find another, of the same date, which says (*ibid.* 878) hō[ρ]os hoδῶ. The beginning of chapter 8 of the Hippocratic

<sup>1</sup> Thumb, p. 2, has no difficulty in disposing, by this test, of Kühner's general rule (II, p. 595), but the rule which he substitutes ('middle' position of the verb) can be disposed of with equal ease.

<sup>2</sup> See especially ch. IV, A (i) below (p. 32). Similar criticisms of circularity may be brought against, e.g., Ammann's attempt (*WSr*) to represent differences of Greek order by stylistic differences in translation and Richter's treatment (p. 24) of 'Rhythmuslinien'.

work *De Carne* is τὸ δὲ ἦπαρ ὤδε ξυνέσθη; the next chapter begins ὁ δὲ σπλήν ξυνέσθη ὤδε.

Discouraging as such examples may be, we should regard them as opening the question, not as closing it. They suffice to show that there must be *some* degree of indeterminacy in Greek word order; that is to say, it must sometimes be determined by processes in the mind of the composer, rational or irrational, which we cannot necessarily expect to recover. On the other hand, there are very many utterances in Greek which conform to one or other of a limited number of patterns.<sup>1</sup> Take, for example, a complete utterance consisting of the three words πάντα ἄν ἔγραψεν. Mathematically, there are six possible ways of arranging three unlike objects; but out of the six possibilities in this utterance, the majority can be discarded:

(i) ἄν πάντα ἔγραψεν, (ii) ἄν ἔγραψε πάντα. No competent student would write either of these; and any competent student should be able to say why, namely that ἄν never begins a sentence.

(iii) ἔγραψε πάντ' ἄν. Nor, I hope, would a student write this; but I should be surprised if he could say why, except to say (truly) that if we search for an example, in Classical Greek prose, of verb + πάντα + ἄν arranged, as a complete utterance, in this order, our search will be long. All of us, teachers and students alike, constantly avoid abnormal formulations without knowing why, and there is nothing strange in that; the process is comparable with the familiar experience of carrying out a manual operation rightly when we do not attend to it too closely and wrongly when we do.

(iv) πάντ' ἔγραψεν ἄν. This is described by Demetrius, *Eloc.* 256, as a κακόφωνον deviation from πάντα ἄν ἔγραψεν, but something which one might say or write in order to achieve δεινότης; he mentions it with παρεγένετο οὐχί=οὐ παρεγένετο.

(v) ἔγραψεν ἄν πάντα and (vi) πάντ' ἄν ἔγραψεν. On these two alternatives it is enough for the moment to remark that it is (vi), not (v), which Demetrius treats as the norm from which πάντ' ἔγραψεν ἄν is a deviation, and (vi) which we should be more likely to write in a prose composition; reasons for this will be given later.

If it is objected that an example containing a word like ἄν is not a fair example, it is legitimate to answer: what *is* a word 'like ἄν', and which words are 'like ἄν'? And where does the boundary lie

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Vendryes, p. 167.

between the comparative rigidity of πάντ' ἄν ἔγραψεν and the total laxity of ὄρος ὁδοῦ / ὁδοῦ ὄρος?

The purpose of this book is to discover the nature of the principles which would justify us in calling πάντ' ἄν ἔγραψεν 'normal' or 'right' in order.

## (ii) TYPES OF DETERMINANT

The respects in which two utterances may be similar or dissimilar are clearly very numerous. If two utterances are syntactically identical, but differ in order, this does not prove that the determinants of their different orders are unknowable; it proves only that syntactical identity does not suffice to determine identity of order; and our task becomes the exploration of all the respects in which the two utterances are dissimilar, in the hope of finding there the vital difference which determined their difference of order.

Let us now take a very simple Greek utterance, the words with which Hippocrates excitedly awakens Socrates at the beginning of Plato's *Protagoras* (310B): Πρωταγόρας ἦκει.<sup>1</sup> Let us discard any beliefs which we may previously have entertained on the determination of word order, and ask in complete innocence: Why, in this particular utterance, does the word Πρωταγόρας precede the word ἦκει? We cannot know *a priori* what kind of answer we shall get, if we ever get one; we must be prepared for an answer in any of the following categories:

(i) In phonological terms, e.g. 'the longer word precedes the shorter', or 'a word beginning with a consonant precedes a word beginning with a vowel'.<sup>2</sup>

(ii) In morphological terms, e.g. 'nouns precede verbs, irrespective of their syntactical interrelation'.

(iii) In syntactical terms, e.g. 'the subject precedes the predicate'.

(iv) In semantic terms, e.g. 'words denoting motion come at the end'.

(v) In lexical terms, e.g. 'ἦκει is one of *n* words which always come at the end'.

(vi) In logical terms, e.g. 'Hippocrates knows that Socrates will guess that someone has come, but he won't know who; so he utters

<sup>1</sup> This example is discussed by Goodell, pp. 30f., and Denniston, *Prose*, pp. 44f.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Jacobsohn (ctr. Spitzer) and Wackernagel, *Wstregel*.

first the word which is least expected by his hearer'. Here and subsequently I use the word 'logical' in a highly general sense, as an adjective corresponding to the noun 'thought'.<sup>1</sup>

(vii) In emotive terms, e.g. 'the word Πρωταγόρας comes first because it is the focus of the speaker's emotion'.

(viii) In social or ceremonial terms, e.g. 'Protagoras is older than the speaker' or 'ἦκει is a tabu word in the speaker's family'.<sup>2</sup>

(ix) In terms involving the individual history of the speaker, e.g. 'the last time he said, or wrote, or thought "Protagoras has arrived" it was in the form Πρωταγόρας ἦκει, and the present example is determined by habit'.

(x) In stylistic or aesthetic terms, e.g. 'the last time he thought or said or wrote "Protagoras has arrived", it was in the form ἦκει Πρωταγόρας, and he likes variety of formulation'.

I should not like to think that these ten categories are an exhaustive list;<sup>3</sup> but they are something to go on with. The customary procedure in an enquiry of this kind is:

(i) To select one of these categories for exploration.

(ii) To formulate, within that category, hypothetical rules of the highest level of generality compatible with their being mutually exclusive.

(iii) To make a selection of texts which is random from the point of view of the rules to be tested but not necessarily random from the point of view of history, dialect or genre.

(iv) To compile statistics of the observance and non-observance of the rules.

(v) On the basis of these statistics, to distinguish between 'normal' and 'abnormal' order.

(vi) To discover the determinants of abnormality; that is to say, to discover conditions which are present in all the abnormal

<sup>1</sup> Goodell, pp. 14ff., uses 'rhetorical' in something like this sense.

<sup>2</sup> I exaggerate here, but cf. Wackernagel, *Wf.* pp. 47ff., for respects in which word order may reflect social conditions and changes in order changes in conditions.

<sup>3</sup> One must also consider e.g. 'mimetic' order, in which words denoting sudden noise or movement precede the words denoting its cause or source (Ammann, *Unt.* 1, p. 15, *Dopp.* p. 23; Havers, *Hdb.* p. 146), and 'excitant' order, in which the words which are essential to the hearer's understanding of the whole situation communicated are postponed in order to create tension (Lindhamer, p. 71; de Vries, pp. 87ff.).

instances but absent from all the normal, or, if present in some normal instances, are counteracted there by certain other conditions which are absent from the normal. The process of counteraction may, of course, be complex, so that we eventually find ourselves formulating rules which constitute exceptions to an exception to an exception to an exception to an exception to the general rule.

This procedure is not only customary,<sup>1</sup> but in some form or other inevitable. Yet the difficulties and dangers inherent in it are numerous and remarkable.

(i) Statistics may or may not give a clear picture; we cannot know until we have them. If, for example, we are testing the syntactical rule 'the subject precedes the predicate', and we find that the ratio of *SP* to *PS* is 10:1, we can embark with some confidence on the next stage of the enquiry, the discovery of the determinants of abnormality. On the other hand, if the ratio is 2:1 or lower, it is unlikely that we have discovered a primary determinant of order and more likely that we are on the track of a secondary phenomenon.

(ii) It is easy, but wrong, to equate 'statistically normal' with 'natural' and 'statistically abnormal' with 'distorted', 'inverted', etc. If, for example, we were investigating a language in which the order *SP* was invariable in statements and the order *PS* invariable in questions, it would be misleading to formulate the rule in terms such as: '*SP* is normal, but this normal order is reversed in questions'. Statements are more numerous than questions, but that is not a fact of a kind with which we are concerned; we should content ourselves with the pair of discoveries that (a) statement determines the order *SP*, (b) interrogation determines the order *PS*.

(iii) It is also easy, but equally wrong, to define the determinants of abnormality positively and to leave those of normal order negatively defined. Suppose, for example, that there is a language in which the order *PS* is statistically abnormal and in all instances of *PS* the predicate is the focus of the speaker's emotion. It is misleading, in such a case, to say that the predicate precedes when it is

<sup>1</sup> The distinction between 'habitual', 'traditional', 'usual', 'banal', or 'natural' order on the one hand and 'occasional' or 'rhetorical' order on the other is fundamental in Brugmann, *Vgl.* p. 677, Delbrück, *Vgl.* pp. 38, 110ff., *Altind.* p. 13, Schwyzer, *Gr.* II, p. 691, Leumann, p. 610, Kieckers, *St. Vbs.* pp. 2ff.; cf. Chantraine, pp. 71f., Vendryes, p. 168.

Cambridge University Press  
 978-0-521-13470-5 - Greek Word Order  
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emotionally emphasised but omit to say that the subject also precedes when it is emotionally emphasised. It would be more useful to say that (a) the element which is the focus of emotion precedes, and (b) a syntactical determinant operates when emotion is absent. (Perhaps here, as in other aspects of linguistics, there is room for 'zero grade' as a positive concept.) We might also find in some language that normal and abnormal orders are equally positive manifestations of a single general principle.

(iv) No scholar, I suppose, thinks that he needs to be warned against regarding the order of his native language as 'natural', but the danger is more complex and more insidious than is commonly realised. The concepts 'nature' and 'instinct' die hard in linguistics. If in our browsing in linguistic literature we encounter an illustration of word order drawn from a North American Indian language, we think it fantastic; but because most of us who know Greek at all began to learn it as children, and became accustomed to it gradually, we fail to see that the fundamental differences in order between Plato's language and ours are at least as great as that between Sitting Bull's and ours.<sup>1</sup> One consequence of this failure is our tendency to regard as 'natural' such elements as are common to Greek and English order; we therefore seek explanations of the differences, but do not trouble to explain what is familiar; these are written about *καὶ ἀγλαὰ δέχθαι ἄποινα* (*Il.* 1, 23)<sup>2</sup> but not about *φέρων τ' ἄπερείσι' ἄποινα* (*ibid.* 13).<sup>3</sup> The fallacy is not wholly irrational in origin. Since Greek and English are the result of differentiation from much more obviously related originals, and since there exist language-families in which all the members of the family follow the same principles of word order, it might be supposed that we can find a Greek norm of order which will also be an Indo-European order and will be manifested also in English, French and German. We might find this; but we have no right whatsoever to *expect* that we shall find it. Indeed, when we reflect that the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. especially the phenomena discussed by Vahlen, p. 1002, Schöne, *Umstr.*, Wilhelm, *Synt.* Postgate, p. 166, appreciates the magnitude of the difference, but in describing it somewhat exaggerates the rational and intellectual aspects of Greek order.

<sup>2</sup> On 'Spaltung', 'Sperrung', and 'Hyperbaton' see Bachhammer, Havers, *Spalt.*, Lindhamer, de Vries, Rass, Kühner, II, pp. 600ff., Fraenkel, *Iktus*, pp. 162ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the pertinent criticisms made by Loepfe, p. 10.

few thousand contemporary languages on which we have some information and the handful which we can trace back into the past represent only a tiny portion of the whole field of human language, and that within that portion the variety of structure which we can find is almost as great as the variety which we can imagine, we may well conclude that we have no right to expect anything.

Before we make our initial choice from the list of ten categories, let us remind ourselves of some important facts by a glance at the practice of modern spoken English. If we were asked by a foreigner for a general rule of word order in English, we should say, I suppose: The subject precedes the predicate. On second thoughts, we should add: That is, in a statement the subject must precede the predicate; any utterance in which part of the predicate, in the form of an auxiliary verb, precedes the subject is a question.

We shall have more than second thoughts, but let us consider for a moment the nature of our statement so far as it has gone. Our immediate classification of English sentences is in syntactical terms, according to whether the subject precedes the predicate or the predicate the subject. Yet the determinants of these alternative orders are not themselves syntactical; they are logical. Even then, the rule is not absolute; for there are questions which in respect of order are indistinguishable from statements, e.g., 'You haven't done it?', and the classification of the logical conditions which determine order in questions is subtle and difficult.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, our statement that the subject precedes the predicate in indicative statements is not entirely true. Consider, for example, 'Here comes a policeman', 'There goes a bus', 'Never have I heard such nonsense', or 'He would not do it, nor would I expect him to'. The importance of these exceptions lies in the fact that they are not instances of subordinate syntactical rules concerning negatives or demonstratives or adverbs or conjunctions; they are instances of the occurrence of specified words in specified patterns, and their usage can be communicated to a foreigner only by exhaustive lists and examples.

This reminds us that we cannot expect to find that the determinants of order in any language are all of one type. Determinants

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Brugmann, *Vschd.* pp. 1 ff.

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of several different types may, as it were, pull a given utterance in different directions, and the order in which it is eventually formulated will represent the victory of one type of determinant over the others.<sup>1</sup>

The co-existence of determinants of different types is one of the fundamental facts of language. If I construct a sentence containing a subject and a verb which I have never used before—because, let us say, someone has just invented them—my unthinking grasp of a highly general and abstract syntactical rule will ensure that I put the subject before the verb. But this application of a rule to an unfamiliar content does not weaken my adherence to certain familiar patterns which are in conflict with the rule, such as ‘nor would I expect him to’. Historically speaking, over a long enough period the balance of power between determinants demonstrably shifts;<sup>2</sup> but it would be a very unusual language in which all the utterances of a given individual speaker were wholly and exhaustively determined by mutually exclusive rules belonging all to the same type.

With these considerations in mind, let us turn back to our Greek example, Πρωταγόρας ἦκει, and make our first choice of a type of determinant for further exploration. It is clear that not all the ten types listed afford an equal purchase. The phonological type offers no firm purchase at all; rhythmically, the word Πρωταγόρας is choriambic; accentually, it is paroxytone with a short penultimate vowel; it begins with a consonant, and ends with one; its vowels are all back-vowels. The number of ways in which Πρωταγόρας can be seen to differ phonologically from ἦκει is very large, and the possible phonological reasons for the order Πρωταγόρας ἦκει are accordingly so numerous that no obvious starting-point of enquiry suggests itself. Similarly, if the determinant of the order is habit, or ceremonial, or aesthetic variation, it will not normally be discoverable. When the author is dead, there are limits to the inferences we can draw from what he has left us in writing.

The fact that some types of answer are hard to obtain does not mean that these answers are wrong; it means only that we shall be

<sup>1</sup> Schwyzer, *Gr.* II, p. 690. Firbas, *Comm.* pp. 39f., *WO*, p. 73 speaks of ‘hierarchies of principles’ and illustrates the growth of the domination of syntactical principles of order in English.

<sup>2</sup> Bloomfield, pp. 156f.



unwise to attempt such an answer until we have first explored the possibilities of easier types. The possibility of an answer in lexical or semantic terms depends in the first instance on observation and thereafter on statistical compilation or negative observation. The process reveals that there are many words in Greek which never begin a sentence, and others which never end one. In addition, there are some which are disproportionately common at the beginning of a sentence. These data are useful, but they do not help us with Πρωταγόρας ἦκει.

An answer in morphological or syntactical terms stands at the opposite extreme to the phonological. Morphological and syntactical categories in Greek are few, and the possible alternative rules of order in terms of these categories are correspondingly few. Also, there is seldom room for disagreement on whether a given word is noun or verb, subject or object or predicate.<sup>1</sup> The *a priori* advantage of a morphological or syntactical answer is strengthened by the fact that in very many languages the determinants of order are syntactical<sup>2</sup> and may be thought to be strengthened by ancient theory. The order subject–verb is described by Demetrius *Eloc.* 199 as ‘natural’ (ἡ φυσικὴ τάξις), and noun–verb by Dionysius *Comp. Verb.* 5 as τῆ φύσει ἐπόμενον. But any inclination which the statistician may feel to welcome the ancient critics as allies may falter when he considers their reasons. Demetrius, speaking specifically of narrative, says that the subject-matter (τὸ περὶ οὗ) of a sentence should be stated first, and ὁ τοῦτό ἐστιν second, which is not quite the same as saying that the syntactical subject precedes the syntactical predicate. He continues: ‘but, of course, the order can be reversed. . . . I do not unconditionally approve the former order and condemn the latter; I am merely setting forth τὸ φυσικὸν εἶδος τῆς τάξεως.’ Demetrius’s conception of ‘nature’ is not necessarily based on linguistic usage, as we may see from Dionysius. Dionysius thinks it natural that nouns should precede verbs because nouns denote substance (οὐσία) whereas verbs denote accident (συμβεβηκός) and substance is ‘by nature’ prior to accident. He once believed, he says, that in order to write well we should follow nature and put nouns before verbs; but he realised later that this *a priori* philoso-

<sup>1</sup> The problem of Greek order in general has usually been discussed in syntactical terms, e.g. by Chantraine, Frisk, Kühner and Schwyzer.

<sup>2</sup> Barth, pp. 22 ff.

phical view of the relation between substance and accident was irrelevant to good writing. He deserves credit for his observation, and gratitude for the honesty with which he reveals the divergence of interest between metaphysics and linguistics. When we come to examine syntactical statistics, we shall do so without philosophical allies.

## (iii) MATERIAL

It is proposed in the next three chapters to identify types of determinant in Greek word order; it is therefore necessary to define 'Greek' for this limited purpose.

Clearly our enquiry must be into early Greek; the study of word order in the Gospels or Plutarch is interesting and worth-while, but no one will want to turn first to them for an answer to a question about the structure of the Greek language so long as the material of earlier centuries is available.<sup>1</sup> Equally clearly, our attention must be concentrated on prose rather than poetry. In poetry rhythm is among the determinants of form;<sup>2</sup> and where the determinants of form generally are more numerous, the isolation of the determinants of word order in particular is likely to be more difficult. This consideration is responsible also for my comparative neglect of that large portion of fourth-century prose in which rhythmical and phonetic preoccupations are demonstrably at work among the forces determining the form in which authors express themselves.

I have therefore paid special attention to Herodotus and documentary inscriptions. I am aware that Herodotus was an artist, the power and beauty of whose work are manifest on every page; yet there are two important respects in which his language is 'natural'. He does not try, as Thucydides constantly tries, to say too much in too few words; nor does he wrestle clumsily with language in the manner of the so-called 'Old Oligarch'. Secondly, the rhythmical and

<sup>1</sup> The statistics in Frisk, pp. 16ff., show important differences in syntactical order between Hellenistic and Classical Greek; we may perhaps come to the conclusion that the major difference is the emergence in Hellenistic Greek of syntactical determinants which are irrelevant to Classical Greek.

<sup>2</sup> Porzig, p. 97, says that the exigencies of metre do not create new patterns of order but only determine the author's choice between existing alternatives. I am not sure that this distinction does not beg the question; cf. Wackernagel, *Dicht.* pp. 6ff.; Bloomfield, pp. 157f., 165; Spiegel, p. 514.