CONDITIONALITY IN JOHN’S GOSPEL: A CRITIQUE
AND EXAMINATION OF TIME AND REALITY
AS CLASSICALLY CONCEIVED IN
CONDITIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS

MICHAEL J. THATE*

“The only reason for time is so that everything doesn’t happen at once.”
“Reality is merely an illusion, although a very persistent one.”

Albert Einstein

In her famed poem “Sacred Emily,” penned in 1913, Gertrude Stein claimed, “A rose is a rose is a rose.”¹ The verse has since sparked legendary appropriation—ranging from Margaret Thatcher’s “a crime is a crime is a crime” quip in 1981, referring to the actions of IRA affiliates, to Ernest Hemingway’s satirical stab at French editors, “a stone is a stein is a rock is a boulder is a pebble,”² and to D. A. Carson’s claim that “an aorist is an aorist is an aorist.”³ The saying has become inculcated as cultural idiom for claiming that things are what they are, or, as with the aorist, that however diverse the pragmatic function, the semantics of the inflection remain constant. The aim of this paper is to investigate the function of conditional clauses with an indicative in the protasis in John’s Gospel, and to see if, after all, “a conditional is a conditional is a conditional.” We will stay our answer until the end of this essay, while tracing the two categories of time and reality.

What is a conditional?⁴ Defining words properly is indeed a fine and peculiar craft.⁵ C. F. D. Moule states that “[t]he general formula ‘Given

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¹ Gertrude Stein, “Sacred Emily,” in Geography and Plays (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1999 [1922]).
² Hemingway would later write, “an onion is an onion is an onion,” in For Whom the Bell Tolls.
³ The aphorism was uttered during the seminar on “Advanced Greek Grammar” at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in the spring semester of 2006. The theory behind the large majority of this essay must be credited to the rough proposal of D. A. Carson.

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certain conditions, certain results follow’, which underlies Conditional Sentences, has to include a wide and flexible range of phrase in order to express the range of contingencies in varying conditions. Tight definitions therefore should be avoided. Structurally speaking, a conditional sentence consists “of a subordinate clause stating the condition or supposition (the if-clause) and a main clause giving the inference or conclusion.” It is a “construction that functions in the realm of pragmatic usage, linking two smaller units within one larger discourse unit.” It is important when discussing conditionals to keep in mind the levels of differential analysis—structural, semantic, and pragmatic. This essay will for the most part skip over the semantic discussion, for the structural and pragmatic analyses will inform and modify the semantic.

While the scope of this project is rather inert—limited to one book of the NT, and one aspect—the ambition behind it is fairly grand. The data presented here are the groundwork for what hopes to be a full investigation of Johannine idiolect vis-à-vis the conditional construction. Of course, in order to discover Johannine idiolect, the steps of this assignment would need to be enlarged to cover the whole of conditionality, and extended to the rest of the Johannine literature, and then repeated within the Gospel genre in particular, and the NT and the wider Hellenistic writings of the period in general. The benefits of such a study would be far reaching—not least as it relates to the aspectuality of the verb. Conditional statements prove a fertile field for testing verbal aspect theory, “since so much discussion revolves around their sphere of temporal reference.” For now, we will only examine the indicative in the protasis, moving from a purely descriptive probe to a rough proposal.

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12 To my knowledge, such an investigation has not been done. Edwin A. Abbot, *Johannine Grammar* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1906), for example, lacks a section on the conditional construction—though he mentions it here and there in sections 2078–86; 2513–16.
15 The choice of the indicative should be evident. This is the mood where grammars traditionally place the interface of time. Outside of the indicative, so the saying goes, all bets are off.
I. PREVIOUS PROPOSALS

1. Goodwin. Though there are numerous proposals for classification, two major schools on conditional statements hold sway. The first dominant school of classification is that of W. W. Goodwin, who argued for four groupings of conditional statements: (1) present and past conditions implying nothing as to fulfillment; (2) present and past conditions implying non-fulfillment; (3) future conditions; and (4) future less vivid.

   a. Present and past conditions implying nothing as to fulfillment. Within this grouping, there are two forms:
      i. Particular—εἰ + indicative (including the future) in the protasis, and any verbal in the apodosis.
      ii. General—either εἰναὶ + subjunctive in the protasis and a present indicative in the apodosis; or an augment with εἰ + optative in the protasis and imperfect verbal in the apodosis.

   b. Present and past conditions implying non-fulfillment. This form consists of εἰ + augment in the protasis, and ἀναλημμα + augmented form in the apodosis.

   c. Future more vivid conditions. This can consist of either εἰναὶ + subjunctive, or εἰ + future in the protasis, any future verbal form in the apodosis.

   d. Future less vivid conditions. This is when εἰ + optative occurs in the protasis, and ἀναλημμα + optative follows in the apodosis.

This position has been roundly criticized in the literature, and these criticisms need not be rehearsed here.

2. Gildersleeve. The second major conditional scheme was formulated by B. L. Gildersleeve. Porter comments that in “using Gildersleeve’s Mood-oriented analysis, along with the significant contribution of verbal aspect, a sizable step forward can be taken in understanding conditional statements.” Gildersleeve’s scheme “combines a formal analysis of the protasis with the

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16 It is not the purposes of this paper to provide a history of the literature. For the vast bibliography and nuanced proposals, see Porter, Verbal Aspect 291–94. It will be apparent that I rely rather heavily upon Porter’s analysis.


19 See Porter’s six criticisms in Verbal Aspect 292–93; idem, Idioms 254.

20 See Porter, Verbal Aspect 293–94 for bibliography.

21 Ibid. 294.
semantics of attitudinal function,” providing two major categories: assertion and projection.

a. Assertion
   i. For the sake of argument
   ii. Assertion to the contrary
      aa. Projection with no reference to fulfillment
      bb. Projection with contingency for fulfillment
      cc. Expectation of fulfillment

b. Projection
   i. Projection with no reference to fulfillment
   ii. Projection with contingency for fulfillment
   iii. Expectation of fulfillment.

Despite these improvements, problems remain: the aspects are scattered haphazardly, and some of the labels revert to time-based categories.

3. Porter. A third proposal worthy of note is the recent work of Stanley E. Porter. For our purposes, we will examine only his designation of first and second class conditionals.

   a. First Class Conditionals. A first class condition asserts something for the sake of argument: the general form is ει + indicative. “Despite much work on the Moods, there is still the persistent belief among certain grammarians that this category of conditional asserts a fact.”

   As J. L. Boyer’s study has demonstrated, however, this category is not necessarily as tight as is suggested in the grammars.
Of the twenty-eight first class conditionals that appear in John’s Gospel,²⁸ sixteen (57%) fit the classic pattern of assertion, with the helping word “since” figuring into the protasis;²⁹ two remain unclear (7%);³⁰ and the remaining ten (36%) are exceptions to one degree or another.³¹ Boyer’s classification of the whole of the NT yields similar results:³²

Instances where the condition was obviously true 115 37%
Instances where the condition was obviously false 36 12%
Instances where the condition was undetermined 155 51%

Consider the following exceptions. In John 8:39, Jesus states εἰ τέκνα τοῦ Ἄβραάμ ἐστε, τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Ἄβραάμ ἐποιεῖτε. Though εἰμί shows up in the protasis in the present tense, it is, of course, aspectually vague. Grammatically speaking, this is mere assertion: if you are x, you would do y. However, the Whispering Wizard’s³³ polemics are far more biting. Jesus turns the Pharisees’ claim of bastardry on its head (8:19). This was a radical indictment,³⁴ and a charge not missed by the Pharisees (cf. v. 41). Naked grammar and classification miss the point. Somewhere between ὁ δὲ ὁ σπέρμα Ἄβραάμ ἐστε (8:37), and ὑμεῖς ποιεῖτε τὰ ἔργα τοῦ πατρός ὑμῶν (Satan; 8:41), lies the thrust of the condition of 8:39: εἰ τέκνα τοῦ Ἄβραάμ ἐστε, τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Ἄβραάμ ἐποιεῖτε. Contextually, Jesus’ interlocutors’ “‘father’ must therefore be someone else.”³⁵ Does the label realis, or assertion for the sake of the argument, capture the narrative dynamics of 8:39?

The simple assertion of “since” could work for 8:46, but misses what the language is doing. The apodosis διὰ τί υμεῖς οὐ πιστεύετε μοι draws the interlocutor into a dialogue with the protasis.

The simple assertion “since” will not work for 10:24: εἰ σὺ εἴδος ὁ χριστός, εἰπὲ ἡμῖν παρρησία. There is little doubt in the Jews’ minds that Jesus is not the Christ. As Young Siward said in a different context, “The devil himself could not produce a title more hateful to mine ear.”³⁶ Of course, one could argue that this is an assertion for the sake of argument, but this misses the

²⁸ This number was arrived at by searching GRAMCORD for a subordinating conjunction + the indicative, excluding all of Porter’s second class conditionals. In twenty-seven of the hits, εἰ signaled the protasis. The one exception—which needs closer inspection—was 12:26.
³⁰ 14:11; 15:22.
³² Boyer, “First Class Conditions” 76. Of course, one exegete’s “undetermined” may be another’s “obviously true,” or “obviously false.” There is a learning curve, and its name is “interpretation”!
³³ The language of “whispering wizard” (of the imperfect tense) belongs to Thomas Mann and Der Zauberberg (The Magic Mountain), and is applied to John’s Gospel by R. Alan Culpepper, Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 15.
tenor of the Jews’ “question.” There is no interest on the part of the Pharisees in “argument” in any loose sense. The language is accusatory. The idea of assertion for the sake of argument is present, but there are obvious problems with the nomenclature.

John 15:20a departs from this scheme as well. Jesus warns the disciples: εἰ ἐμὲ ἔδωξαν, καὶ ὑμᾶς διώξουσιν. Jesus is certainly not denying the assumption that he in fact was persecuted, but the persecution Jesus has in mind is the future event of the cross. Moreover, certainty (vivid expectation) is grammaticalized in the apodosis. The disciples can expect to be persecuted because Jesus was persecuted (cf. 16:33). Verse 20b is less certain: εἰ τὸν λόγον μου ἐτήρησαν, καὶ τὸν ὑμέτερον τηρήσουσιν. Who are the “they” referred to in the morphology of ἐτήρησαν? Is it the “they” referred to in the morphology of ἔδωξαν? If so, then the augmented tense in the protasis would suggest irrealis. But the certainty (realis) of 20a seems to suggest that equal certainty (realis) be assumed in the protasis of 20b. Moreover, the prevalent notion that the aorist and the imperfect are past-referring and the present is present-referring is doubtful. As John A. L. Lee has demonstrated in his work on the inheritance of errors in lexicography, so it seems that the sins of the fathers, as it were, have passed from grammar to grammar, with little thought given to the large body of counterexamples. In fact, “enough clear examples exist to prove the standard rule inadequate and force subsequent examination to approach verbal usage from a non-temporal perspective.” To press the two aorist verbs in the protasis of 15:20 for temporal distinctiveness “on the basis of verb tense is to run the risk of making nonsense.”

The use of the present tense ποιῶ in the protasis of 10:37, for example, needs to be read in light of the perfective ἔδωκα of verse 32. The protasis cannot be reduced to Jesus’ current workings. It is best read as proverbial, or timeless. The apodosis contains the directional command μὴ πιστεύετέ μοι. Many translations (e.g. NIV, TNIV) flip the protasis and apodosis. Doing so, however, misses the emphasis and rhetoric—that is, εἰ οὐ ποιῶ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ πατρὸς μου.

Aktionsart has a difficult time explaining the use of the present tense in 15:18: Εἰ ὁ κόσμος ὑμᾶς καταστρέφει, γινώσκετε ὅτι ἐμὲ πρὸτον ὑμῶν μεμίσθηκεν. The protasis is presented by John as being imperfective. John’s Gospel has yet

41 Ibid. 298.
to reveal Jesus being hated by the world, much less any hint of the world’s hatred of the disciples.\footnote{Pace Raymond E. Brown, The Gospel According to John XIII–XXI: Introduction, Translation, and Notes (ABC; New York: Doubleday, 1970) 686.} Time, therefore, is irrelevant, and is best taken as timeless or gnomic. The tense communicates aspect, not time. The apodosis consists of both direction: γίνοσκετε and stative assertion: ὅτι ἐμὲ πρῶτον ὑμῶν μεμίσθηκεν.

Our brief survey of first class conditionals, as classified by Porter, in John’s Gospel reveals that “[c]onditionals that are past-referring virtually always have clear temporal dexis.”\footnote{Porter, Verbal Aspect 300.} Moreover, the relationship between the hypothesis and its consequent “must be determined by appeal to context.”\footnote{Porter, Idioms 255.} Stringent classification and definition must therefore be avoided.

b. Second class conditionals. This group is often labeled contrary to fact: εἰ + indicative (negated by μη), with ἄν in the apodosis, with an aorist or imperfect in the apodosis.\footnote{See John L. Lyons, Semantics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) 2.818. Porter (Verbal Aspect 304; Idioms 259–60) seems to drop the pluperfect from this category in his most recent presentation. He cites John 11:12 in his simple condition section in Idiom.} It is in these hypothetical statements and counterfactuals where verbal aspect, as opposed to the time-based schemes found in most grammars, makes the best sense of the tenses.\footnote{That is, against temporal reference. See Porter, Verbal Aspect 305, following J. Gonda, The Character of Indo-European Moods, with Special Regard to Greek and Sanskrit (Wiesbaden: Harrossowitz, 1956) 179.} Porter hints that this is merely a subcategory of the first category,\footnote{Porter, Idioms 260.} but insists that the “major distinctive of this class is provided by the apodosis with the conditional particle (ἄν).”\footnote{Ibid.} This takes seriously the phenomenon of the particle in the apodosis, but gaps remain in this approach (cf. the absence of ἄν in 15:22).

Of the thirteen second class conditionals that appear in John’s Gospel, eight (62%) fit the mold of the contrary-to-fact label; five (38%), however, need closer inspection.

John 9:41, on the face of it at least, appears to be more proof in the pudding of the irrealis or contrary-to-fact scheme. Jesus says, εἰ τυφλοὶ ἦτε, οὐκ ἄν εἶχεν άμαρτίαν. Yes, ἦτε is aspectually vague, but grammatically the scheme holds. The Pharisees are not τυφλοί, for they claim to be able to see. But can they really see? This is the brilliance of John—for the grammar would suggest “yes,” while the context would suggest “no.” To press the category of the second class conditional would miss the “guiding irony” within the surrounding context.\footnote{Craig S. Keener, The Gospel of John: A Commentary (Vol. 1; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003) 795. On irony, especially as it relates to this text, see Paul D. Duke, Irony in the Fourth Gospel (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985) 124.}

John 14:28, however, presents a problem for those who assert that the augmented tense in the protasis carries with it a flavor of irrealis. Jesus, in
response to his disciples’ questions, states that εἰ ἡγαπάτε με ἐχάρητε ἄν ὅτι
πορεύομαι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα. Does the imperfect use of ἀγαπάω reveal Jesus’
incredulity toward the disciples’ love for him? Surely their love is not perfect,
but is Jesus really saying something like, “If you love me (and you most cer-
tainly do not!),” or, “If you did love me . . .”? No, Jesus knows that his disciples
love him. This is Jesus teaching his disciples what it means to love him: to
rejoice that he is going to the Father.

Boyer rightly claims that “the tenses used were determined by normal
aspectual considerations, not by arbitrary rule of grammar.” Aspect, not
time, is communicated by the morphemes. The use of the pluperfect in 8:19,
for example—εἰ ἤδεισε, καὶ τὸν πατέρα μου ἂν ἤδειτε—apparently refers to
a present situation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref.</th>
<th>Protasis</th>
<th>Apodosis</th>
<th>Neg.</th>
<th>Comment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:25</td>
<td>εἰ σὺ Οὐκ εἰ (PAI2S) ο χριστὸς οὐδὲ Ἡλίας οὐδὲ ὁ προφήτης;</td>
<td>τί οὖν βαπτίζεις (PAI2s)</td>
<td>οὐκ</td>
<td>Apodosis comes first;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:12</td>
<td>εἰ τὰ ἐπίγεια εἶπον (AAI1s) ὑμῖν καὶ οὐ πιστεύετε (PAI2pl);</td>
<td>πῶς ἐὰν εἴπω (AAI2s) ὑμῖν τὰ ἐποιήματα πιστεύεστε (FAI2pl);</td>
<td>οὐ</td>
<td>Subj in apodosis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:10</td>
<td>εἰ ἦδεις (PlpA12s) τὴν δωρεὰν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὰς ἐστίν ὁ λέγων σοι ὅσον μοι πεῖν</td>
<td>σὺ ἂν ἤτησας (AAI2s) αὐτὸν καὶ ἔδωκεν ἂν σοι ὕδωρ ζῶν.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pluperfect in protasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:46</td>
<td>εἰ γὰρ ἐπιστεύετε (IAI2pl) Μωϋσει,</td>
<td>ἐπιστεύετε (IAI2pl)</td>
<td>ἂν ἐμοί</td>
<td>Note the use of ἂν in apod.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:47</td>
<td>εἰ δὲ τοῖς ἐκείνου γράμμασιν οὐ πιστεύετε (PAI2p);</td>
<td>πῶς τοῖς ἐμοῖς ῥήμασιν πιστεύεστε (FAI2pl);</td>
<td>οὐ</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7:4</td>
<td>εἰ ταῦτα ποιεῖς (PAI2s) φανέρωσον (AAImpv2s) σεαυτὸν τῷ κόσμῳ.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Imperative in apod.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:23</td>
<td>εἰ περιτομὴν λαμβάνει (PAI3s) ἄνθρωπος ἐν σαββάτῳ ηῷα μὴ Λυθῇ ὁ νόμος Μωϋσέως,</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

52 Though in disagreement with his classification of contrary-to-fact conditions, on this point
53 Ibid. 309.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Greek Text</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:19</td>
<td>εἰ ἐμὲ Ἰδεῖτε (PlpAI2pl) καὶ τὸν πατέρα μου ἄν Ἰδεῖτε (PlpAI2pl).</td>
<td>Pluperfect in prot., and apod.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8:39</td>
<td>εἰ τέκνα τοῦ ἄραμα ἔστε (PAI2p) τὰ ἔργα τοῦ ἄραμα ἐποιεῖτε (IAI2p)</td>
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<td>8:42</td>
<td>εἰ ὁ θεὸς πατήρ ὑμῶν ἦν (IAI3s) ἤγαπάτε (IAI2p) ἄν ἐμὲ</td>
<td>Note use of ἄν in apod.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8:46</td>
<td>εἰ ἀλῆθειαν λέγω (PAI1s) διὰ τὶ ὑμεῖς οὐ πιστεύετε (PAI2pl) μοι;</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:25</td>
<td>εἰ ἀμαρτωλὸς ἔστιν (PAI3s) οὐκ οἶδα (PfAI1S) οὐκ</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9:33</td>
<td>εἰ μὴ ἦν (IAI3s) οὗτος παρὰ θεοῦ οὐκ ἠδύνατο (IMI3s) ποιεῖν (PAINf) οὐδενὶ οὐ Π</td>
<td>Note use of ἄν in apod.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9:41</td>
<td>εἰ τυφλοὶ ἦτε (IAI2p) οὐκ ἄν εἴχητε (IAI2p) ἀμαρτίαν</td>
<td>Note use of ἄν in apod.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:24</td>
<td>εἰ σὺ εἶ (PAI2s) ὁ χριστός. Εἰπὲ (AAImpv2s) ἡμῖν παρρησία.</td>
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<td>10:35</td>
<td>εἰ ἐκείνους εἴπεν (AAI3S) θεοὺς Uncertain (interference)</td>
<td>w/o apodosis?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:37</td>
<td>εἰ οὐ ποιῶ (PAI1S) τὰ ἐργα τοῦ πατρὸς μου (PAImpv. 2Pl) μη</td>
<td>Imperative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:38</td>
<td>εἰ δὲ ποιῶ (PAI1S) κἂν ἐμοὶ μὴ πιστεύητε (PASubj.2P), τοῖς ἐργαὶς πιστεύετε (PAImpv.2pl) A lot of interference; also look at κἂν</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:12</td>
<td>εἰ κεκοίμηται (Pf.MI3S) σωθήσεται (FPI3S)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:21</td>
<td>εἰ Ἰδο (IAI2s) ὅδε (adv) οὐκ ἄν ἀπέθανεν (AAI3S) ο άδελφος μου. οὐκ</td>
<td>Note use of ἄν in apod.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:26</td>
<td>καὶ ὅπου εἰμὶ ἐγὼ ἐκεῖ καὶ ὁ διάκονος ὁ ἐμὸς ἔσται (FMI3s)</td>
<td>Note use of ὅπου</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13:14</td>
<td>εἰ οὖν ἐγὼ ἐνισκά (AAI1S) ὑμῶν τοὺς πόδας ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ διδάσκαλος καὶ ὁ υἱὸς ὁλόκληρος καὶ οὐκ</td>
<td>Note use of καὶ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:17</td>
<td>εἰ ταῦτα οἴδατε (Pf.AI2Pi) μακάριοι ἔστε (PAI2P) έαν ποιήτε (PASubj.2P) αὐτά Use of ἕαν</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13:32</td>
<td>εἰ ὁ θεὸς ἑδωκάσθη (API3S) ἐν αὐτῶ. καὶ ὁ θεὸς δοξάσει (FAI3S) αὐτὸν ἐν αὐτῶ, καὶ εὐθὺς δοξάσει (FAI3S) αὐτῶν. Note use of καὶ</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
14:2 εἰ δὲ μὴ (ἐν τῇ οίκῳ τοῦ πατρὸς μου μοναὶ πολλαὶ εἰσίν) [PAI3P] εἶπον (AAI1S) ἃν ὑμῖν Νote use of ἃν and the “relative” use of the prot.

14:7 εἰ ἐγνώκατε, (Pf.AI2pl) με καὶ τὸν πατέρα μου γνώσθε (FMI2P) Note use of καὶ

14:11 εἰ δὲ μή. διὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτὰ πιστεύετε (PAImpv2p). Note use of ἃν

14:28 εἰ ἡγαπάτε, (IAI2P) με ἐχάρητε (API2pl) ἃν ὁτι πορεύομαι (PMI1S) πρὸς τὸν πατέρα Imperative intermittent with Pf. apod.

15:18 Εἰ ὁ κόσμος ὑμᾶς μισεῖ (PAI3S) γινώσκετε (PAImpv.2pl) ὅτι ἐμὲ πρῶτον ὑμῖν μεμίσθηκεν (Pf.AI3S) Note use of ἃν

15:19 εἰ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου ἢτε (IAI2P) κόσμος ἃν τὸ ἱδίον ἔφιξε (IAI3S) Note use of ἃν

15:20a εἰ ἡμὲ Ἄδιώξαν (AAI3P) καὶ ὑμᾶς διώξουσιν (FAI3P) Note use of καὶ

15:20b εἰ τὸν λόγον μου ἐτήρησαν (AAI3P) καὶ τὸν ὑμέτερον τηρήσουσιν (FAI3P) Note use of καὶ

15:22 εἰ μὴ ἥλθον (AAI1s) καὶ ἐλάλησα (AAI1S) αὐτοῖς, ἀμαρτίαν ὡκ εἶχοσαν ὡκ (IAI3P) Note use of καὶ

15:24 εἰ τὰ ἔργα μὴ ἐποίησα (AAI1S) ἃν αὐτοῖς ἃ οὐδεὶς ἄλλος ἐποίησεν (AAI3S) Άμαρτίαν ὡκ εἶχοσαν ὡκ (IAI3P)

15:25 εἰ ὃν ἐμὲ ἔχητε (PAI2Pl) ἄφητε (AAImpv2pl.) toύτους ὑπάγειν (PAInf.) Imperative in apod?

18:8 εἰ οὐν ἐμὲ ἔχητε (PAI2Pl) μαρτύρησον (AAImpv.2S) περὶ τοῦ κακοῦ: Παρεδέχεστε (PAInf.) Imperative in apod?

18:23a εἰ κακοῦς ἐλάλησα (IAI1S) τούτους ὑπάγειν (PAInf.)

18:23b εἰ δὲ καλῶς, τί με δέχεσθε; (PAI2S) Παρεδέχεστε (PAInf.) Use of ἃν

18:30 εἰ μὴ ἢν (IAI3S) οὖν τοῦ κακοῦ ποιῶν (PAPtcMSN) οὐκ ἃν σοι παρεδέχεσθε (AAI1P) αὐτὸν.

18:36 εἰ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου ἢν (IAI3S) ή βασιλεία ή ἐμή oἰ υπηρέται oἱ ἐμοὶ ἡγοιξόντο (ImI3Pl) [ἀν] ἃν μὴ παραδοθοῦ (APSubj.1S) τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις
What then of the various tenses in conditional constructions, and the relationship between the protasis and the apodosis? Diversity demonstrates choice, and choice reveals emphases. Can any emphases be determined based upon John’s morphological decisions? “Establishing the exact relation between protasis and apodosis is more difficult, since there are no firm criteria by which such an analysis may be made.” 54 Boyer suggests, in the first class construction at least, “a simple logical connection between protasis and apodosis.” 55 Is this correct? Porter is probably right in stating there likely will “never be a scheme for conditionals that will meet the approval of all grammarians, but formal criteria utilizing attitudinal and aspecural semantics provide a helpful basis for advancing discussion of the protasis.” 56

Following the preliminary work of D. A. Carson, 57 I suggest that Porter’s first and second class conditionals be lumped into a single group where the assertive attitude—the indicative—appears or is assumed (e.g. 18:23b) in the protasis, excluding the future. The distinguishable morphological aspect of this group is the assertive attitude. Though the majority of Porter’s class one and class two conditionals are distinguishable, often enough these categories prove inadequate. Though the label “assertion” can bring with it the baggage of the simple gloss “since,” the label is still helpful because group one conditionals all assert or do something. Assertion is broad enough to allow context to define what is being asserted. 58 The benefits of this proposal are that it allows flux for the uncertainty of the particle āv, appreciates verbal aspect, and, of course, creates a wide open space for interstructural dialogue of protasis and apodosis.

Therefore, as McKay rightly suggests, the “measure of doubt introduced by a conditional protasis depends partly on the form of the protasis, but mainly on the context as a whole.” 59 Such categories as “open condition,” “unreal
condition,” “remote condition,” and the like may be helpful at the pragmatic level, but structurally speaking the categories can be misleading.\footnote{164}

At the pragmatic level, conditional sentences can be “uttered as a veiled threat, request, command, and the like.”\footnote{61} Grouping Porter’s class one and class two conditionals allows contextual indicators to interpret the nature of the assertion and gives room for the interplay of semantically-relevant factors which, according to John L. Lyons, are impossible to identify. Moreover, “it is also impossible to calculate the probability, and therefore the information-content, of any part of them.”\footnote{97}

Any classification of the conditional construction must remain wide and flexible and allow for context to determine the precise relation of the protasis with the apodosis. “The prominent role that dialogue and direct speech play in the Fourth Gospel calls for attention to the capacity of language to perform multiple functions in one literary context.”\footnote{75} The scheme must fit the script.

III. CONCLUSION

A. T. Robertson once said, “For some reason the Greek conditional sentence has been very difficult for students to understand.”\footnote{1004} Part of this difficulty is owing to its overclassification. As Moisés Silva said in a different context, “[W]e need not be disturbed when complete precision and certainty elude us; responsible uncertainty will take us considerably further than baseless assurance.”\footnote{177}

So, can we conclude that “a conditional is a conditional is a conditional?” With respect to group one conditionals outlined above, just as a Hybrid Tea, a Grandiflora, a Floribunda, and a Miniature are all a rose, so are all group one conditionals assertive, in a responsibly uncertain way. Context, it seems, is king after all.\footnote{This essay is the fruit of D. A. Carson’s lively seminar, “Advanced Greek Grammar,” held at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School during the spring semester of 2006. I am profoundly grateful to both professor and students for the stimulating discussion and collegial environment and offer these pages as a hearty dedication.}

\footnote{Ibid. 164.}
\footnote{Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics 681.}
\footnote{John L. Lyons, Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) 97.}
\footnote{Jo-Ann A. Brant, Dialogue and Drama: Elements of Greek Tragedy in the Fourth Gospel (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004) 75.}
\footnote{Robertson, Grammar 1004.}
\footnote{Moisés Silva, Biblical Words and their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) 177.}