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SHOULD THE MAY-POTENTIAL USE OF THE SUBJUNCTIVE BE
RECOGNIZED IN LATIN?

In his Critique of Some Recent Subjunctive Theories (Cornell Studies in Classical Philology, No. IX.), Bennett cites passages and uses arguments, intended to disprove the claim, advanced in my Studies in Latin Moods and Tenses, that the Latin subjunctive has not the power of expressing the 'may-possibly' idea. For the purposes of the discussion in my Studies, I accepted Roby's list of instances from Silver Latin as sufficiently complete for that period. Bennett cites the following as additional instances, not considered by me:

Plaut. Asin. 465 *sit, non sit, non edepol scio*.

Fronto, p. 25, 10; 136, 1; 224, 19 (Naber) *quaeras fortasse*; p. 63, 1 *fortasse requiras*; p. 159 *dicas fortasse*; p. 114, 9 *fortasse contemnas*.

Ps.-Quint. Decl. CCLI (p. 27, 28, Ritter) *habeant fortasse*.

Pliny, Epp. 1, 23, 2 *erraverim fortasse*.

I cannot see that these passages form any obstacle in the way of my contention. Let us consider them for a moment in some detail. Bennett thinks it impossible to interpret the Plautus passage, *sit, non sit, non edepol scio*, otherwise than as meaning, *it may be he, it may not be he*; *I don't pretend to know*. The subjunctive in such passages is commonly¹ explained as being a subjunctive of indirect question with *utrum...an* omitted as in Cic. Quint. Frat. 3, 8, 4 *uelit nolit scire difficile est*; and elsewhere. See, for instance, Kühner, § 234, Anm. 2 (p. 1017), and compare § 177 (p. 754), III, and Gray's note on Ter. Heaut. 643. As Bennett does not state his objections to the usual interpretation of such passages, and as that interpretation seems to me entirely satisfactory in every respect, I cannot see that the passage has any weight against me. This passage, by the way, would, *without the presence of non scio*, be just the sort of passage that Bennett needs to prove his case. I must still insist upon the principle which I laid down in my Studies as being so self-evident as to be axiomatic viz. 'that, no separate class of uses should be made, or recognized, for a mood, unless there is at least one passage, somewhere in the literature, that cannot be satisfactorily explained in any other way. As applied to the case in

hand, the principle may be stated as follows: If there is not at least one instance of the subjunctive mood that can be explained in no other way than by supposing it to have the force of "may possibly," or at least an instance that can be better explained by supposing it to have such a force than by explaining it according to some one of the recognized and indisputable uses of that mood, then there is no justification, or excuse, for supposing it to have that force.' Now, if it were not for the presence of *non scio*, in the Plautus passage that has prompted these remarks, I do not see how *sit, non sit* could possibly be interpreted as meaning anything else than *it may be he, it may not be he*. And if Bennett can find anywhere in Latin literature a single instance such as this would be without the presence of *non scio*, I will admit at once that my whole case has collapsed. Why is it that in such cases we always find some other form of expression e.g. *potest* with the infinitive, or *fortasse* with the indicative?

The passages from Fronto and the one from Ps. Quint., with one possible exception,² seem to me to yield perfectly good sense if interpreted as instances of the contingent use of the subjunctive; thus, *dicas fortasse*, may well mean *perhaps you would say, quaeras fortasse, perhaps you would ask* (where we should commonly say *perhaps you would like to know*). The modal force of the subjunctive would then be exactly the same as in the common English expression 'you would suppose.'³ This brings up the whole question of the naturalness of the conception involved in this interpretation. Bennett denies even the possibility of the conception or of the interpretation. In translating the *dicat fortasse aliquis* in Pliny N.H. 36, 2, I used the expression 'some one would perhaps rejoin.' Of this translation Bennett says (p. 37) 'I must submit that this use of "would" is unknown to our English speech.'

² In the passage on p. 63, line 1, the subjunctive in *fortasse requiras* may perhaps be best explained in the same way as in the *erraverim fortasse*, to be discussed later on in this paper, i.e. as due to the influence of *forsitan* reflected through *fortasse*. This same explanation would apply equally well to the other instances.

³ In 'perhaps you would ask,' the 'would' might sometimes be felt as involving a wish (= *would like*), but such expressions are commonly used to express mere contingency, as in 'you would suppose,' 'one would take you for a fool,' &c.

¹ Bennett, so far as I know, stands alone in his interpretation of such passages.

Whether this criticism is well founded or not must be settled by each individual for himself. I have myself been guilty all my life of using 'would' in just such cases and I have frequently heard it used in the same sense by others. Moreover, I am assured by several specialists in English, of the highest reputation, to whom I have submitted the entire passage in which I used the expression in question, that my expression 'some one would perhaps rejoin' represents a perfectly legitimate and natural use of 'would.' Others might agree with Bennett. To all who are not familiar with this use of 'would' I can readily understand that my interpretation of the passages in question may seem forced or unnatural. But I cannot understand how even they can regard it as impossible, when to so many other people it seems natural and is a matter of common usage. However, the question as to whether my use of 'would' was a legitimate one or not is not of the slightest importance in settling the main point at issue, *viz.* whether the Latin subjunctive is used in such contingent expressions, and, if so, whether that interpretation is possible in the passages under discussion. Whether the Latin subjunctive is so used admits of no doubt. If *nemo dicat* can mean *no one would say*, there can be no possible objection on the ground of modal usage to interpreting *aliquis dicat* as meaning *some one would say*. Whether such an interpretation does justice to the passages in question must be left to the judgment of our readers. It seems to me (and, I find, to many others) that it does, and that this interpretation yields satisfactory sense in nearly all the instances of the present subjunctive that are commonly regarded as instances of the may-potential use; and that, where it does not, the alternative interpretation suggested in my Studies is possible and not unnatural. This applies even to *fors fuat an* (and *fors sit an*) which Bennett regards as capable of meaning only *it may be a chance whether*. I fail to see how this satisfies the requirements of the original sense of the phrase any better than *it would be a matter of chance whether*, or some similar expression. A phrase which had this latter meaning would easily come to be used in the sense of 'possibly,' 'perhaps.'

There remains to be considered the *erraverim fortasse* in Pliny. If I am not mistaken, this *erraverim* has been responsible for much mischief. I believe it to be the only instance of the kind in Latin literature—the only one that apparently

gives (and only apparently, I think) justification for the claim that the perfect subjunctive *fecerim* may mean 'I may (perhaps) have done.' Certainly none other occurs before the period of decline. Generalizing from this particular instance, grammarians have treated this as a normal use of the subjunctive. And to-day Latin grammars (even those which no longer translate *amem*, etc., in paradigms of the conjugations, by *I may love*, as all grammars used to do),¹ continue to translate *amaverim*, etc. (in the paradigms) by *I may have loved*, etc. and thus to ask beginners to learn this as illustrating the *regular force* of the perfect subjunctive! I believe that Pliny's *erraverim*, aided perhaps by certain uses of the subjunctive with *forsitan* (see below), has done the whole mischief: and I cannot but think that the force of the subjunctive even in this *erraverim fortasse* has been misunderstood. There can, I think, be no doubt that, at least prior to the period of decline, the subjunctive with *forsitan* (*i. e.* *fors sit an*) continued to be felt merely as the subjunctive of indirect question. This is shown by the facts presented in the note on pages 177–179 of my Studies. To the evidence there presented should be added the further fact that *forsitan* could, until comparatively late times, be used only *before* its verb, as would be expected if the *an* were still felt as governing the verb, while *fortasse* followed the word it modified as often as it preceded it. When *forsitan* began to cease to be felt as introducing an indirect question, it then began to take the indicative, like *fortasse*, and, like it, to follow sometimes the word it modified, and, like it, to be used also with adjectives, adverbs, infinitives, etc. *Forsitan* and *fortasse* seem to have mutually influenced each other—a common phenomenon in language illustrated again, for instance, in *quamquam* and *quamvis*. In classical Latin *quamquam* is used regularly with the indicative and *quamvis* with the subjunctive; but in the period of decline *quamquam*, through the influence of *quamvis*, sometimes takes the subjunctive with an indicative sense, and *quamvis*, through the influence of *quamquam*, sometimes takes the indicative. In a similar manner, as soon as *forsitan*, under the influence of *fortasse*, ceased to be felt

¹ In giving this translation, the authors of grammars probably had chiefly in mind certain subordinate clauses, *e.g.* purpose clauses; but students invariably gained the impression that the translation represented the regular force of the mood in independent clauses. Some grammars even gave *can love*, &c., side by side with *may love*.

as introducing an indirect question, it began to take the indicative; and at the same time *fortasse*, through the influence of *forsitan*, came occasionally to be construed with the subjunctive. The subjunctive in *errauerim fortasse* may be due indirectly to the influence of *forsitan* reflected through *fortasse*. I do not see how else we can account for this use of the perfect subjunctive in Pliny in a manner hitherto unknown to the Latin language. If this be the true explanation of *errauerim fortasse*, we shall have to regard the mood of *errauerim* as due merely to a mechanical association with the use of the subjunctive in indirect questions introduced by *forsitan*. The potential idea involved in the expression would then be due wholly to the *fortasse*, just as, in similar expressions formed by *forsitan* and the subjunctive in classical Latin, the potential idea involved is due wholly to *forsitan* and not at all to the mood of the verb. A potential idea is similarly involved in *fortasse erravi* which means *I may have erred* (lit. *I have perhaps erred*), but no one would on that account say that the indicative *erravi* expresses possibility. Of course it would have been easily possible for the association of ideas, and of usages, involved in this explanation of *errauerim fortasse*, to result ultimately in giving to the subjunctive mood itself a force that had hitherto been foreign to it. But that the subjunctive mood itself ever did actually gain this force, I can not believe until an example is cited similar to *erraverim*, but without the presence of *forsitan* or *fortasse*. I do not believe that such an instance can be cited. If any can be, then we shall have to set it down as representing a use of the subjunctive that was first acquired during the period of decline. In the meantime let us make haste to discard, from the paradigms of conjugations in our school books, such translations of *amaverim*, *monuerim*, etc. as 'I may have loved,' 'I may have advised,' etc.

Before taking leave of this subject, I may say a word regarding Bennett's criticism of *some one will have said* (i.e. *during this discourse*) as a translation of *dixerit quispiam* in Cic. de senectute 3, 8. This interpretation was suggested by Roby and adopted by me. Regarding it, Bennett uses the following language: 'I cannot help feeling that this is highly absurd. The words quoted are those of Cato. He is speaking to Laelius and Scipio. Obviously, if any one had said anything while Cato was discoursing, it must have been one of these

two young men. But *quispiam* cannot refer to either of them. Again, what point is there in the conception "will have said during this discourse"? How could any one have said anything during the discourse without interrupting the speaker? It cannot be urged that *dixerit* means "will have said to himself"; that would have been *secum dixerit*, etc.' Bennett is here straining my words somewhat. My translation was intended merely as illustrative. I should be perfectly ready to give up the phrase 'during this discourse,' as the one to be supplied, and to use in its place 'in the course of his own discussion on some other occasion,' or anything else to suit the situation. It would be still better not to attempt to fix any particular point prior to which the saying is to take place, as the expression is in any case a mere formula. If we are going to insist upon indicating the exact status of the act of saying, even in *dices*, *aliquis dicet*, etc., we shall have to admit that the speaker never really expects the act to take place at all. *Dices, you will say so and so*, is very common in dialogue, but no instance can be cited, I believe, where the person thus addressed ever does actually say the thing the speaker asserts he will. Neither *dixerit*, nor *dices*, nor *dicet* in such cases is ever uttered as a prophecy. These expressions are used merely as convenient means of introducing the discussion of some possible objection that occurs to the speaker himself. If the same method of argument were used in discussing *dices*, *aliquis dicet*, etc., that Bennett uses in discussing *aliquis dixerit*, one might claim with equal force that the verb in these expressions can not mean *will say*. One might, for instance, argue as follows: '*Dices* can not mean *you will say*; for when is the person addressed by *dices* going to say the thing referred to? If he says it during the discourse, it will interrupt somebody (of which he of course will not be guilty); and he will not say it after the discussion is over, as he goes out of the door, for it would be rude not to wait for an answer, and, in any case, it would then be too late to renew the discussion; and he will not say it next day, or later, because if he has any objection to offer, it will not be natural to wait so long before making it. Furthermore no instance can be cited where the person thus addressed by *dices* ever does actually say the thing indicated. Therefore *you will say*, as a translation of *dices*, is inappropriate, untrue, and so impossible.' I maintain that this

sort of argument is not to the point. I may have been unhappy in fixing upon the point of time prior to which the saying is to take place, but I do not see how that has any essential bearing upon the question at stake, *viz.* whether *dixerit* is future perfect indicative. If it be said that the future perfect does not seem natural, the reply will be that perhaps it does not to the English idiom, but it is, so far as I can see, just as natural to the Latin idiom as scores of indisputable future perfects where this tense would be impossible in English, *e.g.* *videro* (Cic. Verr. 2, 61, 150 and often; see Roby, Lat. Gram. p. CVI); *fecero* (Ter. Phorm. 882 and often); and countless other

instances of the same sort. Similarly in *riserit aliquis fortasse* and *fuertit fortasse dicendi* the future perfect seems strange in English, but equally strange uses of the future perfect are met with frequently in some authors and are absent from very few.

I can not feel that Bennett has satisfactorily answered the various objections I raised to the usual interpretation of *aliquis dixerit*. My argument in favour of taking *dixerit* as a future perfect indicative still seems to me to be conclusive and unanswerable.

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TWO NOTES ON THE LATIN SUBJUNCTIVE.

1. The 'May have' perfect.

Erraverim fortasse, Pl. *Ep.* 1, 23, 2, has apparently been regarded by grammarians as the only instance of the use of the perfect in the sense of 'may have.' Professor Bennett, the latest defender of the 'may potential' (*Cornell Studies* IX), while citing various presents gives only this example of the perfect. A search through a number of representative writers of the Empire failed to reveal a second example, until an examination of the Declamations of the Pseudo-Quintilian for another purpose resulted in the discovery of the existence of ten instances of the usage. They are all of the *fortasse* type, but I am confident that a longer search in Silver Latinity, which I hope to make, will disclose the existence of others, unaccompanied by *fortasse*.

The examples are: p. 183, 3, 4 (Ritter) *fortasse erraverim* in dispiendis causis, minus prudentiae habuerim iuvenis; 69, 13, *vos fortasse plus consumpseritis*, patres; 159, 2, *quod fortasse etiam corruperit mores meos*; 171, 14, *et fortasse accidere somnus hic potuerit* inter plures; 182, 27, *despicendum tibi fortasse fuerit*, ad quem venires; 184, 8, *aliud fortasse fuerit*, quod te postea concitarit; 328, 27, *fortasse etiam contulerint* ista detrimenta deliciis tuis; 344, 1, *et alius fortasse tantum usurpaverit libertatem*; 379, 15, *fortasse moriturum non putaveris*.

Fortasse with the present occurs in seven passages (the second of which is cited by Bennett: 12, 2, *fortasse possit*; 27, 28, *habeant fortasse*; 62, 11, *fiant fortasse*; 143, 18, *conveniat fortasse*; 178, 21, *fortasse*

commendet; 189, 12, *possis fortasse*; 327, 25, *adferat fortasse*.

I am making a collection of 'may potentials' in Silver Latin (here more types appear to exist), believing with Bennett that 'other instances quite as decisive could be gathered by systematic searching, particularly in the Latinity of the early Empire.'

2. The Negative with Expressions of the Restitisses Type.

Bennett, speaking of expressions of the *restitisses*, *repugnasses* type, says (*Cornell Studies*, IX, 27): 'the negative is regularly *ne* not *non*.' He cites three passages from Plautus, two from Cicero, one from Seneca, and one from Fronto. The second person occurs in all save the last. The negative in every case but one is *ne*, and here Bennett gives an ingenious, if not entirely convincing explanation of the use of *non*.

The usage is certainly infrequent, for the only instance I have noted in a rather careful examination of a large portion of Silver Latin are three from the Pseudo-Quintilian, where the negative is *non*. They are: 12, 15, *virginem hanc aut viduam non diceret* (dicere A); 37, 4, *invitum non de <di> dissetis*; 53, 18, in his etiam minimis observationibus inhumane non cederet (inhumanum ne ced. B) honorem lateris.

It is to be hoped that the collection may be enlarged, for with only nine passages on which to base the argument (and these in the ratio of five to four) it is impossible to state the regular negative with certainty.

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