Excerpt (from the Preface):

Whoever has read in one book that English has three tenses, in another that it has two, and in yet a third that it has sixteen; or has been told by one authority that the French *imparfait* represents an incomplete or habitual action in the past, by a second that it is used of an action simultaneous with another action, and by a third that it is used for circumstances and background description; or has read in one text that the perfective tenses of Russian are just like the perfect tenses of English, but in another that they are totally different; or has read here that Biblical Hebrew has tenses and there that it does not, may be pardoned for some confusion and some skepticism as to the claim of linguistic scholars to know a great deal about tense.

The reader may be surprised to learn that tense has been studied for almost twenty-five hundred years, since at least the time of the ancient Greeks, and that hundreds of books and articles have been devoted to it in general, and thousands more to the tenses of particular languages. It is no contradiction to say that we know a very great deal about tense, but understand it little. In the two decades since Robin Lakoff wrote that we "cannot account for many ways in which tenses are used in English and other languages," our knowledge of tense has increased greatly, but our understanding of it has deepened less.

It has been difficult even to know how much we do understand it, for confusing as discussions of the tenses of various languages may be, the scholarly literature concerning tense in general is, if anything, even more confusing. Philosophers, logicians, grammarians, general linguistic scholars, and scholars of particular languages approach tense in very different ways, with differing goals, and with assumptions drawn from sundry scholarly traditions, often employing confusing terminology and arcane symbolism inaccessible to outsiders, and applying special methods grounded in some particular school of linguistics or logic.

For example, an understanding of how distinctions of time are made in Arabic can be extremely important to many who do not know Arabic and have no interest in learning it but wish to understand what tense, in general, is all about. But Semiticists writing about Arabic often do not transliterate examples given in Arabic script, provide no detailed translation (or no translation at all), and use a special terminology unknown outside of Semitic studies.

The present work attempts to provide a complete guide to grammatical tense and the kindred phenomenon of grammatical aspect, both to characterize what we have learned about the expression of time in the verb and to render accessible to the interested reader as much of the relevant literature as possible.

Though it uses the methods and findings of linguistic science, this book is designed to be useful to anyone, scholar or layperson, who wishes to understand tense and aspect. Assuming on the part of the reader minimal background in grammar and linguistics, it presents the facts and theories which have been brought forward in the ongoing investigation of tense and aspect, explains in as nontechnical language as possible the terminology and symbolism used in the scholarly literature, and builds from the simplest concepts and approaches to the most complex.

This book does not pretend to present a coherent general theory, which scholars remain far from achieving, though at the end of the 1980s the outlines of one have perhaps begun to emerge. Nonetheless, it should contain as good an account as any available of the meanings and uses of the various tenses found in the languages most familiar to speakers of European languages, based on what is known about tense in general.

Comrie's *Tense* (1985) and *Aspect* (1976) have been criticized for excessive concentration on certain familiar languages. I would offer criticisms of both books, fine though they may be—obviously the present work was written because I believe they left a serious need unfilled—but I think this particular criticism invalid. The mere recitation of curious facts about a large number of "exotic" languages is in itself neither useful nor revealing. The languages discussed here are cited because facts about them illustrate points of theory or have been used to argue for or against certain hypotheses.

Emphasis has been placed on familiar languages not only because the discussion is more likely to be accessible to the reader but also because, for the most part, only the more familiar languages have been well-explored and entered crucially into theory-formation (with the noteworthy exception of the Bantu language Kikuyu). If the present work discusses mainly Greek, Latin, Romance, Germanic, Russian, and—yes—Kikuyu, it is not accidental.

My purpose has been to provide the sort of book James Pickbourn would have liked to have had, just two hundred years ago, when he was mortified to discover that neither he nor anyone else could adequately explain the uses of the tenses of the English verb. After much reading, he "began to suspect the subject [of tense] had never been minutely discussed by any of our grammarians," adding, "the result of these researches I confess much surprised me; for I had read all these authors without ever remarking the deficiency."

The present volume is designed to serve as three guidebooks in one. First, it encompasses a short history of the study of tense (part I) and of aspect (part II). Second, it provides a commentary on and guide to the scholarly literature, especially aiming to aid the reader in approaching the extraordinarily technical work of the last two decades. In chapters 7 and 8, in particular, recent developments are investigated in great detail. Assuming that few readers will have much background in formal semantics, I have included a lengthy introduction. A list is provided of all symbols and abbreviations used, which includes virtually all symbols found in the literature.

Third and last, the book constitutes a guide to the meanings and uses of the various tenses and aspects of the more familiar languages. The summary section points the reader interested in this or that question (e.g., the difference between the *imparfait* and the simple past tense of the Romance languages) to discussions of the various theories offered and of the best current thinking.

An historical approach allows movement from the presentation of the simplest ideas and phenomena to the most sophisticated. Part I begins with the earliest theories of tense, formulated by the ancient Greeks, and ends with the most recent theories of modern grammarians, formulated in the 1950s and 1960s. Since that time, theories of tense which do not take aspect

into consideration, or which are based on traditional methods of grammar, have largely been supplanted, and the study of tense revolutionized, by new goals and methods.

Throughout this period, spanning some twenty-five hundred years, not only did theories of tense become ever more complex as simpler accounts provided inadequate, but the data utilized grew broader and more interesting as well. In chapter 1 we will see that the ancient Greeks largely confined themselves to the question of how many tenses there are. Not recognizing that tense and time are different, they had some difficulty in reconciling the three times—past, present, and future—with the half-dozen tenses of their own language.

Chapter 2 brings us up to the Renaissance, when the study of modern languages began. Though the goal remained one of accounting for the tenses by labeling them, the European languages had developed a much more complex system of tenses than had existed in Greek or Latin, requiring a considerable revision of ancient theories. What emerged were two streams of thought, aspectual theory and the theory of relative tense, which continue to influence research today.

The vast expansion of European exploration brought Westerners into contact with languages manifestly different from the familiar European ones. Starting in the eighteenth century, attempts to apply European grammatical concepts to these "new" languages revealed the inadequacies of the grammatical tradition and led ultimately to a radical break with the past. Nonetheless, the investigation of tense remained hampered by the false assumptions that to describe the meaning of a verb form is to explicate its use, and that contextually defined meanings of a tense are either insignificant or purely derivative of one basic meaning.

It was only in this century (chapter 3) that grammarians began to look at the full range of problems concerning the expression of time in the verb. Whereas formerly very little attention was paid to how tenses were actually used, as opposed to what they ideally meant, the focus on use now revealed a wide range of phenomena previously unconsidered. In particular, the relationship of tense to grammatical constructions and to syntax was specifically examined for the first time. The range of data considered by Hans Reichenbach (1947), William Bull (1960), and Robert Allen (1966) was far greater than that utilized by earlier scholars.

In part II the historical approach must be partly abandoned, since most important work on aspect is relatively recent. Although Aristotle discussed it some twentyfour hundred years ago, and aspect entered the Western grammatical tradition through Slavic studies not long after 1800, the modern concept of aspect was established only as recently as the 1930s. In our century tense and aspect have increasingly been viewed as two complementary facets of one set of phenomena (work on languages has revealed yet a third, called "status").

Part II first examines the traditional theory of the type of aspect found in Slavic languages (chapter 5), then shows how that theory was applied to Greek aspect, and finally (especially in chapter 6) illustrates how contemporary approaches developed largely in response to the failure of that enterprise.

Contemporary research on tense and aspect consists of two broad streams very much in opposition. The first, heavily influenced by philosophical logic, emphasizes explicitness and

formal rigor, placing great emphasis on technical details. These theories (chapter 7) emphasize semantics in the narrow sense of a referential theory of how language is linked to the external world, and assume that the uses of an expression in some way follow its meaning or meanings, or at least that meaning is independent of use.

But scholars who have had to deal with real language as it occurs in literary texts or records of actual conversation are aware that the uses of tenses and aspects often do not accord with their nominal meanings. This second, informalist, stream (chapter 8) contains work by scholars who have emphasized use rather than meaning and have expressed some skepticism in regard to the notion of "the" meaning of a form or expression; some have gone so far as to propose that meaning follows use rather than the reverse. The methods of such scholars owe more to literary than to logical analysis. The two streams appear to be uniting in the work of those formal semanticists who apply to research on tense and aspect in discourse and text both the results of the informalist school and the methods of formal semantics.

The purpose of part II is, to a great extent, to explicate the various contentious issues in current research, to characterize what each of the schools of thought has achieved, and to point out problems remaining to be solved. As it happens, there are many such issues which either fall beyond the scope of tense and aspect proper (though they are related to them) or have not been treated by either of the current methodologies. Such borderline issues are not discussed at length, but some are described at the conclusion of part II.

Of necessity, emphasis has been placed on materials written in English and readily available to the average reader. Nonetheless, many obscure works in a number of languages have had to be utilized. Frequent quotation from these and other sources has been necessary because much of this material has never been translated or even, in some cases, edited or reprinted. It seemed worthwhile to let Priscian and Scaliger speak in their own (albeit translated!) words, as well as some contemporary writers (in and out of English) who are unusually articulate (or, occasionally, arcane). For a number of reasons, scholars writing in and about English are overrepresented here. While there is a very large and interesting body of literature—much of it untranslated—on the languages of the Soviet Union, practically none of this material is readily available, nor has it significantly affected Western scholarship. This is regrettable, as aspectological studies in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union have advanced further than most scholars in the West realize.

If I have insisted on a historical approach, it is partly because I do not share the prevailing prejudice that linguistic scholars need not concern themselves much with the works of the past. The consequence of this attitude is constant reinvention of the wheel and repeated announcement of the imminent appearance of the squared circle. In research for this book I have come across more than one publication which presents as novelties proposals already put forward—or rejected—by Aristotle, Jespersen (1924), Reichenbach (1947), and others in between.

Already in 1751 James Harris complained of writers' ignorance of older or foreign writings. What he says of his *Hermes* might equally be said of the present work:

[It aims] to pass, as far as possible, from small matters to the greatest. Nor is it formed upon sentiments that are now in fashion, or supported only by such authorities as are modern. Many Authors are quoted, that now a-days are but little studied; and some perhaps, whose very names are hardly known.

Nothing can more tend to enlarge the Mind, than . . . extensive views of Men, and human Knowledge; nothing can more effectually take us off from the foolish admiration of what is immediately before our eyes, and help us to a juster estimate both of present Men,and present Literature.

A like evil to that of admiring only the authors of our own age [and our own country], is that of admiring only the authors of one particular Science.

Such then is the Apology made by the Author of this Treatise, for the multiplicity of antient quotations, with which he has filled his Book. If he can excite in his readers a proper spirit of curiosity; if he can help in the least degree to enlarge the bounds of Science; to revive the decaying taste of antient Literature; to lessen the bigotted contempt of every thing not modern; and to assert to Authors of every age their just portion of esteem; if he can in the least degree contribute to these ends, he hopes it may be allowed, that he