

## Two reflections on “verb”

**Verb** signifies an **action** or a **passion**. This type of definition was to remain the standard one: verbs signify actions; they have certain morphological properties; and they signify **time**...

In order to understand the Stoic conception of verbal tenses, we must first look into the **Stoic ideas about time**. According to Chrysippos real time - physical time - is the interval of the movement of the kosmos. With the void it shares the property of being infinite into two directions, stretching towards the **past** and towards the **future**; the **present is only an intersection of two infinities, itself without dimensions and without existence** from a geometrical point of view. On the other hand, one has to concede that the past and the future are without real existence, and only possess an abstract, derived being whereas the present is really "present". Another opposition is that only the **present** represents a **definite point in time**, the past and the future are infinite...

The precarious existence of the present time from a physical point of view entails the impossibility of present actions. Still, in everyday speech we do use present verbal forms, but these denote a grammatical tense, which differs from the physical time. This "improper" time or tense is the **contraction of the last part of the past and the first part of the future**...

We may conclude from this that the **present verb** is necessarily **imperfectum**, because part of it is still in the future. Greek grammarians recognized the necessity of a present tense in grammar. They argued that the present tense may be non-existent from a physical point of view, but on the other hand it is possible to speak of the present hour, day, week, month, or year, so that in actual speech the present time is treated as a reality.

*The Stoic Verbal System, C. H. M. Versteegh  
Hermes, 108. Bd., H. 3 (1980), pp.338-341*

The **active voice**, Strunk says, strengthens a sentence, and “when a sentence is made stronger, it usually becomes shorter. Thus, brevity is a by-product of vigor.” ....

I have argued that, historically and ontologically, **passive subjects** precede **active subjects**, not the other way around. ...

We reject the **passive voice** precisely because it proves that the subject need not be active: by grammatical form alone, it refutes the conflation of activity with ontology. In capitalist society, however, **activity means production**, and capitalism depends, both conceptually and coercively, on denying the subject any other kind of existence. At a certain age, and a fairly tender one at that, we demand that the child (hitherto an eager consumer) be something else, by which we mean that he or she must assume a **productive function** in “the economy.”  
pp. 503-504

*Sleeping Beauty, or In Praise of the Passive Voice:  
Renaissance Chronicles and the Subject of Production, - by John Leeds.:  
Modern Philology, Vol. 104, No. 4 (May 2007), pp. 503-504*