

## CHAPTER 14

# The Semantics of the Perfect in the Greek of the New Testament<sup>1</sup>

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The perfect in the Greek of the New Testament (and in Koine Greek more generally) is well known for resisting straightforward analysis within a clear aspectual framework. The fundamental problem is that, although bearing the label perfect, the range of use of the Greek perfect in this period is very broad. Studies of the perfect in the post-Classical period have not in recent years been as many as those for the classical period,<sup>2</sup> although the situation in the New

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- 1 May I express my thanks to the participants of the conference “Linguistics and the Greek Verb” for their helpful comments and questions following my presentation of an earlier version of this paper, as well as to the faculty of Örebro Theological Seminary, Sweden, where a much earlier version of this paper was presented.”
  - 2 Recent studies on the Homeric and Classical Greek perfect include Martin Haspelmath “From Resultative to Perfect in Ancient Greek,” in *Nuevos Estudios Sobre Construcciones Resultativas*, ed. Leza Iturrioz and Luis José, Función 11–12 (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 1992), 187–224; C. M. J. Sicking and P. Stork “The Synthetic Perfect in Classical Greek,” in *Two Studies in the Semantics of the Verb in Classical Greek*, ed. C. M. J. Sicking and P. Stork, MS 160 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 119–298; Eva-Carin Gerö and Arnim von Stechow, “Tense in Time: The Greek Perfect,” in *Words in Time: Diachronic Semantics from Different Points of View*, ed. Regine Eckardt, Klaus von Heusinger, and Christoph Schwarze, TiLSM 143 (Berlin: de Gruyter,

Testament has received more attention.<sup>3</sup> Following the taxonomy of Bybee et al.,<sup>4</sup> the perfect in the post-Classical period may be found denoting the following tense-aspectual categories:

- ANTERIOR, i.e., “a past action with current relevance,” e.g., πεποίηκα “I have done.”<sup>5</sup>
- 1. ὕπαγε εἰς τὸν οἶκόν σου πρὸς τοὺς σοὺς καὶ ἀπάγγειλον αὐτοῖς ὅσα ὁ κύριός σοι πεποίηκεν καὶ ἡλέησέν σε.  
Go to your house to your people and tell them what the Lord has done for you, and how he had mercy on you. (Mark 5:19)<sup>6</sup>
- Resultant state, i.e., a state resulting from an event taking place prior to reference time, e.g., ἐλήλυθα, “I have come.”

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2003), 251–94; Dag Trygve Truslew Haug, “Aristotle’s Kinesis/Energeia-Test and the Semantics of the Greek Perfect,” *Linguistics* 42 (2004): 387–41; idem, “From Resultatives to Anteriorities in Ancient Greek: On the Role of Paradigmaticity in Semantic Change,” in *Grammatical Change and Linguistic Theory: The Rosendal Papers*, ed. Thórhallur Eythórsson, *Linguistics Today* 113 (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2008), 285–305; Sander Orriens, “Involving the Past in the Present: The Classical Greek Perfect as a Situating Cohesion Device,” in *Discourse Cohesion in Ancient Greek*, ed. Stéphanie Bakker and Gerry Wakker, *ASCP* 16 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 221–39; Klaas Bentein, “The Periphrastic Perfect in Ancient Greek: A Diachronic Mental Space Analysis,” *TPhS* 110 (2012): 171–211.

- 3 Studies include K. L. McKay, “On the Perfect and other Aspects in New Testament Greek,” *NovT* 23 (1981): 289–329; Stanley E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament*, *SBG* 1 (New York: Lang, 1989); Buist Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek*, *OTM* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Trevor V. Evans, “Another Ghost: The Greek Epistolary Perfect,” *Glotta* 75 (1999): 194–221; Constantine Campbell, *Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative*, *SBG* 13 (New York: Lang, 2007); and Robert Crellin, “The Greek Perfect through Gothic Eyes: Evidence for the Existence of a Unitary Semantic for the Greek Perfect in New Testament Greek,” *JGL* 14 (2014): 5–42. K. L. McKay, “The Use of the Ancient Greek Perfect Down to the End of the Second Century AD,” *BICS* 12 (1965): 1–21 and idem, “On the Perfect and Other Aspects in the Greek Non-Literary Papyri,” *BICS* 27 (1980): 23–49 have a focus outside of the New Testament. Trevor V. Evans, *Verbal Syntax in the Greek Pentateuch: Natural Greek Usage and Hebrew Interference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) examines the verb system in the Greek Pentateuch.
- 4 Joand L. Bybee, Revere D Perkins, and William Pagliuca, *The Evolution of Grammar* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 61.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 The Greek text used is NA<sup>28</sup>; unless otherwise specified, all translations are the author’s.

2. οὐκ ἐλήλυθα καλέσαι δικαίους ἀλλ' ἁμαρτωλοὺς εἰς μετάνοιαν.  
I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5:32 ASV)
- State concurrent with the reference time of the clause with no reference to any prior event,<sup>7</sup> as in the following example of ἔλπικα "I have hope."
3. ἔστιν ὁ κατηγορῶν ὑμῶν Μωϋσῆς, εἰς ὃν ὑμεῖς ἔλπικατε.  
Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. (John 5:45 NIV)<sup>8</sup>

Uses of the perfect without apparent reference to prior terminating event can be paralleled outside of the New Testament, as in the following example of the perfect of σπουδάζω "be zealous, eager":

4. ... πρὸς δὲ τὸ γενομένης ὀργῆς ἢ διαβολῆς ἢ στάσεως διδάξει καὶ πρᾶττει καὶ μεταθεῖναι τοὺς ἡγνοηκότας ὀλοσχερῶς ἀστοχοῦσιν<sup>9</sup> ...  
but when anger, or slander, or insurrection actually occur, [the Carthaginians] completely fail to teach, or calm down, or change those who are ignorant. (Plb. 1.67.5)
5. πέμψαντες πρὸς Ἰούδαν ἐδήλουν αὐτῷ ὅτι λαβεῖν ἐσπούδακε Τιμόθεος τὸ χωρίον εἰς ὃ συνεπεφεύγεσαν.  
... [they] sent to Judas and informed him that Timotheus was eager to take the land to which they had fled. (Jos. A.J. 12.330)

7 Of course, all states must in principle start at some time. However, so much would also be true of a state described by a present tense. The question is whether or not a perfect predicate by virtue of its being a perfect predicate must assert something about this start point.

8 According to the views outlined by Haug and McKay, whereby the perfect first instantiates the predicate via an aorist, this example should denote that the event of hoping started prior to reference time. Accordingly, there would be no difference between this and change of state predicates as at 48. The presence of the preposition εἰς "to, into," suggesting a dynamic situation, might be taken to support this. However, εἰς in the New Testament has in several places a purely locative function. Furthermore, on several occasions εἰς is used with πιστεύω "believe" where it is not necessarily obvious that it is a dynamic situation that is being described, e.g., John 9:35, 12:44, 14:1, 16:9; Rom 10:10; and Jas 2:19. Finally, it is striking that three ancient versions, namely the Vulgate, Gothic, and Old Syriac (Curetonian), all translate ἔλπικατε without any explicit past reference. For discussion of this example in the Gothic case, see Crellin, "Greek Perfect through Gothic Eyes," 33–34.

9 This example is quoted and discussed in Robert Crellin, "The Greek Perfect Active System: 200 BC–AD 150" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2011), 211; all classical texts are from LCL.

The capacity of the perfect in certain circumstances to express present-only time reference has led some to suggest that the perfect's semantics are devoid of time reference.<sup>10</sup> Consider the following statement from Porter:

It is appropriate to assert that the Perfect grammaticalizes the state or condition of the grammatical subject as conceived by the speaker. Whether a previous event is alluded to or exists at all is a matter of lexis in context and not part of aspectual semantics.<sup>11</sup>

Porter does not give an account of the specific lexical circumstances under which past time reference is made by a perfect form, although it is true to say that the interaction of perfect and lexical semantics can have important implications for the interpretation of the perfect. Nor indeed does Porter elaborate on what exactly is meant by "state or condition." McKay, however, provides a more fulsome explanation. As part of his summary of the meaning of the perfect from Homer to the Roman period he describes the usage of the perfect as follows (emphasis original):

- *State or condition*, normally, if not always, of the *subject*:
  - a) in verbs of action—a state usually arising from a prior action or series of actions. This state may be that of responsibility for having performed the action(s) or of a characteristic established by the action(s)
  - b) in verbs whose present denotes a state—a state usually arising from the aoristic operation of that verb, resulting either in a continuing state or a subsequent state.

<sup>10</sup> An intensive force has often been ascribed to some present-only perfects. However, it is often difficult to know in a particular case whether or not this sense is really present (cf. Haug, "Aristotle's Kinesis/Energeia-Test," 394) and consequently I will not attempt to deal with this phenomenon in this paper. Another problem of the perfect is its apparent capacity to detransitivize, i.e., to reduce the number of arguments projected by the verbal head by one. Thus for example ἔστηκε is the perfect active of ἵστημι "make to stand," yet the subject is not someone who is making another stand, but rather is standing himself. There is unfortunately not space to address this problem here. For an integration of this phenomenon into a semantic description of the Greek perfect, see Crellin, "Greek Perfect Active System," 82–179.

<sup>11</sup> Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 259.

c) in verbs of emotion, etc.—a state of continued feeling which usually implies greater intensity than the present.<sup>12</sup>

Notably, however, McKay also allows for the existence of what he calls “category” perfects “where the *state* or condition has continued only as *historical* reputation.” Yet it is questionable to what extent “historical reputation” may be meaningfully regarded as a state or condition.

Finally, Campbell analyzes the perfect as aspectually imperfective, based on the distributional evidence that both the perfect and the present occur frequently in discourse, “The demonstrable facts about the usage of the perfect indicative within discourse signify that the most likely aspectual value of the perfect is that of imperfectivity.”<sup>13</sup>

Campbell’s understanding of the perfect as a kind of imperfective leads to some somewhat novel and perhaps surprising interpretations in the case of dynamic verbs, such as at 2 Tim 4:7, where the Greek perfects are rendered by Campbell as present continuous forms in English, as in example 6.

6. τὸν καλὸν ἀγῶνα ἡγώνισμαι, τὸν δρόμον τετέλεκα, τὴν πίστιν τετήρηκα.  
I am fighting the good fight, I am finishing the race, I am keeping the faith. (2 Tim 4:7, Campbell’s trans.)<sup>14</sup>

So does the perfect in this period have a unified semantic description? Some suggest not.<sup>15</sup> However, if it does, what does it basically denote?

12 McKay, “Use of the Ancient Greek Perfect,” 17. For the intensive use see n. 10 above.

13 Campbell, *Verbal Aspect*, 186.

14 Ibid. For critiques of Campbell’s views see Robert Crellin, “Basics of Verbal Aspect,” *JSNT* 35 (2012): 196–202 and Stanley E. Porter, “Greek Linguistics and Lexicography,” in *Understanding the Times: New Testament Studies in the 21st Century; Essays in Honor of D. A. Carson on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 19–61.

15 E.g., Haug, “From Resultatives to Anteriors,” 302.

## 2. EVENT AND SITUATION STRUCTURE

In this paper I will present a proposal for a unified semantic description of the perfect which I believe takes account of the majority of phenomena which are attested. However, in order to do this we need to reconsider how events are represented in language. In doing this I adopt the semantic aspectual framework outlined by Klein.<sup>16</sup> I am therefore concerned with the truth conditions associated with the perfect.

Many have tended to think of tense and aspect as a property of verbs.<sup>17</sup> However, more recent consensus has it that these are properties of propositions realized as predicates,<sup>18</sup> e.g.:

7. Mary made a cake.

This is a proposition with a subject Mary, and with a predicate, “made a cake.” The proposition can exist independent of time, i.e., <make a cake>. This event has its own time structure, which we shall term its situation structure, which has a set of times associated with it (TSit). In this case the event has a beginning (when the event of making a cake starts), a middle (when the making of the cake happens), or an end (when the cake is made). This is diagrammatically represented at Figure 1.

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- 16 Wolfgang Klein, “The Present Perfect Puzzle,” *Language* 68 (1992): 525–52, and idem, *Time in Language*, Germanic Languages (London: Routledge, 1994). This approach has been incorporated in approaches for describing tense and aspect in Russian in Alla Paslawaska and Arnim von Stechow, “Perfect Readings in Russian,” in *Perfect Explorations*, ed. Artemis Alexiadou, Monica Rathert, and Arnim von Stechow, IE 2 (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2003), 307–62; and for Ancient Greek in Gerö and von Stechow, “Tense in Time.”
- 17 Thus Zeno Vendler, “Verbs and Times,” *PhR* 66 (1957): 143–60, although he is sensitive to differences induced by the different properties of particular predicates.
- 18 Carol Tenny and James Pustejovsky, “A History of Events in Linguistic Theory,” in *Events as Grammatical Objects: The Converging Perspectives of Lexical Semantics and Syntax*, (Stanford, CA: Center for the Study of Language and Information, 2000), 6.

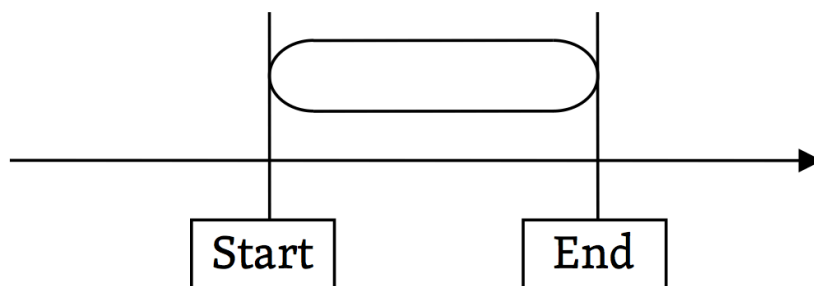


Figure 1. Predicate &lt;make a cake&gt;

Different kinds of events or situations can be distinguished according to their time structure.<sup>19</sup> These can be distinguished on the basis of telicity, that is, the presence of a set end point, durativity, namely duration for more than one conceptual moment, and homogeneity, the capacity to divide a given event into multiple, albeit smaller, instances of the same event type.<sup>20</sup> This latter category can be further analyzed into a “strong” homogeneity, where an eventuality is infinitely subdividable into events of the same character, and “weak” homogeneity, where an eventuality is subdividable only to a certain granularity. In what follows, I am concerned only with “strong” homogeneity.<sup>21</sup>

Accordingly, the following kinds of eventuality may be distinguished:

<sup>19</sup> See e.g., Vendler, “Verbs and Times,” 143–60.

<sup>20</sup> For discussion of different event types and their properties, with references, see Tenny and Pustejovsky, “History of Events,” 5.

<sup>21</sup> For this distinction and definitions of the two types, see Tenny and Pustejovsky, “History of Events,” 5; Gillian Catriona Ramchand, *Aspect and Predication: The Semantics of Argument Structure* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 123–24; David R. Dowty, *Word Meaning and Montague Grammar: the Semantics of Verbs and Times in Generative Semantics and in Montague’s PTQ*, SLL 7 (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1979), 166; and Barry Taylor, “Tense and Continuity” *Ling&P* 1 (1977): 199–220. Ramchand, *Aspect and Predication*, 123–24, explains as follows:

Stative verbs ... have completely homogeneous reference in the sense that one cannot distinguish any change, gradual or otherwise, occurring as a part of the eventuality. The difference [with activities] ... is that the divisibility of “running” is limited by a certain level of granularity. At some point, if the divisions get small enough, a subevent of running can no longer be distinguished as “running” per se, as opposed to “walking” or “jumping” or “moving the foot.”

1. Activity, e.g., swimming: no set endpoint, nonhomogeneous, durative;
2. Accomplishment, e.g., building a house: set endpoint, nonhomogeneous, durative;
3. Achievement, e.g., recognizing a friend: set endpoint, nonhomogeneous, nondurative (i.e., no conceptual duration);
4. State, e.g., sitting on the mat: no set endpoint, homogeneous, and nondurative.<sup>22</sup>
5. Complex events: change of state, e.g., <the banana rot>: accomplishment which leads to a state (being rotten). This state has no set endpoint (see figure 2).

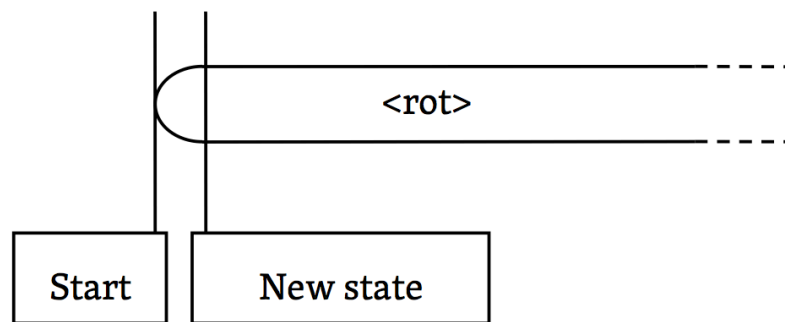


Figure 2. Change of state predicate

### 3. TENSE AND ASPECT

However, the sentence <Mary make a cake> is not well formed. It needs also to be given properties of tense and aspect, which are in Greek (and English) usually ascribed to the sentence through the verb.

<sup>22</sup> The nondurativity of states needs some qualification; it is true that states may have duration. Indeed, Vendler, "Verbs and Times," 146–47 asserts that they do. Thus it is possible to say "I loved her for a long time." However, duration is not a necessary inference from the statement "I love her." This is simply a statement that a state of loving holds at the present moment, and is a feeling that may be lost at any time. The statement "I love her" does not make a claim, per se, on the future. This is different from specifically durative states, such as "staying," which do carry such an expectation. Thus if I say, "I'm staying," and then immediately leave, I will not be understood to have spoken truly in my statement.

Crucial to Klein's semantic definition of tense and aspect is Topic Time (which Klein abbreviates to TT, and which I abbreviate to TTop). This is "the time for which, on some occasion, a claim is made."<sup>23</sup> Within this framework, tense concerns the relationship of TTop to Utterance Time (which Klein abbreviates to TU, and which I abbreviate to TUtt).<sup>24</sup> The past tense asserts that TTop precedes TUtt, the future that TUtt precedes TSit and the present tense that TSit includes TUtt. By contrast, aspect relates TTop to TSit.

Consider the following example:

8. I was washing up the dishes at ten o'clock.

This sentence contains the predicate <wash up the dishes>. TTop, ten o'clock then bears a relationship of priority with respect to TUtt. This is a relationship of tense. The tense of this sentence is "past," because TTop precedes TUtt. The aspect of this sentence is the relationship that the predicate "washing up the dishes" holds to TTop, which is ten o'clock.

The event described by this predicate has a relationship to TTop, which for this predicate is defined as ten o'clock. Specifically, TTop, ten o'clock, is located in time during the event <wash up the dishes>. In other terms it may be said that TSit properly includes TTop.<sup>25</sup> This is an aspectual relationship. There are two principal aspects in languages with aspect, imperfective and perfective:

- Perfective: TTop includes TSit<sup>26</sup>
- Imperfective: TSit properly includes TTop<sup>27</sup>

Accordingly, the aspect of the predicate <wash up the dishes> in 43 is imperfective.

The perfective aspect can also be used to define TTop, e.g.:

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23 Klein, "Present Perfect Puzzle," 535.

24 Ibid., 536.

25 Set A is said to properly include set B if B is a subset of A, and A is unequal to B; see Herbert B. Enderton, *Elements of Set Theory* (San Diego: Elsevier, 1977), 85.

26 Corien Bary, "Aspect in Ancient Greek: A Semantic Analysis of the Aorist and Imperfective" (PhD diss., Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, 2009), 78, and Klein, *Time in Language*, 118. By contrast, Klein, "Present Perfect Puzzle," 537, defines perfective as "TTop including end of TSit and beginning of time after TSit."

27 Klein, "Present Perfect Puzzle," 537. Bary, "Aspect," 78, expresses imperfective in these terms as TTop being a nonfinal subset of TSit.

9. I was washing up when I caught sight of a pigeon.

Here the event described by “I caught sight of a pigeon” determines TTop for the event described by “I was washing up.”

#### 4. TENSE AND ASPECT IN GREEK

Ancient Greek (as Modern Greek) is a language that marks both tense and aspect. In Greek the “aorist” stem forms convey perfective aspect, while the “present” stem forms (i.e., present and imperfect) convey imperfective. In the indicative tense is also marked, and may be distinguished between past and nonpast. Here the aorist (perfective) and imperfect (imperfective) denote past tense, while the present and future mark nonpast.<sup>28</sup> Consider the following examples:

10. ἐγερθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰωσήφ ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕπνου ἐποίησεν ὡς προσέταξεν αὐτῷ ὁ ἄγγελος κυρίου καὶ παρέλαβεν τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ...  
When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife... (Matt 1:24 ESV)
11. ἔτι αὐτοῦ λαλοῦντος ἰδοὺ νεφέλη φωτεινὴ ἐπεσκίασεν αὐτούς...  
While he was still speaking, behold a bright cloud covered them... (Matt 17:5 NIV)

The aorist predicate in 10 can be represented diagrammatically as follows at Figure 3:

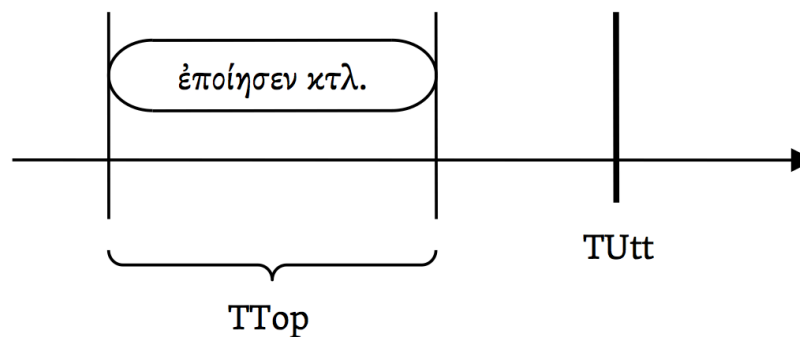


Figure 3. Aorist predicate at Matt 1:24

<sup>28</sup> For the view that the aorist and imperfect are not restricted to past tense use, see Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 211–38. For the use of past tenses in irrealis, see Eva-Carin Gerö, “‘Irrealis’ and Past Tense in Ancient Greek.” *Glotta* 77 (2001): 178–97.

In the second example, the aorist predicate ἐπεσκήασεν αὐτούς determines TTop for the participle predicate ἔτι αὐτοῦ λαλοῦντος, i.e.:



Figure 4. Aorist and participle predicates at Matt 17:5

## 5. PROBLEM OF THE PERFECT IN TERMS OF TENSE AND ASPECT

We can now put the problem of the perfect in the tense and aspectual terms that we have been introducing. On the one hand, it sometimes behaves like an imperfective. Leaving aside TTop for the time being, the problem is that a perfect predicate appears to bear at least three kinds of relationship to TUt. First, where the perfect is formed to a state predicate, TSit may include TUt:

12. = 3.

ἔστιν ὁ κατηγορῶν ὑμῶν Μωϋσῆς, εἰς ὃν ὑμεῖς ἠλπίζατε.

Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. (John 5:45, NIV)<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> According to the views outlined by Haug and McKay, who favor an interpretation of the perfect whereby there is first an instantiation of the predicate via an aorist, this example should denote that the event of hoping started prior to reference time. Accordingly, there would be no difference between this and change of state predicates as at 13. The presence of the preposition εἰς “to, into,” suggesting a dynamic situation, might be taken to support this. However, εἰς in the New Testament has in several places a purely locative function. Furthermore, on several occasions εἰς is used with πιστεύω “believe” where it is not necessarily obvious that it is a dynamic situation that is being described, e.g., John 9:35, 12:44, 14:1, 16:9; Rom 10:10; and Jas 2:19.

This is diagrammatically represented in Figure 5.

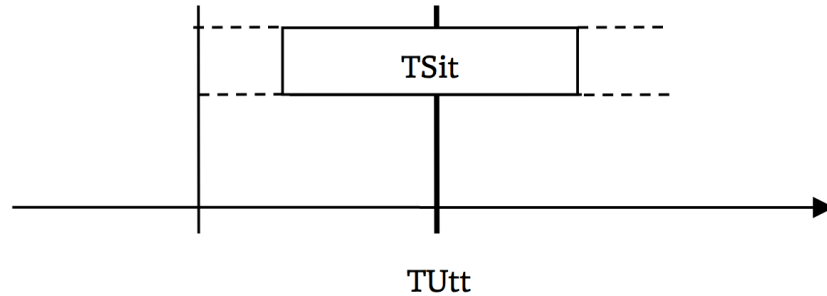


Figure 5. Perfect of a State Predicate

Alternatively, if the predicate describes a change of state, the temporal duration of the poststate includes TUtt, as in the next example, diagrammatically represented in Figure 6:

13. οὐκ ἐλήλυθα καλέσαι δικαίους ἀλλ' ἁμαρτωλοὺς εἰς μετάνοιαν.  
 I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5:32, ASV)

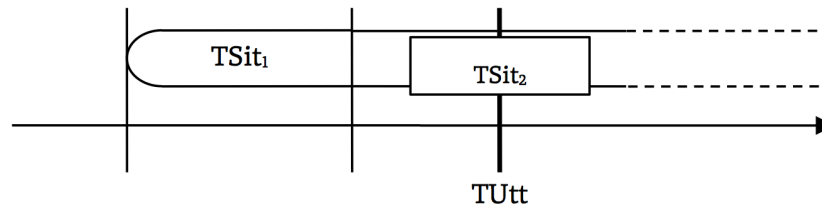


Figure 6. Perfect of a change of state predicate

However, in predicates that neither describe a state nor change of state on the part of the subject, TSit precedes TUtt, as in the following example, represented diagrammatically at Figure 7:

14. οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς, ὅταν ποιήσητε πάντα τὰ διαταχθέντα ὑμῖν, λέγετε  
 ὅτι δοῦλοι ἀχρεῖοί ἐσμεν, ὃ ὠφείλομεν ποιῆσαι πεποιθήκαμεν.

Finally, it is striking that three ancient versions, namely the Vulgate, Gothic, and Old Syriac (Curetonian), all translate ἡλπίζατε without any explicit past reference. For discussion of this example in the Gothic case, see Crellin, "Greek Perfect through Gothic Eyes," 33–34.

So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.” (Luke 17:10, ESV)

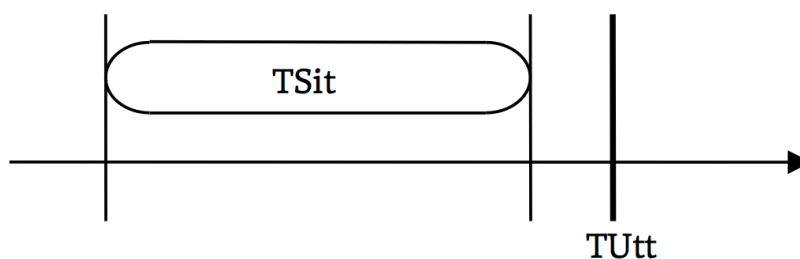


Figure 7. Perfect of a predicate not describing or giving rise to a state for the subject

In this case, the relationship of TSit to TUtt is parallel to that of aorist predicates, as may be seen by comparing Figure 7 with Figure 3.

In sum, therefore, the problem of the perfect may be said to be the following: How can one predict which particular reading a perfect predicate is going to generate, and is there a single semantic description that captures all observed patterns?

So far we have deliberately left TTop out of consideration. Could bringing this in help? Recall that TTop is the set of times for which a claim is being made. Klein posits that for any event there exists a set of times after the event itself has terminated, the posttime of that event, and which we will henceforth term TPostSit.<sup>30</sup> He then provides a definition of the English perfect in terms of TTop and TSit, such that TTop is in the posttime of TSit; see figure 8:

<sup>30</sup> Klein, “Present Perfect Puzzle,” 538. Klein is careful to state that “posttime is not defined by what is the case at TSit, nor by what is the case after TSit: it is just the time after TSit.”

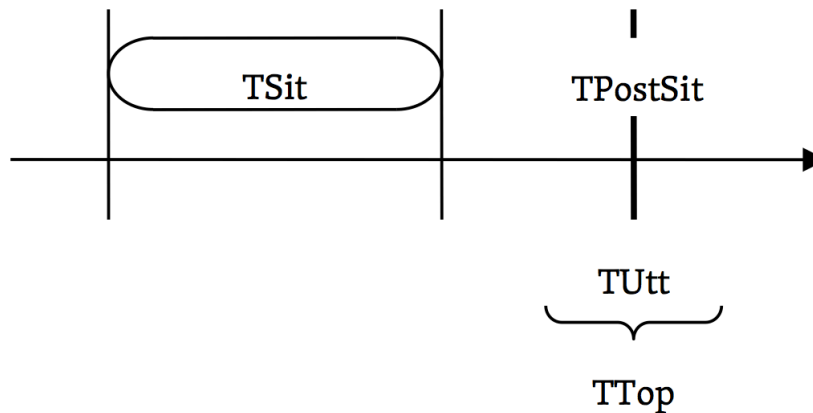


Figure 8. Representation of Klein's proposal for the English perfect

Note the contrast with Klein's definition of the perfective, namely that  $T_{Top}$  includes  $TSit$ : while the perfect presents the event in terms of the time period after  $TSit$ , the perfective makes no reference to this, and refers only to the time interval of the situation itself,  $TSit$ .

This description, applied to the Greek perfect, goes some way to resolving the problems, since it is sufficiently flexible to embrace the behavior of the perfect of both change of state predicates and predicates which do not describe or give rise to a state for the subject. Specifically, in change of state predicates,  $T_{PostSit}$  is taken to be the  $TSit$  of the poststate described by the predicate, while in predicates without state or change of state  $T_{PostSit}$  is simply the situation that pertains after the event has terminated.<sup>31</sup> Thus Figure 8 may be taken to represent examples like 14, while Figure 9 may be taken as representing examples like 13.

<sup>31</sup> These two ways of interpreting  $T_{PostSit}$  may be said to correspond to Parsons' target and result states respectively, see Terence Parsons, *Events in the Semantics of English: A Study in Subatomic Semantics*, CurSL 19 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 234–35.

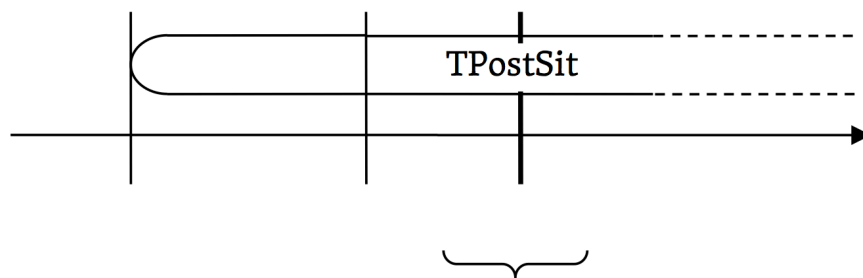


Figure 9. Change of state predicates under Klein's framework

However, Klein's proposal still cannot account for state predicates where TSit includes TTop and TUtt, as in example 12.

Gerö and von Stechow, whose focus is the Classical Greek perfect rather than that in post-Classical Greek, propose to analyze the Greek perfect as an Extended-Now (XN). They observe the following:

When the present perfect is used in Greek, it frequently seems to be the case that the event denoted by the VP [Verb Phrase] either continues after the speech time or that it at least continues up to the speech time (in an inclusive way). In terms of an XN-analysis, the speech time can be seen as a final subinterval of an interval which reaches into a contextually or lexically determined past ...<sup>32</sup>

It is beyond the scope of the present article to assess the validity of this proposal for Classical Greek. However, for the Greek found in the New Testament, it is at least not the whole story. It is true that it does account for uses of the perfect such as that in example 15, where the event described by the predicate ἐμὲ πρῶτον ὑμῶν μεμίσηκεν starts in past time and continues up to and including TUtt.

15. Εἰ ὁ κόσμος ὑμᾶς μισεῖ, γινώσκετε ὅτι ἐμὲ πρῶτον ὑμῶν μεμίσηκεν.  
 "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. (John 15:18 ESV)

This may be represented diagrammatically per Figure 10.

32 Gerö and von Stechow, "Tense in Time," 274.

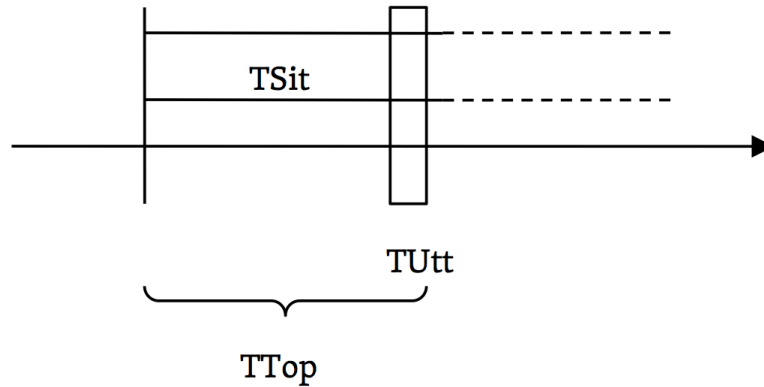


Figure 10. Representation of John 15:18 under Gerö and Stechow's XN framework

The XN analysis fails to account, however, for the fact that certain kinds of perfect predicate describe events which are not included in TTop. Thus with *ἀκούω*, examples such as the following are frequent:

16. τότε ὑπέβαλον ἄνδρας λέγοντας ὅτι ἀκηκόαμεν αὐτοῦ λαλοῦντος ῥήματα βλάσφημα εἰς Μωϋσῆν καὶ τὸν θεόν.

Then they secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” (Acts 6:11 ESV)

Here the event of hearing described by the predicate *ἀκηκόαμεν αὐτοῦ λαλοῦντος ῥήματα βλάσφημα κτλ* must have occurred and terminated well before TUtt, since it is asserted in the immediately preceding verses that Stephen, the subject of the predicate in question here, was speaking in such a way that his accusers could not argue with him. However, it is hard to find examples in the New Testament of events where the event of hearing continues up to and includes reference time.<sup>33</sup> There are similarly no clear examples with *ποιέω* “I

<sup>33</sup> The perfect of *ἀκούω* occurs at John 4:42, 5:37, 18:21; Acts 6:11, 6:14; Rom 15:21; 1 John 1:1, 1:3, 1:5, 4:3, in all of which the event of hearing terminates prior to TTop.

do, make.”<sup>34</sup> Indeed, there are occasions where it comes very close to a perfective reading:<sup>35</sup>

17. τρίς ἑρραβδίσθην, ἅπαξ ἐλιθάσθην, τρίς ἐναυάγησα, νυχθήμερον ἐν τῷ βυθῷ πεποίηκα  
 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; (2 Cor 11:25 ESV)

Yet on an XN analysis one should expect the perfect of all predicate types to be able in principle to include TTop.<sup>36</sup> The XN approach, therefore, does not appear adequate to provide a comprehensive

34 Thus Mark 5:19, 11:17; Luke 1:25, 17:10; John 12:18, 12:37, 13:12, 18:18; Acts 3:12, 21:33; 2 Cor 11:25; Heb 11:28; Jas 5:15. The only possible exceptions to this are Mark 7:37 καλῶς πάντα πεποίηκεν, καὶ τοὺς κωφοὺς ποιεῖ ἀκούειν καὶ [τοὺς] ἀλάλους λαλεῖν. “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.” (ESV) and 1 John 5:10 ὁ μὴ πιστεύων τῷ θεῷ ψεύστην πεποίηκεν αὐτόν, ὅτι οὐ πεπίστευκεν εἰς τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν μεμαρτύρηκεν ὁ θεὸς περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ. “Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son.” (ESV). The first case can easily be taken as a summary of Jesus’ miracles to-date. The present tense predicates that follow can then be taken as generalizing Jesus’ ministry. The second case does not have any past referring context in the same way. However, it is noteworthy that the implicit event by which the predicate ψεύστην πεποίηκεν αὐτόν comes about is homogeneous and atelic, namely μὴ πιστεύων τῷ θεῷ. Perhaps then the predicate ψεύστην ποιεῖν αὐτόν could be taken as a homogeneous and atelic synonym for μὴ πιστεύων τῷ θεῷ, whose perfect is therefore also homogeneous and atelic. Support for this reading comes from the Vulgate which translates πεποίηκεν in this predicate with the present tense *facit*.

35 Parallel to this use may be considered Heb 11:28 and Jas 5:15.

36 Gerö and von Stechow, “Tense in Time,” are actually unclear on the issue of whether or not the time of the event described by the predicate is asserted to be included in TTop (which they refer to as reference time). On the one hand they assert, “Let us use the abbreviation XN(t,n) for ‘t is a time interval that extends up to n (and possibly includes n)’” (p. 275). This statement suggests that n may or may not be included in t. However, they later assert, “Recall that XN(t’, t) means that t is a final subinterval or point of t” (p. 280). This statement, contrary to the previous one, suggests that t’ is in fact included in t. This latter is confirmed by the statement (also p. 280) that, “An XN rather stretches the reference time into an indefinite past,” suggesting that the period of time denoted by XN includes reference time, since it must include it in order to stretch it.

description of the perfect, at least for the data in the New Testament and of the post-Classical period more generally.<sup>37</sup>

An alternative solution is proposed by Haug in reference to the Homeric and Classical Greek perfect:

... the perfect denotes a present state resulting from a former event that can be expressed by the VP in the aorist. The perfect, therefore, has a double reference: a present state and a past event that culminated. But, as we would expect in such situations, pragmatic factors can put emphasis on the state or on the event.<sup>38</sup>

In the earlier stages of the language, where the perfect is generally not found with atelic nonstate predicates, the state in question is the target state of the predicate, whether the target state described by the predicate itself in the case of change of state predicates, or a derived target state in the case of atelic state predicates. However, in the later language, the perfect is increasingly applied to predicates that do not give rise to a state for the subject. In these cases the interpretation of “state” is that of Parsons’ result state,<sup>39</sup> defined as follows:

For every event *e* that culminates, there is a corresponding state that holds forever after. This is “the state of *e*’s having culminated,” which I call the “Resultant state of *e*” or “*e*’s R-State.” If Mary eats lunch, then there is a

37 From the corpus of post-Classical authors (Polybius, Plutarch, Appian, and Josephus) investigated for Crellin, “Perfect Active System,” it is hard to find convincing cases where the event described by a perfect predicate does not give rise to a state for the subject that continues at TTop. A possible case could be considered Jos. A.J. 12.338, with the perfect *προσβέβληκα* from *προσβάλλω* “attack.” Indeed, Whiston translates with an English past continuous form, “were attacking” ([www.perseus.tufts.edu](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu) ad loc.). However, it seems better to take the verb as meaning “make an assault, attack,” per LSJ *προσβάλλω* II.1. In this case the perfect would refer to the fact that an assault had been made, with the assault terminating before TTop. A TLG search of the same corpus for the phrase *ἐκ πολλοῦ χρόνου* “a long time since” did not yield any predicates not describing or giving rise to a state of the subject.

38 Haug, “Aristotle’s Kinesis/Energeia-Test,” 395–96.

39 Ibid., 409–410.

state that holds forever after: The state of Mary's having eaten lunch.<sup>40</sup>

Parsons' proposal is not unproblematic. Not least significant is the issue that the positing of a state after every event that culminates weakens considerably the notion of what statehood involves, to the point where one wonders whether they really are the same notion. This causes problems specifically with the Greek perfect in later periods, where, as Haug notes, as the perfect is applied to atelic predicates, there emerges an ambiguity as to which state to derive, whether the target or result state.<sup>41</sup> Haug observes, however, that the issue is lexically resolved, citing *σιγάω* "be silent" and *ἀκούω* "hear," where in the former case the perfect produces a target state reading, while in the latter case the perfect produces a result state reading.<sup>42</sup> However, it is not specified precisely what semantic features lead to the correct reading in each case.

A further issue with Haug's proposal is its requirement for a prior event to be realized.<sup>43</sup> This Haug frames by applying the perfect to a predicate which has already had the aorist applied to it.<sup>44</sup> Yet this is problematic in the case of examples where there can have been no prior event.<sup>45</sup> In an attempt to address these concerns, I previously proposed the following formulation:

The perfect of a predicate P denotes a property of the subject S as a function of S existing at or beyond a

40 Parsons, *Events*, 234–35, quoted by Haug, "Aristotle's Kinesis/Energeia Test," 398.

41 Haug, "Aristotle's Kinesis/Energeia Test," 410–11.

42 Ibid., 410.

43 Ibid. 409–10.

44 This is also a feature of McKay's proposal in McKay, "Use of the Ancient Greek Perfect," 17. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 119–20 has something similar in his summary of perfect semantics: "The perfect in NT Greek is a complex verbal category denoting in its basic sense, a state which results from a prior occurrence."

45 The perfect *ἀναχωρήκα*, from *ἀναχωρέω* "withdraw" at Plb. 2.11.16, discussed at Crellin, "Greek Perfect through Gothic Eyes," 8, may be considered a particularly problematic case.

terminal point of the event as determined by the event structure of P.<sup>46</sup>

In order to address the problematic nature of Parsons' R-states, this proposal picks up and modifies Smith's participant property notion of the perfect,<sup>47</sup> so that in cases where a true state follows from TSit, the property is interpreted as this. Yet this is not a requirement, so that events that do not give rise to a state for the subject can be interpreted simply in terms of a participant property.

While this formulation removes the requirement for event realization, with the perfect simply reading off a state from the event structure described by the predicate, it still carries the requirement of the imposition of a terminal point onto this event structure. While for events that naturally terminate or include such a terminal point this is unproblematic, for state predicates this is less than ideal, since the assertion of such a terminal point by the perfect is not undisputable in all such cases, as at example 12 above. A further difficulty with this formulation is that it does not specify the characteristics of the property described by the perfect predicate in terms of event structure.

## 6. PROPOSAL FOR THE SEMANTICS OF THE GREEK PERFECT

The issue of the semantics of the Greek perfect has been clouded by various authors referring to three different things as "states": pure states, result states, and the situation pertaining after an event.<sup>48</sup> This leads to issues of ambiguity regarding the derivation

46 Ibid., 14. This is a development of the proposal put forward in Crellin, "Greek Perfect Active System," 280–85.

47 Carlota S. Smith, *The Parameter of Aspect*, 2nd ed., SLP45 (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1997), 107, gives the following definition of the semantics of the English perfect: "Perfect sentences ascribe to their subjects a property that results from their participation in the prior situation." Haug, "Aristotle's Kinesis/Energeia-Test," 396–97 discusses Smith's proposal in the context of the Greek perfect of earlier periods. For further discussion see Crellin, "Greek Perfect Active System," 280–285 and idem, "Greek Perfect through Gothic Eyes," 15.

48 Thus Parsons, *Events*, 234–45, describes result states as "target states," and post-situations as "result states." He is followed in this by Haug, "Aristotle's Kinesis/Energeia-Test," 398–405. Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 259, and McKay, "Use

of the correct state in different circumstances. There is the further question of what Smith's participant property amounts to in event structure terms, and what it might have in common with true states. We need a notion defined in event structure terms that is capable of capturing the properties that pure states, result states, and the participant property notion share with one another.

This is, in fact, not as difficult as it might at first seem, since these concepts share the fact that they are homogeneous and atelic. This is clear in the case of pure and result states.<sup>49</sup> In purely event structure terms, the participant property may also be viewed in this way, since it is both unchanging (i.e., homogeneous), insofar as the property of having done something never ceases to hold (at least while the subject continues to exist), and atelic, insofar as it has no set terminal point. This eventuality would have many of the properties of Parsons' R-State.<sup>50</sup> There is an important difference, however, between what I am proposing and Parsons' proposal. The participant property described by the perfect in cases where the predicate does not give rise to a state for the subject is a secondary eventuality derived by the perfect itself, and is not part of the original predicate. As such I do not identify (post)states and the participant property. Rather I am saying that both may be regarded as eventualities that share two properties of event structure, namely homogeneity and atelicity. States are distinguished from the participant property by the fact that the former are part of the prescribed event structure of the situation described by the original predicate, while the latter is a secondary derived category, defined purely in terms of the situation described by the predicate.<sup>51</sup>

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of the Ancient Greek Perfect," 17, do not distinguish kinds of state, but assert that the perfect describes the "state or condition of the subject," where the precise relationship between "state" and "condition" is, as far as I can see, not explained.

49 I.e., Parsons' target states.

50 It might a priori seem implausible to regard such a participant property as an eventuality, in the Neo-Davidsonian sense, at all. However, its eventuality-hood is suggested by examples like the following: "I have made a chair, and I'm glad about that." In this example "that" refers back not just to the making of the chair, but to the fact that this is now a fact about him or her.

51 In this respect Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 259, may be said to be correct, namely that past reference on the part of the perfect is not part of its own semantic description, but rather a consequence of its interaction with "lexis in context."

I therefore propose the following semantic description of the Greek perfect:

The perfect of a predicate derives a homogeneous atelic eventuality from the predicate for the grammatical subject and includes Topic Time in the Situation Time of this derived homogeneous atelic eventuality.

This proposal has the potential to resolve the issues that other formulations have had. Crucially, it is able to derive the correct kind of result with the correct temporal entailments regarding the event described by the predicate. Thus, for predicates that do not give rise to a state for the subject, events like “Mary made a cake,” the only means that the perfect has of deriving a homogeneous atelic eventuality from the predicate is by asserting that a participant property holds at TTop, namely the property of having once done the event described by the predicate. This in turn requires that in these cases the eventuality described by the predicate be realized. Thus this kind of perfect is readily interpreted as experiential, familiar from English, as at 14 above.<sup>52</sup>

By contrast, for predicates describing states and changes of state, our formulation correctly predicts that two readings should be available: either (1) the state described by the predicate holds at TTop, without necessarily requiring prior event realization, or (2) the state no longer holds at TTop, but once did, and the participant property of this state now holds at TTop. Example 12, with ἡλπικα, is an example of the first interpretation. Example 18, by contrast, is a case of the second type, where the state does not hold at TTop, and should be analyzed per Figure 8:

<sup>52</sup> If the participant property is a homogeneous and atelic eventuality, it might be wondered why the adverbial ἔτι “still” does not combine with perfects that describe such an eventuality. (For this discussion, see Haug, “Aristotle’s Kinesis/Energeia-Test,” 397–98, who cites Östen Dahl, *Tense and Aspect Systems* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1985], 133ff.) I suggest that this is because adding this notion to such predicates would be tautological: unlike natural states, the participant property cannot cease. This is to say that once I have made a chair, by virtue of the fact that traveling in time is not possible, it is not possible for me to change this fact about me.

18. καὶ ἔρχονται πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ θεωροῦσιν τὸν δαιμονιζόμενον καθήμενον ἱματισμένον καὶ σωφρονοῦντα, τὸν ἐσχηκότα τὸν λεγιῶνα, καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν.

And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. (Mark 5:15 ESV)

Note that this is a genuine ambiguity in pure state predicates, and is not lexically resolved, given examples such as the following:

19. ... δι' οὗ καὶ τὴν προσαγωγὴν ἐσχήκαμεν [τῇ πίστει] εἰς τὴν χάριν ταύτην ἐν ᾗ ἐστήκαμεν...

... Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God... (Rom 5:2 ESV)

Here, in contrast to example 18 where it is the post-situation that holds at TTop, the perfect of ἔχω “have” is used to assert that the state described by the predicate, not the postsituation, holds at TTop.<sup>53</sup>

Finally, our proposal is sufficiently flexible to encompass the XN perfects that are attested, since the eventuality derived by the perfect is constrained only in terms of homogeneity and telicity, that is to say that it must be homogeneous and atelic. It is not, however, constrained in terms of durativity, and thus may be durative or nondurative according to the specifications of the particular predicate. Thus at 15 the predicate is durative because of the adjunct phrase *πρῶτον ὑμῶν* referring to a time span prior to TUtt. By the same token, if the arguments of the predicate refer to entry into the state described, the perfect is also capable of expressing this, as demonstrated in example 19.

Furthermore, our proposal is able to predict where XN perfects should not occur, specifically where the predicate describes a non-homogeneous event, since in this case TSit is not homogeneous and cannot include TTop. Rather, the perfect must derive a homogeneous and atelic participant property that can be included in

<sup>53</sup> Indeed, at 2 Cor 2:13 it appears that the perfect of ἔχω is used in past narrative. However, see A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 3rd ed. (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1919), 900–902, for alternative approaches to this verse.

TTop. This provides an explanation for why there are no clear cases of predicates headed by the perfect of ἀκούω “hear” and ποιέω “do, make” with XN readings.

## 7. SEMANTIC RELATIONSHIP AND MERGER WITH THE AORIST

It is clear that many of the entailments of perfects of examples 14 and 18 are not far from those of the aorist, namely that an event in the denotation of the verb started and finished prior to TUtt. The difference is that in the case of the perfective, TTop includes TSit and is prior to TUtt, while in the case of the perfect, TTop includes TUtt and is itself properly included in TPostSit. However, it is clear that it would only take a small semantic shift for the semantics of the perfect and aorist to merge, i.e., for TTop to move backwards to include TSit rather than be included in TPostSit.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, the following examples suggest that this change is already underway in the period of the writing of the New Testament:<sup>55</sup>

20. καὶ ἀνέβη ὁ καπνὸς τῶν θυμιαμάτων ταῖς προσευχαῖς τῶν ἁγίων  
ἐκ χειρὸς τοῦ ἀγγέλου ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ. καὶ εἰληφεν ὁ ἄγγελος τὸν  
λίβανωτὸν καὶ ἐγέμισεν αὐτὸν ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου...

54 This proposal is not far, in principle, from that of McKay, “Use of the Ancient Greek Perfect,” 11, who proposes that the semantic change undergone by the perfect was “along the lines of an increasingly conscious implication of the past and present time relationship in the essential state idea of the perfect.” Robertson, *Grammar*, 898–99, describes a similar process.

55 Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 302–3, includes these examples in his list of those “which the grammars generally agree should be labeled aoristic.” He also includes 2 Cor 2:13 quoted at p. 452 n. 54 above. However, in the case of Rev 5:7 and 8:5, Robertson, *Grammar*, 899 invokes “a vivid dramatic colloquial historical perfect,” presumably akin to the historical present. Citing Moulton’s support, he appears to take πέπρακεν in Matt 13:46 in the same way, noting that it occurs in a vivid parable (ibid., 900). In the case of Rev 8:5, it is hard to see why the event of seizing the censer should be given particular prominence, while in Matt 13:47 one can see why the event of selling everything for the sake of buying the pearl might be emphasized. However, it is hard to see why in these examples one would use the perfect to do this, in preference to the historic present, since the latter would unambiguously place focus on the event of selling, as opposed the postevent situation, as would be the case if the perfect had its former semantic value. (My thanks to Steve Runge for these references.)

... and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar... (Rev 8:4-5 ESV)

21. εὕρων δὲ ἓνα πολύτιμον μαργαρίτην ἀπελθὼν πέπρακεν πάντα ὅσα εἶχεν καὶ ἡγόρασεν αὐτόν.

Who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matt 13:46 ESV)

I suggest the reason for such a development is that in change of state predicates and predicates that do not give rise to a state for the subject there is a potential conflict of interest between the event occurring before TTop, and the postsituation. It is not hard to imagine that in certain instances the former would have more pragmatic value, and in such cases TTop would appear to be shifted backwards. If repeated over a long enough period of time, this change could have become encoded as the “meaning” of the perfect.

## 8. CONCLUSION

To conclude, we set out to provide a semantic description of the Greek perfect capable of taking account of its problematic phenomena, namely that it is apparently able to convey anterior, resultative, and pure state in a single form. Using Klein’s semantic framework as a reference point, giving a description of tense and aspect of predicates in terms of Situation Time (TSit), Topic Time (TTop) and Utterance Time (TUtt), I surveyed the various existing views on the perfect in the Greek of the New Testament. I then proposed a description of the semantics of the perfect adopting Klein’s semantic aspectual framework, whereby the perfect derives a homogeneous atelic eventuality from the predicate and includes TTop within the TSit of this eventuality. Where a predicate itself describes a state for the subject (state predicates and change of state predicates), the perfect may simply return this state. By contrast, where a predicate does not describe or give rise to a state for the subject, the perfect derives a homogeneous atelic eventuality for the subject, a property of the subject based on the subject having previously participated in the event described by the predicate. This is readily interpreted as experiential in many situations. This latter interpretation is

also available for state and change-of-state predicates, so that all instances of the perfect are in principle capable of anterior denotation. I ended by suggesting that it is the semantic development of the perfect from including TTop in the posttime of the predicate (TPostSit), to including TSit of the event described by the predicate that led to its eventual merging with the aorist and ultimate demise.

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