PERFORMANCES AND ACTIVITIES

Denis Richard Oram

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This thesis is my own work and all the sources used in its composition have been acknowledged.
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Introduction

My aim in this thesis is to examine one of the distinctions that can be made between actions. It is, I think, a fairly central one in the philosophy of action, and its significance may be marked by its application in ethics, philosophical psychology, the philosophy of law and even aesthetics. My primary concern however, has been with the problem of making a workable definition of the distinction, rather than with its application.

In the first chapter I examine Kenny's definition of state, performance and activity verbs, which is the most comprehensive account that has so far been given. I also examine one of the strongest criticisms of Kenny's distinction, that of Evans, and a similar distinction made by Vendler. I conclude by arguing the impossibility of making the distinction in terms of verbs, and questioning whether a purely grammatical account is possible.

In the second chapter I examine further possible ways of giving a purely grammatical account, and argue against the capacity of such accounts to cover all possible cases. I then comment on the problems that are encountered when the search for a purely grammatical account is abandoned; problems in the characterisation of action, of the intention of the agent, etc. I conclude by asserting that existing attempts to give a comprehensive definition of the distinction seem inadequate and that the distinction seems to be a far more profound and complex one than might initially be supposed.

In the final chapter I argue for an alternative way of approaching the distinction and suggest other alternatives that might be pursued. I conclude the thesis by outlining the way in which the distinction might be applied as a means for identifying the extent to which an agent may be rationalising his action in order to avoid responsibility for a wrong doing.
Chapter 1. The grammatical account

J.L. Austin, in 'A Plea for Excuses' deplores the fact that the idea of 'doing an action' is commonly taken to be '...a self-explanatory, ground-level description, one which brings adequately into the open the essential features of everything that comes, by simple inspection, under it', and sees the need to introduce 'some classification into the vast miscellany of "actions"'. The distinction between performances and activities seems to be one such attempt. In this chapter I shall look at the most comprehensive existing formulation of the distinction, that of A. Kenny, and also examine similar tense distinctions made by Z. Vendler which, though not specifically designed to relate to actions in the same way that Kenny's seem to be, are closely related to Kenny's enterprise in so far as both are grammatical distinctions between what are commonly known as 'verbs of action'.

I. The criterion

Kenny makes his distinction in terms of types of verb used. He distinguishes performance and activity verbs from static verbs by the fact that (Rule 1) static verbs cannot take continuous tenses whereas the other two can; e.g. I can be growing up or living in Rome, but I cannot be being happy.

Performance verbs are distinguished from activity verbs by means of the fact that (Rule 2) with performance verbs 'x is $\phi$ ing' implies 'x has not $\phi$ ed', whereas in the case of activity verbs 'x is $\phi$ ing' implies 'x has $\phi$ ed'; e.g. that I am sitting on a chair implies that I have sat on that chair in the case of performance verbs.

1 A. Kenny, Action, Emotion and Will. London 1963, Ch.VIII.
Now this distinction I think, fails. And the main reason for this is that he does not make a distinction between the continuous and the non-continuous use of the perfect tense. In illustrating his point in relation to activity verbs he says:

... if I am living in Rome it does not follow that I have not lived in Rome; on the contrary told that I am living in Rome you may at once ask "And how long have you lived in Rome?". As with "live in Rome" so with "giggle", "listen to", "keep a secret", "ponder on"; in all these cases, "A is ø ing" implies not "A has not ø ed" but rather "A has ø ed" (op. cit. p.172).

Kenny is here making two claims:

1) for all performance verbs "A is ø ing" implies "A has not ø ed"

2) for all activity verbs "A is ø ing" implies "A has ø ed"

He uses 'living in Rome' as an example of an activity verb such that 'A is living in Rome' implies 'A has lived in Rome'. But it is not clear that this implication always holds. There is an ambiguity in the meaning of 'A has lived in Rome' between (a) a case where A has lived in Rome at some previous time stretch, but is not living in Rome now, in which case (2) above would be false, since 'A is living in Rome' would not imply 'A has lived in Rome' (or 'A has not lived in Rome') and (b) where 'A has lived in Rome' means the same as 'A has been living in Rome and still is'. But one can also say 'A has been building a house and still is'; therefore, where 'A has ø ed' has the same force as 'A has been ø ing and still is', it would not be true that 'A is ø ing' implies 'A has not ø ed', which would make (1) false.

To summarise: Either the continuous and non-continuous perfect tenses are equivalent in meaning or they are not. If they are, then it is not true that 'A is ø ing' implies 'A has not ø ed' in the case of performance verbs. If they are not then equivalent then it is false that 'A is ø ing'
implies 'A has not ed' in the case of activity verbs. Since there is a workable distinction between these verbs if 'A has not ed' is not taken as equivalent to 'A has been ed and still is', it seems appropriate to assume that the continuous and non-continuous perfect are not equivalent. But this would require, according to my argument, a modification of (2) such that, with activity verbs, while it is not true that 'A is ed' implies either 'A has ed' or 'A has not ed', 'A is ed', with activity verbs, does not imply 'A has not ed', while it does in the case of performance verbs.

It may be objected that this is just a case of unhappy choice of examples. It is certainly true that there are certain verbs which take a continuous tense for which this does not apply, namely, for example, 'winning' or 'reaching'. To say 'x is winning' does not necessarily imply 'x has been winning'. But there is also a further difference between this latter type of verb and Kenny's performance and activity verbs. This is that 'x is winning' does not always mean the same as 'x wins'. For example, x is running a race. At one stage of the race it may be true to say 'x is winning'. But at the closing stages of the whole thing (or any other stage for that matter) it is possible for this assertion to be made false, i.e. if he is overtaken at the finish. This type of verb cuts straight across Kenny's distinction between performance and activity verbs. For in the one instance, when x is winning but the race is not yet over, 'x is winning' does perhaps imply 'x has been winning', but not 'x has won'; which makes winning a performance verb. Whereas in another instance, where x's winning finishes the race, 'x wins' implies 'x has won' which makes it an activity verb, but does not necessarily imply 'x has been winning'. (He may have leapt to the lead at the last moment - does this last moment validate the claim that he must have been winning even if it was only for one-tenth of a second? If it does it is a different sense of 'having been
winning'; there is a clear sense in which 'x wins' may be consistent with 'x has not been winning'.) This latter point differentiates 'winning', and verbs like it, from both performance and activity verbs, a fact which Kenny fails to take into account. So his distinction between activity and performance verbs also fails to embrace all verbs which take a continuous tense.¹ But it is still possible to distinguish performance from activity verbs which relate to the criterion Kenny has given, from the fact that there is a difference in the way in which these two types of verb fail to imply the non-continuous perfect from the present tense. For while 'x is living in Rome' does not necessarily imply 'x had lived in Rome', 'x is building a house' implies necessarily not 'x has built a house'. To put it formally:

Activity - 'x is ing' does not entail 'x has ed'

Performance - 'x is ing' entails 'x has not ed'

Kenny, when formulating this distinction, puts it as follows:

Activity - A is ing only if A has ed - which

according to my argument, is false.

Performance - A is ing only if A has not ed - which

is true.

Thus it seems that Kenny must weaken his assertion about activity verbs. A similar point is made by Timothy C. Potts² about Aristotle's distinction between actions which have, and those that lack, a limit, but is not argued in any detail.


II. Distinguishing features: from perfect to present tense

After giving these basic criteria, Kenny goes on to outline various distinguishing features of the three types of verb. And the first assertion he makes seems rather less than obvious. This is that in the case of static verbs 'x has ed' implies 'x s';

We use such expressions as "I have loved her for seven years" or "I have been afraid of this all day" only when I still do love or when I still am afraid. If I have ceased to do so, or be so, then we most commonly use not the perfect but the simple preterite; "I loved her", "I was afraid of this". (op. cit. p.173)

As it stands this general rule seems to rest on pretty weak foundations. There is nothing to prevent me saying 'I'm miserable now although I have been happy in the past'. I cannot see immediate grounds, other than the fact that Kenny says so, for arguing that the preterite should be used here rather than the perfect tense. If there are logical reasons for this, Kenny certainly has not given them.

Further, it can be seen that if 'x has ed', which he translates in his examples relating to static verbs as 'x has been ', implies 'x s' in the case of static verbs, it is also the case that 'x has been ing' implies 'x s (or is ing)' in the case of both performance and activity verbs. I take it that what Kenny means in making this point about static verbs is that as soon as one can say, for example, 'I have been happy', it is true to say 'I am happy'. Kenny claims that when one has a static verb in the perfect tense, it is appropriate to add '...and still am' as in 'I have been happy and still am'. But by the same token this feature also applies to 'I have been building this house for six months and still am', and to 'I have been living in Rome for three years and still am'. So it is difficult to see how this serves as a distinguishing feature of static verbs.
III. From present to future perfect

The next distinguishing feature that Kenny identifies relates to performance verbs. This is that, given that the statement 'x \( \delta s \)' is true, it will not always be true in the future to say 'x has \( \delta \text{ed} \)'; whereas this does not apply to static and activity verbs. 'Alf is walking to the Rose and Crown' may be true now, he says, but it does not necessarily follow that in the future it will be true to say 'Alf has walked to the Rose and Crown'. He does clarify this, or rather qualify it:

To be sure, if Mary is knitting a sweater, then it will be true that Mary was knitting a sweater, and we might say that the past tense which corresponds to the non-frequentative present is not the simple past tense.

In general, it is only once A has \( \delta \text{ed} \), that we can say that it will be true that A \( \delta \text{ed} \). It is therefore only when a present-tensed proposition contains a verb for which the inference from present to perfect holds that we can say that the corresponding simple-past-tensed proposition will be true. And the inference from present to perfect holds only for certain states and activities, not for performances. (op. cit. p.176)

Kenny now appears to be making a distinction which he had previously ignored. In the same way as it is true that the fact that Mary is knitting a sweater implies that she was knitting a sweater, that she is knitting a sweater implies that she has been knitting a sweater. 'Was' and 'has been' seem to convey the same thing here, since, although the former is a non-perfect tense, they are both continuous. Thus he does seem to be making the sort of distinction that I made earlier; that is, between 'has \( \delta \text{ed} \)' and 'has been \( \delta \text{ing} \).

But let us unlock the expository part of the above quotation. In the first place Kenny is no longer talking about types of verb, but about the real thing - performances, activities and states per se. This suggests that Kenny assumes that wherever there is a statement using a particular
type of verb, there the relevant performance, activity or state is always
to be found; or, to put it another way, that one type of verb cannot be
used as the main verb in a description of an event having a different
name from that of the type of that verb. For example, an activity verb
cannot be used as the main verb in the description of a performance.
But since counter-examples immediately spring to mind - 'he builds houses'
seems by all accounts the description of an activity, while Kenny gives
the verb 'to build' as a performance verb - some refinement is clearly
needed if this suggestion is going to work, if it does at all.

But to return to the main argument here. He says that 'with performance
verbs the past tense which corresponds to the non-frequentative present
is not the simple past tense'.

It appears that what Kenny wants to say in this passage can be put
in terms of continuous and non-continuous usage. For, as has been seen
in the examples he gives, he contrasts the continuous past, 'was knitting'
with the non-continuous past, 'knitted'. And I shall assume that what he
means by the 'simple past tense' is the same as what I call non-continuous
past tense. Under this interpretation his argument would be roughly that,
while 'x is doing' implies that it will be true that 'x has been doing'
(or 'has been doing' in the case of static verbs) with all three verbs, it is
only in the case of performance verbs that 'x does' will not necessarily
imply 'x has done'. This is true, but here again the problem of types of
verb like 'winning' crop up. 'X is winning' does not imply that it will
be true that x has won. And it has been seen that 'winning' is neither
a performance nor an activity verb.

IV. Taking, lasting, and going on for, a time

The next point he makes is that only performance verbs can take time;
states last for a time, he says, and activities go on for a time, but
neither take time. It is not clear what this idea of 'taking time' is.
For there does seem to be an un-objectionable sense in which one may talk of activities taking time. He says; '...one may giggle for five minutes, but one does not take five minutes to giggle' (op. cit. p.176). But here he is twisting language to suit his own purpose. For it seems quite sensible to say that x took five minutes in which to giggle, and it seems even more meaningful to say that giggling, listening to, weeping, laughing - examples Kenny gives of activity verbs - all take time, as well as going on for a time. In fact I am not sure what the difference between taking, going on for, and lasting for, a time is. All convey an idea of continuousness and all are capable of being given a definite determination, having a beginning and an end. It seems that such grammatical pointers need greater explanation than has been given. Following the same vein, Kenny says: 'performances are performed in a period to time; states and activities are prolonged for a period of time. We travel to Rome in three days, and stay there for three days. If we spend an hour in a successful search for a thimble, then we look for it for an hour and find it in an hour'. (Ibid.) But what is one to make of the statement 'in three days she laughed a lot'? Did not the laughing occur in a period of time? My objection here is not so much to the fact that these grammatical expressions may be used to indicate a difference in temporal reference - that after all is presumably their function. It is rather that Kenny is in danger of being too rigid in exalting their function to one in which they can serve to distinguish types of verb. While he does not expressly say so, the suggestion is that one can use these expressions to make a distinction just by looking at their uses in a sentence. This is not true in all cases since, as my examples have indicated, there may be instances where one of these expressions, such as 'in' as in 'in three days she laughed a lot', may cross the categories Kenny has stipulated. And in cases such as this Kenny must say in defence that the expression is being
used in a deviant way. But once he makes this move the expressions lose their value as grammatical criteria.

These expressions also raise questions about the way in which these verbs refer to different ways in which actions are placed in time. I will be dealing with this later at greater length since I think the role of temporal considerations is crucial to the distinction.

V. Quickly and slowly

He then goes on to say that only performance verbs can be qualified by the adverbs 'quickly' and 'slowly'. But here again it seems quite meaningful to say 'he laughed slowly'. And he seems to admit the weakness of the assertion when he attempts to meet this objection:

Of course, one can see a joke quickly or slowly, just as one can take a long time to see a joke, though seeing a joke is not a performance; but this merely means that the time between hearing or seeing a joke was short or long, not that the seeing of the joke was something which it took a shorter or longer time to complete. Only performances can be complete or incomplete. Contrast "I've not yet finished drying the baby", and "I'm half-way through drinking the whisky" with "I'm half-way through wanting a drink". Activities and states may be prolonged indefinitely or they may cease; performances come to a definite end and are finished. I can go on keeping a secret for ever; I can only go on telling a secret until it is told. (op. cit. p.177)

Well, first, he seems to have rejected the criterion in terms of the adverbs 'quickly' and 'slowly' only applying to performance verbs, in favour of another, that of the completeness of performances. But here again the distinction seems rather unsatisfactory. For why is it not possible to say 'I've not yet finished laughing at the joke' or 'I'm half-way through pondering this problem and you've interrupted my activity'. I think here that it might well be argued that laughing and pondering are referred to as performances in this context. But this possibility is implicitly ruled out by Kenny in view of his assumption that performance
verbs can only be used to refer to performances, activity verbs to activities, and static verbs to states.

And surely, performances can in principle be prolonged indefinitely, at least as long as it is meaningful to talk of states and activities in this way, i.e. until the agent dies. In principle, although admittedly extremely unlikely in practice, a may could go on telling a secret for the rest of his life. (It may be a very long story or he may be shot by an impatient listener while still telling it.) And this fact seems to be necessary if he is to retain his claim that in the case of performance verbs 'x 6s' does not imply that it will be true in the future that 'x has 6 ed'. For under this claim 'x is telling a secret' does not imply that it will be true that x has told a secret.

It may be objected that if the man dies while keeping the secret, he may still be said to be keeping it, whereas of course he could never be said to be still telling it once he is dead. But this involves rather a poetic use of language. For it is not clear what meaning can be given to the statement 'x, qua corpse, is keeping the secret' if it is not possible for x, qua corpse, to reveal it. And this distinction becomes even more implausible in the case of laughing. It seems that one is likely to be keeping a secret just as indefinitely (or just as definitely for that matter) as when one is laughing.

VI. Bringing it about that p

Kenny then says:

Performances are brought to an end by states. Any performance is describable in the forms "bringing it about that p". Washing the dishes is bringing it about that the dishes are clean; learning French is bringing it about that I know French, walking to Rome is bringing it about that I am in Rome... One performance differs from another in accordance with the difference between the states of affairs brought about: performances are specified by their ends. (op. cit. p.177-8).
He seems here to be making two main points:

1) Performances are brought to an end by states. Any performance is describable in the form 'bringing it about that p'.

2) 'One performance differs from another in accordance with the differences between the states of affairs brought about; performances are specified by their ends.'

Is this a distinctive feature of performances? It certainly seems to be the case that activities are not brought to an end by states, if only because activities are not brought to an end in the same way as performances are.

But then is Kenny saying that only performances are describable in the form 'bringing it about that p'? Well it seems that in at least some cases it is possible to redescribe an activity as 'bringing it about that p'. A can be walking for the exercise. The activity of walking can now be described as 'bringing it about that p' where p is the state of having been exercised.

But, it may be objected, in the case of this activity, p does not terminate the action, in the same way that a given state can terminate a performance. So that now the distinguishing feature is not so much that a performance is describable as bringing it about that p, but rather that the p is the terminal point of the performance, and specifies it.

But in what sense does the end of a performance specify it? A is building a house. The terminal point, p, beyond which A cannot continue building the same house, is the state which obtains when it is true to say 'the house has been built'. But as Q. Skinner¹ points out, 'The only truth ... which this form of analysis seems to yield ... is that these verbs of action are capable of being put through a passive transformation', and that 'if the analysis is to be rescued from this triviality, it is

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obvious what we must do; assign some independent value to the 'p' which is said to be brought about whenever a performance takes place.

But it seems that any such attempt to find an independent 'p' fails to 'specify the performance' in the manner Kenny wants, since to be independent is to lack the logical relation that is required for the p to carry out the required job of specification. And if the p seems to have this specifying function, the description 'bringing it about that p' ceases to be a distinguishing feature of performances and sinks into triviality. It does seem however that the idea of the terminal point of an action is crucial to the distinction, and I hope its significance becomes clearer as the discussion proceeds.

VII. Commanded and voluntary actions

In conclusion Kenny points out that only performances can be commanded, and thus all performances are voluntary. And secondly that all performances are distinguished from states in that they have purposes, while only some activities have purposes. This is an issue which I wish to discuss below so I will leave it for the moment.

VIII. Summary of Kenny

The distinguishing features outlined in the first four sections all relate to the question of tenses, and there appears to be an underlying confusion about the use of the continuous and non-continuous past tense. I have argued that his assertion that 'x hasød' in the case of static verbs, implies that 'xød', is false. But, if true, it would parallel the criterion for distinguishing static verbs from the other two types, since the implication from past to present only applies in the continuous perfect tense with performance and activity verbs; and thus, since static verbs cannot take a continuous use, the distinction would have carried over.
Secondly, he asserts that only in the case of performance verbs does 'x is $\phi$ ing' fail to imply 'x will have $\phi$ ed'. While I hope that I have demonstrated the falsity of this proposition, the distinction between continuous and non-continuous usage is again relevant, since it has been indicated that 'x is $\phi$ ing' implies 'x will have been $\phi$ing' in the case of both performance and activity verbs.

The claim that performances take time, activities go on for a time, and states last for a time has a close connection with the criterion for distinguishing performance from activity verbs. If Jones is taking three months to build a house - performance - he has not built it. While if Smith is going on living in Rome he has already been living there, but has not necessarily lived there before. Thus there is a parallel with the amended version of Kenny's criterion, i.e., that there is an implication from 'is $\phi$ ing' to 'has not $\phi$ ed' with performance verbs, while there is no implication from 'is $\phi$ ing' to either 'has $\phi$ ed' or 'has not $\phi$ ed', with activity verbs.

In the case of the distinction between static and other verbs however, this feature seems to run contrary to the criterion given. The statement 'his pain is lasting for a long time' makes sense, but is at the same time a continuous use of the verb 'to last for'. But if 'taking', 'lasting for' and 'going on for' are to serve as criteria for their corresponding categories, then they must in a secondary sense, be performance, activity and static verbs respectively.

His point that only performances can take the adverbs 'quickly' and 'slowly', because only performances can be complete or incomplete, has been shown to require greater elaboration. And it seems that this point has a great deal to do with the criterion for distinguishing performance and activity verbs. For if it were true that, in the case of activity verbs, 'x is $\phi$ ing' implies 'x has $\phi$ ed' then it would follow that there would
never be an instant where it was true to say 'x is \text{\textit{ing}}' and that he
had not at the same time \text{\textit{ed}}; and therefore that it would never be true
to say that x had not completed or finished \text{\textit{ing}}. And if it were never
true that activities were \text{incomplete} it could never be true that they
were complete either.

It is interesting to note however that the distinction he is making
here does hold between both performance and activity verbs and the category
of verbs which he fails to mention, e.g. 'win' and 'reach', which are not
of any of the three types he has given. 'X wins' does imply 'x has won'
and can therefore be neither complete nor incomplete. The contrast also
holds for static verbs, to which the same applies.

So it looks as if the systematic elaboration of the uses and
implications of continuous and non-continuous tenses would allow many of
Kenny's problems to fall into place. This has been indicated by Potts (op.
cit.) when he argues that the perfect tense is not a proper past tense at
all. Whether the situation is as clear-cut as that is open to doubt. It
does seem, however, that in some of its uses, especially in its continuous
sense, the perfect tense does not refer to a preceding time period, as in
the case where it is always true to say 'I have been \text{\textit{ing}}' \text{\textit{as soon as}}
and \text{\textit{at the same time as}} it is true to say 'I am \text{\textit{ing}}'. This raises the
question of what is involved in the concepts of 'as soon as' and 'at the
same time as'. Does it mean that the perfect tense, as used here, refers
to the same, or to a different, time period?

It has been seen that certain confusions arise over the fact that he
never makes it clear what role his distinctions between different types of
verb play in distinguishing between different types of \text{\textit{action}}. It seems
to be assumed that a performance, for example, cannot be referred to by a
description containing an activity verb. If it could there would seem
to be little point in distinguishing between different types of \text{\textit{verb}} in
the way he does. As it is, his many examples do not stand up to the distinctions he makes. This suggests that, although the distinctions may be alright, they might apply to the description as a whole of these different types of action, rather than only to the verbs used in such descriptions.

IX. **Substances and human agents**

Kenny's distinction has also been criticised by Evans,¹ with an emphasis on the fact that it cannot be made in terms of types of verbs. I think that we have covered much the same ground and made similar criticisms if in slightly different ways. I have already acknowledged the third category of action, viz. transitory acts, for which the strong implication from 'A ãs' to 'A has ãd' holds, and I have shown how this category crosses both the other categories.

Evans also legislates for the distinction only apply to human agents and not to non-human substances, on the grounds that ascription to substances is incompatible with one of Kenny's criterial distinctions for distinguishing performance verbs, namely that all performances, some activities and no states, can be commanded.² Now I think this may be rather a casual way of dismissing substances from taking performance, activity or transitory act descriptions. Although both Evans and I (and, it would seem, Kenny) are primarily interested in human action, the way in which the distinction applies to substances may shed light on considerations of intention that the distinction raises when applied to human action. It also seems to be the case that performance descriptions, when they are not completely intentional, are processes, at least in so far as one can talk of someone being in the process of building a house or running to Yass.


The value I see in including substances in our categorisation of actions is that one can gain a clearer insight into what is meant by saying that someone or something is doing something. It seems that when we say of the sea that it is bringing about the downfall of the cliff, we are saying something similar to what we would say of someone who is carrying on a performance but does not realise it, i.e. where the agent's intentions need not be taken into account in describing his action as a performance.

Can we say that the sea is engaged in a performance in the same way that a man is? We can say that the sea is bringing about the downfall of the cliff, such that 'the sea is destroying the cliff' implies 'the sea has not brought down the cliff'. Nonetheless this does have an anthropomorphic ring to it, rather like talking about the fury of the sea. We would be more inclined to say that the downfall of the cliff is the result of the movement of the sea rather than the terminal point of the sea's action in bringing down the cliff.

Evans argues against the inclusion of processes as subjects of the distinction on the grounds that Kenny includes as one of the distinguishing features of performances the fact that only performances can be commanded. But since processes cannot be commanded, Kenny is faced with the dilemma of either excluding processes or saying that not all performances can be commanded. Evans argues in favour of the former on the grounds that what Kenny is primarily interested in is human action.

But it may be possible to argue that even some human performances cannot be commanded. Whether human performances can be commanded or not depends on the description of what is being performed. For example, a man may be running along a road and, when asked what he is doing, say 'I am running along this road for thirty miles'. Now x, an observer, may know that the town of Yass is exactly thirty miles along the road; and A, the agent, may not know this fact. So that it is true to say, of what
A is doing, 'A is running to Yass without realising it'. And it is impossible to command someone to run to Yass without realising it. If one commands someone to run to Yass without realising it and he does run to Yass, he either realises that he is running to Yass, or he accidently runs there, in which case it would not be clear what sense could be given to the idea that he had obeyed a command in this context. * 

So it seems that, contra Kenny, not all performances which have a human agent can be commanded. It might be argued that 'running to Yass without realising it' is not the correct description of what A is doing. But since Kenny's only condition for an action description is that it can be given in answer to the question 'What is A doing?', in this context at least the description is quite legitimate.

The problem for Evans now is that the grounds on which he is qualifying non-human substances as subjects of the distinction also disqualifies human agents in some cases. This means that only intended actions can be performances or activities, since only intended actions can be commanded. (I assume an equivalent force holds here for 'doing x without realising it' and 'doing x without intending it'.) It may be a good way of making a distinction between performances and activities to limit them to intended actions, but then the criterion as it stands would be inadequate, since a given description might serve to describe an intended or an unintended action, depending on context. So that any attempt to make the distinction solely in terms of the description of an action independent of its context would fail.

* Professor Herbst has suggested a parallel case where an officer insists that all orders be obeyed and then orders that everyone should do what they like.
X. **Transitory acts**

Evans then goes on to add the third category of transitory acts to the distinction,\(^1\) as one which takes the non-frequentative non-continuous present tense but is still an action and not a state as Kenny argues. As we have already seen, the stronger implication between 'A òs' and 'A had òd' here obtains, such that the former entails the latter.

Verbs such as 'winning' and 'reaching' qualify here. Kenny asserts that static verbs are those verbs which cannot take the continuous present tense. He also asserts that the use of the non-continuous present with static verbs is non-frequentative, whereas it is frequentative in the case of performance and activity verbs. This cuckoo category of verbs such as 'winning' does take the non-frequentative non-continuous present, as in 'he wins' where this is a description of a particular act of winning and where the historic present is being used, such that 'he wins' is equivalent to 'he has won'. But it can also take the present continuous, which disqualifies it as a static verb.

So transitory acts fill a vacuum necessitated by the amendment to Kenny's assertion that, with activity verbs, 'A is ò ing' implies 'A has òd'. What we have now are performances, where 'A is ò ing' implies 'A has not òd'; activities, where 'A is ò ing' does not imply 'A has not òd'; and transitory acts, where 'A òs' implies 'A has òd'. The argument against the distinction being made in terms of types of verbs is reinforced by the fact that, with 'winning', 'A is winning the race' implies 'A has not yet won the race' which makes winning a performance and 'A wins the race' implies 'A has won the race', which makes it a transitory act.

As we shall see, Vendler's achievement terms fulfil much the same sort of role as Evan's transitory acts.

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1 Ibid., p.300.
XI. Results and consequences

Evans then attempts to reformulate the distinction between performances, activities and transitory acts on the basis of von Wright's distinction between the result and consequence of an act: 'the connection between the act and its result is intrinsic (logical), that between the act and its consequence(s) extrinsic (causal).¹ Evans then goes on to distinguish activities from performances by the fact that in the case of an activity, the agent 'brings about a result from the moment he starts the activity until the moment he stops';² whereas in the case of a performance 'he brings a result after engaging in the performance for some time, and the materialisation of the result terminates the performance'.

Let us then take an example of a performance and an activity respectively; of a performance take walking to town, and of an activity, going for a walk. Now, according to Evans, going for a walk is an activity because the intrinsic logical result of having gone for a walk has been brought about from the moment the agent starts walking; and walking to town is a performance because its result - having walked to town - is only brought about after the performance has been engaged in for some time, and once he has walked to town he can no longer continue walking to town. The result of having got to town terminates the performance.

Well, in this example at any rate, the agent, in carrying out the performance, is also fulfilling the conditions for an activity, at least insofar as in walking he is continuously bringing about that he has walked. But it may also be possible that 'walking to town' might be seen as an activity. In illustrating the distinction between result and consequence, Evans says: 'If the act is the act of opening a window, it is logically necessary that the window should open. Should the window not open, the

¹ Ibid., p.301.
² Ibid., p.302.
act cannot be described as the act of opening. Instead the agent would be described as performing some other act; namely, the act of trying to open the window'. Now, in the same way, can we not say of the man walking to town, that if the act is the act of walking to town, it is logically necessary that he should reach the town? Should he not reach it, the act cannot be described as the act of walking to town. Instead the agent would be described as performing some other act; namely, the act of trying to walk to town. If this holds true of the performance of walking to town, then certain problems arise. It now seems that whether or not walking to town is a performance or not depends on whether it is correct to say that the agent is actually walking to town or merely trying to do so. In some cases where the agent may be walking but does not make it, it may sometimes be appropriate to say that he was walking to town; whereas in other cases it may be more appropriate to say he was just trying to walk to town. In the case where it may be correct to say that the agent actually was walking to town, rather than just trying to do so, one is justified in saying that he was continuously bringing about the result of having to-town-walked where walking-to-town is a kind of walking, just as buffalo-hunting is a form of hunting.

My main points here are that (1) in the case of some performances at least a result is continuously brought about, e.g. 'having walked' in 'walking to town'; and (2) a given description may serve to describe a performance or an activity, such that it may be impossible to determine in abstraction whether a continuous result is being brought about or not.

So the least we can say of Evans' reformulation is that if the distinction can be made at all, it will lie in terms of the fact that a performance has a terminal point, while an activity does not. How much further we can

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1 Ibid., p.301.
go in defining or applying the distinction is the main preoccupation of this thesis.

XII. Basic performances and activities

Evans then makes further distinctions within these categories. He distinguishes basic and compound performances and activities. A basic performance or activity is distinguishable by means of the fact that neither can be described as a series of sub-activities, performances or transitory acts. I wish to take issue with him in the possibility of distinguishing either basic activities or performances in this way.

In the case of basic activities there is reason to argue that they must be describable as a series of transitory acts. Let us take walking again. Walking consists of raising a leg, moving it forward, then putting it down again, then raising the other leg etc. Now at any stage where it is true to say of someone that he is walking it will be true to say that he is doing one of these three things. And each of these three actions are themselves activities. So that for Evans they would each be basic activities. But each of these activities has a beginning and an end. In this case and in the case of any action whatsoever there will be a point where the agent starts and stops what he is doing. And the beginning and end, the start and stop, of an action must be a transitory act. To quote Evans: 'An agent performs a transitory act when he brings it about all at once, and the result terminates the act'. Likewise an agent performs the act of starting to do something when he brings about the result of having started to do that thing all at once, and the result, namely that the agent has started, terminated the act of starting.

So this would seem to act as a counter-example to both basic performances and basic activities.

I would also like to argue that all performances are constituted by an activity. Given that any action consists of some physical movement on
the part of the agent, nothing in the movement taken on its own will tell us whether the action is a performance or an activity. Taken purely as physical movement, all we can say is that the movement starts and stops. We cannot say that there is logically some point beyond which the movement cannot continue. Whether an action has a terminal point or not or indeed whether it is an action at all, is a function of the description of the physical movement. Assuming that any movement can be ascribed to a non-human substance so that it becomes the action of that substance, then we can say of any physical movement that it must be either an activity or a transitory act. That much is certain. But in order to determine whether a given physical movement is a performance or not, we have to go beyond the mere physical movement. For example a human body is seen on a road, moving in a manner characteristically known as walking. Now, depending on how we analyse the bodily movement, whether we take just the instant when a foot touches the ground (transitory act) or the complete cycle of foot raised, foot moved forward, foot put down (activity), we know that the movement is either an activity or a transitory act. And as yet we are unable to tell whether there is a terminal point to the action. It is only once we take cognizance of the end of the agent that we are able to determine whether the action is describable as a performance. So that, in this sense at least, an activity must be basic to a performance. As has been suggested it also seems that any action is redescribable as a series of transitory acts, again on the basis that such a distinction rests not on observable features of a given physical movement, but on how we describe it. Given that raising an arm is a basic activity, we break down the description 'raising an arm' into an infinite number of stages of the actual movement. And at least one stage of this breakdown we will find as instantaneous a movement as we are likely to find in a transitory act. It is not as if we can measure physical change to determine whether it is
transitory. An act is as transitory or as intransitory as we choose to make it within a relative conceptual framework.

But given these qualifications it still seems possible to distinguish basic activities. Given that any activity can be described as a series of transitory acts, we can take as a basic activity that which is (a) continuous in time; and (b) not describable as a series of sub-activities. So that, by the same token, we can define a basic performance as being constituted solely by a basic activity.

XIII. Vendler on tense and time

The distinctions made by Zeno Vendler\(^1\) are very similar to those made by Kenny. He also distinguishes verbs which take continuous tenses and those that do not. And within the group of verbs which do, he distinguishes verbs which have, and those which lack, 'terminal points', the former being called *accomplishment* terms, and the latter *activity* terms. A terminal point he defines in terms of the distinction between taking time and going on for a time: 'pushing a cart may go on for a time, but it does not take time; the activity of drawing may also go on for a time, but it takes a certain time to draw a circle... Running a mile and drawing a circle have to be finished, while it does not make sense to talk of finishing running or pushing a cart' (p.145).

But, unlike Kenny, Vendler makes a further distinction within the group of verbs which cannot take continuous tenses, in terms of the distinction between verbs which 'can be predicated only for single moments of time (strictly speaking)' (p.146) and those which 'can be predicated for shorter or longer periods of time' (ibid.). The former he calls *achievement* terms and the latter *state* terms. 'One reaches the hilltop, wins the race, spots or recognises something, and so on at a definite moment. On the other hand, one can know or believe something, love or dominate somebody, for a shorter or longer period.' (Ibid.) It is worthy of note

\(^1\) Z. Vendler 'Verbs and Times', *Philosophical Review* LXVI (1957).
in passing, for further comment, that, first, achievement terms clearly fill the gap that made Kenny's distinctions incomplete; and secondly, that there is a certain incongruity in classing verbs like 'to win' in a category of verbs lacking continuous tenses; 'he is winning at the moment' makes ample sense. But there is the suggestion that the continuous present is used here in a rather different way than in the case of other types of verb.

Vendler goes on to make an interesting point about achievement terms when he ascribes to them a quality originally defined by Aristotle (Met. IX, vi, 7-10), namely that once a statement using an achievement term is true in the present tense, it is also true in the perfect. Further, he says, 'in cases of pure achievement terms the present tense is almost exclusively used as historic present or as indicating immediate future. "Now he finds the treasure (or wins the race, and so on)" is not used to report the actual finding or winning, while the seemingly paradoxical "Now he has found it" or "At this moment he has won the race" is' (p.147).

Vendler also makes parallels between accomplishments and achievements on the one hand and activities and states on the other. The first pair presuppose unique and definite time periods, while the latter imply time periods that are neither unique nor definite.

He goes on to make a further distinction within the group of state terms, which Kenny again does not make; that is between specific and generic states. The distinction rests on the fact that, for some terms, such as 'being a cabdriver' or 'being a dogcatcher' there are specific activities which, when performed a number of times, entitle the performer to be credited with the relevant state. Such activities are in this case 'driving a cab' and 'catching dogs' respectively. While there are other states, such as 'being a ruler of a country' or 'being an educator', for which there is no such specific activity; there is no activity which can be specifically
identified as ruling or educating. Of the difference between the ruler and the painter he says; 'Is he (the ruler) "ruling" only while he is addressing the assembly and surveying the troops, or also when he is eating dinner at a state banquet? We feel that some of our actions are more appropriate than others to his state as a ruler, but we also feel that none of them in particular can be called "ruling". Of course, a painter also performs diverse actions which are more or less related to his profession (e.g. watching the sunset or buying canvas); nevertheless there is one activity, actually painting, which is the activity of a painter' (p.151).

Vendler goes on to say much that is interesting about the relations between these different types of term. But I wish to cast attention mainly on his more basic distinctions and to compare and contrast them with Kenny's.

XIV. Kenny and Vendler

One general point of contrast between Kenny and Vendler is that Vendler does not assume that the distinction between these different kinds of doing and being rests solely on the verbs in themselves. He is careful to distinguish only between different types of term; and, in distinguishing between accomplishment and activity terms he distinguishes 'running' (activity) and 'running a mile' (accomplishment).

Vendler's distinction between accomplishment and activity terms seems to correspond almost exactly to Kenny's distinction between performance and activity verbs. But it is interesting to note that their criteria differ, at least in form. But substantially there are close connections. Vendler distinguishes accomplishment and activity terms in terms of completeness and the idea of finishing. And it has already been seen that there is a close connection between Kenny's basic distinction between performance and activity verbs and the feature outlined in Section V. In
fact there is an almost exact parallel in wording here with Vendler's criterion. Kenny says 'Activities and states may be prolonged indefinitely or they may cease; performances come to a definite end and are finished' (op. cit. p.177); Vendler says 'the activity of drawing may also go on for a time, but it takes a certain time to draw a circle... (accomplishment) ...Running a mile and drawing a circle have to be finished, while it does not make sense to talk of finishing running or pushing a cart' (p.145).

I have already argued against the adequacy of a distinction drawn along these lines (see p.8). In fact what I want to argue is, not so much that this sort of criterion is false, but that it is not sufficiently clear and precise to cover possible ambiguity of interpretation. Both Kenny and Vendler are giving purely linguistic criteria, in terms of common usage, to make a distinction which surely requires a deeper logical analysis.

Let us then examine again these notions of taking time, going on for a time and that of finishing something. Taking time, it is implied, has an air of completeness about it that going on for a time lacks. For something to take a certain length of time implies that once a certain point is reached whatever is being done cannot be continued; whereas if something goes on for a time there is no set point at which the action being done cannot be continued. So if Kenny and Vendler are right, there cannot be a case where an action can be meaningfully said to take time and for which there is no set point at which the action must cease; and no case of an action which can be meaningfully said to go on for a time and for which there is a set point at which the action must stop. Of course the trouble here lies in establishing what is or is not a 'meaningful usage'. But in trying to establish examples this problem may not be relevant.

A paradigm case - it takes Herbert five minutes to run a mile; and on the other hand, Herbert is running for a long time. There is an asymmetry
in the syntactical form of the two examples. And it seems that the second example cannot take the form of the other and retain its original force, or rather, the sentence becomes grammatically uncomfortable. 'Herbert is taking five minutes to run a mile' deprives the first example of its frequentative sense. 'It goes on for a long time, Herbert's running' is not English English, and if the noun clause is put in the right place, so that one gets 'Herbert's running goes on for a long time' it contains a frequentative sense that 'Herbert is running for a long time' lacks.

It may help in trying to elucidate what Vendler and Kenny are saying by examining an earlier point made in the same paragraph as his assertion about finishing, which has been shown to be closely connected to Kenny's point about taking, and going on for a time. Vendler says: 'If I say of a person that he is running a mile or of someone that he is drawing a circle, then I do claim that the first one will keep running till he has covered the mile and that the second will keep drawing till he has drawn the circle. If they do not complete their activities, my statement will turn out to be false' (op. cit. p.145). The sentence I have underlined amounts to much the same sort of assertion that I have implied is being made by Kenny in making the 'taking-going on for' distinction, i.e. that there is a sense of necessary completion in the one case that the other lacks. But let us take a situation in which A says of X 'X is running a mile'. But X does not in fact run that mile (X being a lazy fellow) and subsequently says 'I was running a mile, but I stopped before I completed the distance'.

As I have suggested in discussing Evans, there is a distinction here between 'running a mile' and 'trying to run a mile'. Vendler suggests when he says 'If they do not complete their activity my statement will turn out to be false', that only when an action which takes a performance or accomplishment form (such as 'running a mile') is successful, can we say that the action was an accomplishment at all. Whereas, as I have argued
before, it may be possible that in the case of a particular person running a mile, say Roger Bannister, it would be plausible to say that he was running a mile, rather than trying to, even if he did not make it; whereas this could not be plausibly said, say, of an overweight, unfit person who collapses in the middle of the run. In the first case it would be meaningful to say Roger Bannister had stopped running a mile, whereas in the second, one would have to say something to the effect that he was unsuccessful in his attempt to run a mile. Since it would be meaningful in the first case to say he stopped, and stopping and finishing here have the same force, it seems that 'running a mile' would here be seen as, and used as, an activity, and not just an accomplishment, term.

Vendler says 'running a mile and drawing a circle have to be finished, while it does not make sense to talk of finishing running or pushing a cart'. On what grounds does he assert that it does not make sense to talk of finishing running? If he is arguing from ordinary usage then surely it makes sense to say 'X has finished pushing the cart'. It may be objected that in this case the correct formulation is 'X has stopped pushing the cart' and so on for any counter-example that may be put forward. But this does not provide grounds for asserting that it does not make sense to say 'X has finished pushing the cart'. I only wish to point out both Kenny and Vendler rely rather heavily on linguistic usage in cases where greater spelling out of contexts which determine legitimacy or illegitimacy of usage is clearly needed. How is Vendler going to establish that 'X has finished pushing the cart' is an incorrect formulation without becoming circular, i.e. without coming back to his point that running a mile involves a process for which there is a fixed terminal point, whereas running simpliciter does not? Of course Vendler can say that in those instances where 'X has finished pushing a cart' is meaningful, the statement in question is elliptical, that in fact the speaker has failed
to mention some underlying presupposition about the activity in question, which, if made explicit, would turn the statement into the description of an accomplishment. For example Mrs Omo, in saying that her son Alphonse has finished pushing the vehicle in question, may be speaking elliptically on the basis of an expanded description of what Alphonse was doing, namely 'Alphonse is pushing the cart until tea-time'. Vendler can argue that 'X has finished pushing the cart' is meaningful only where 'pushing the cart' is used elliptically to cover up what is really an accomplishment term, as in 'X is pushing the cart to Rome' where 'pushing-the-cart-to-Rome' is the hidden accomplishment term. But this game can be played in any case where in 'X has finished doing' is an activity term. So that what Vendler should have said in the first place is, not that it does not make sense to talk of finishing pushing a cart - discomfort alone does not establish nonsense - but that where one does talk of finishing in relation to an activity term, the context in which it is used will turn out to presuppose an implicit completeness in the term such that it is really an accomplishment term wearing a beard. But Vendler is using the fact that there are instances where it does not make sense to talk of finishing doing in order to make the distinction between accomplishment and activity terms. So that it seems he cannot use this point about linguistic usage as a criterion.

I think therefore, that there may well be grounds for questioning the validity of distinguishing performances, activities and states on the basis of either the verb used or some other part of the sentence. The verb to run can be used either to refer to a performance or an activity; and the term 'running a mile', while it may be most commonly used to refer to a performance, can be used to refer to an activity, e.g. 'he runs a mile every day', depending on the tense employed.
So it seems that the best way to go about making the sort of distinction Kenny and Vendler are after is to consider the description as a whole and elaborate the tense implications in terms similar to those used in the amended version of Kenny's criterion for distinguishing performance and activity terms. It is on the fact that the implications have not been sufficiently elaborated that I base my criticisms of Kenny and Vendler.

XV. Categorisation of tenses

Corresponding to the differences in time referred to, the three basic tenses are clearly the past, present and future tenses. But within this basic framework there obtain more specific differences; under the category of past tense come the perfect, imperfect and pluperfect tenses; under the present, the historic and the non-historic; and under the future, the ordinary future and the future perfect. This seems to be the standard way of specifying these tenses under their respective genera.

But then one finds that the use of a particular tense does not always indicate that the proposition in which the tense is employed implies its correlative time reference, or at least it is not always immediately clear that it does. For example, it has been seen how an ambiguity in Kenny's use of the perfect tense gave rise to too strong a definition of his distinction between performance and activity verbs. And this was because of an ambiguity in the form of 'X has \( \sim \) ed' between 'X has \( \sim \) ed (before)' and 'X has been \( \sim \) ing (and still is)', the former referring to the past and the latter the present. In common usage the distinction is often rather cloudy. So there is a further distinction to be made relating to all these tenses, namely that between continuous and non-continuous use, which in some cases implied a cross-reference to categories. These cases will need looking into.

In other cases one cannot even point to an underlying distinction. It often depends solely on the context in which the tense is used - like
'has been ...ing' - to show that for example, a future tense verb is being used to refer to a present time period (whatever that means). 'X will have \( \hat{\phi} \) ed' is a case in point; 'X will have \( \hat{\phi} \) ed by now' refers to a past time period in that it entails 'X has \( \hat{\phi} \) ed'; while 'in ten years X will have \( \hat{\phi} \) ed' refers to a future time period.

So in outlining the conditions under which a verb under a given tense category is used to refer to a non-correlative time period category, two types of distinction need to be differentiated;

a) where the use of the verb is one which covers up an **internal** distinction, as in the case of the distinction between continuous and non-continuous use.

b) where the cross-reference is determined by **external** factors in the description.

**XVI. Time past, time perfect**

There seems to be some confusion as to how a given tense relates to a given time period. I wish in this section to examine some of the issues that have been raised by Kenny and Vendler's discussion of tenses when making their respective distinctions.

As we have seen in the last section, there seems to be some doubt as to whether the perfect tense refers to a past time period in all its uses. In examining Kenny's criterion for distinguishing activity verbs we saw that there exists an ambiguity between cases where the perfect tense refers to a discrete past time period. There is the sort of case where there is a lapse of time between the time period referred to and the use of the perfect tense in some statement such as 'he has lived in Rome' where the force of the statement is that he has lived in Rome at some period not necessarily immediately preceding the time at which the statement was made; and cases where the perfect tense is used to refer to a non-discrete time period where the time period referred to immediately precedes the making of the
statement, e.g. 'He has lived in Rome' where the force of the statement is that he has been living in Rome and still is. It might be said of this last case that the proposition could be better expressed by using the continuous perfect, viz 'has been', and this would indeed seem to be a more concise expression. But it is not the case that the continuous perfect always refers to an immediately previous time period. A person could say 'I have been living in Rome' when he is nowhere near Rome, but in London or Timbuctoo.

So it seems that reference to an immediately previous or a discretely past time period cannot be decided on the basis of the use of the continuous or non-continuous perfect tenses taken on their own. Both tenses can be used to refer to either kind of time period depending on the context in which they are used.

But there is another kind of time reference that the non-continuous perfect tense can make. This is what has been called the radio commentator's use where, for example, at the exact moment when the horse passes the winning post, the commentator says 'Pharlap has won'. In reference to exactly the same event and at exactly the same moment the commentator could have said without loss of meaning 'Pharlap wins'. So that in this sort of case the perfect tense is being used to refer to the present, insofar as the present and perfect tenses are interchangeable in this context. And I take it that this is what Ryle means by his 'got-it' verbs, Vendler by his achievement terms, and Evans by the idea of a transitory act.

XVII. Aristotle and the energeia-kinesis distinction

Now the distinction which Kenny, Vendler, Ryle et al. are harking back to when making these kinds of tense implications is Aristotle's distinction between energeia and kinesis. The point of Aristotle's distinction is to distinguish 'actions which contain their own end' from 'actions whose ends lie outside themselves'; between 'perfect' and
'imperfect' actions. And an examination of Ackrill's article on this distinction shows that there is some confusion as to the role that time plays in the making of the distinction. Aristotle himself introduces the issue of relations between tenses when he says in explaining an energeia: 'at the same time one sees and has seen, understands and has understood, thinks and has thought; while it is not true that at the same time one learns and has learnt or is being cured and has been cured', the former being energeia and the latter kinesis.

Now there seems to be an assumption made by most commentators that the distinction in terms of the tense implications suggested above, can serve as a criterion, rather than just an expression or indication of the distinction between perfect and imperfect actions; that where the present entails the perfect, there you have an energeia and where the present entails its negative in the perfect, there you have a kinesis. But it has been argued, by K. Lycos in an unpublished paper on Ackrill's article, that to give temporal considerations such a primary role may lead to a distortion of the distinction; that the temporal references may be secondary to the point of the distinction, which is to distinguish actions of different form. And this can be shown by the fact that when one applies strict tense criteria to one of Aristotle's examples of an energeia, namely enjoyment, one finds that it fulfills the conditions, when given this purely temporal characterisation, for being a kinesis. To demonstrate: At the same time one enjoys and has enjoyed. But one always enjoys something ('the whence and whither constitute the form'). But if one is enjoying the opera, one has not enjoyed the opera, which would seem to make enjoyment a kinesis in this context. If one commits oneself to a purely temporal and tense-type criterion for making the distinction, as Ackrill and others seem to have done, then Aristotle seems to be very


2 Metaphysics Θ(1048b 23-25).
confused. But if, on the other hand one sees such temporal considerations as merely secondary indications of a more metaphysical distinction, then one sees that Aristotle is making a far more subtle distinction. If one accepts that enjoyment is an energeia even if it is true that 'he is enjoying the opera' implies 'he has not enjoyed the opera' then one can see that what are usually taken to be kineseis can function as energeiae in certain circumstances; that the same actions can be done either as kinesis or as energeia. If a man has been building houses for most of his life and for him house-building is second nature, then at a particular instance of his house-building, the achievement of the terminus of his house-building, that the house has been built, may be a secondary consideration in terms of what he conceives of himself as doing. Rather he may see himself as engaged in an activity rather than a performance. He may see himself as flexing his house-building muscles, such that the fact that the house is built may be, for him, an arbitrary point in his activity.

XVIII. Description of action

This leads on to problems in the description of action. A spatio-temporal event can be described in numerous different ways. One may or may not ascribe agency to an object participating in the event. Differences of perspective alter the 'character' of the action, or even what the action is. The description of an action given by that of the agent of the action may differ from that of an observer etc. All these considerations tend to make it difficult to determine what is the 'correct' description of what is being done. And among these problems also come the even more intangible questions about motive, intention and the reasons for acting.

Kenny, in establishing a functional criterion for determining the appropriate description of an action, says that an action, for the purposes of his distinction, can be whatever can be given as a response to the question 'What did A do?' Now it is clear that it was outside the scope
of Kenny's particular investigation to raise questions about the
description of action. But, in the light of the criticisms that have
been made of the way he has made his distinction between performances
and activities, it seems that such considerations do have an effect on
the distinction. To what extent, I shall be examining in the next chapter.
In the last chapter I endeavoured to show that Kenny's distinction between states performances and activities was inadequate on two main grounds.

1. The criterion governing the distinction between performance and activity verbs needed to be amended. Rather than asserting that 'A is \( \text{\textit{ing}} \)' implies 'A has \( \text{\textit{ed}} \)' in the case of activity verbs, one must be satisfied with the weaker implication that 'A is \( \text{\textit{ing}} \)' is consistent with 'A has \( \text{\textit{ed}} \)' or to put it in another way, 'A is \( \text{\textit{ing}} \)' does not imply 'A has not \( \text{\textit{ed}} \)'. This is a point that both Williams and Potts make in slightly different ways.

2. The performance-activity distinction cannot be made in terms of types of verb since there are cases where a performance verb can function as an activity verb and vice versa.

Evans also argues against the distinction in terms of verbs on the grounds that a verb in one category can be made to function in the other category depending on whether the object of the verb is singular or undistributed plural. For example 'He is killing a seal' implies 'He has not killed the seal' which makes 'killing' a performance verb; whereas 'He is killing seals' does not imply 'He has not killed seals' which makes 'killing' an activity verb.

How then is the distinction to be made? Can a comprehensive definition of the distinction be made at all? Well, first it might be appropriate to make it clear just what we claim to be doing in making the distinction.

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1 op. cit.
Kenny claims to be making a purely grammatical distinction without any necessary connection to actions that happen to be called 'performance' or 'activities' in ordinary usage. Evans points out the unreliability of Kenny's claim by (a) demonstrating the pointlessness of calling the two types of verb he is distinguishing 'performance' and 'activity' verbs respectively if he does not intend there to be some connection between the types of verb and what their names are commonly taken to name; and (b) pointing out that Kenny seems to be making just the assumption he denies he is making when halfway through distinguishing types of verbs he switches to talking about states, performances and activities per se and outlining their distinctive features.

I shall assume that we are distinguishing different kinds of action and that whatever linguistic distinctions we make do have some application in this field, even if it is at variance sometimes with our ordinary understanding of the terms 'performance' and 'activity'. What I intend to do is examine three possible ways of making the distinction and see if it is possible to arrive at an adequate definition.

The three possible ways of making the distinction between performances and activities, as the distinction is expressed through language, I take to be as follows:

A) A 'context-free' account, an example of which we have seen in Kenny. In other words, an account which makes the distinction in terms of some part of language taken in abstraction from the contexts in which it might be used.

B) A 'context-bound' account which treats of language primarily as speech act and this makes an understanding of the distinction dependent on the intentions of the speaker or hearer, agent or observer, in describing a given action.
C) A middle way between these two accounts, in which in some cases, or in part, the distinction can be made on a purely grammatical basis, but may in some cases need modification by the context in which the relevant piece of language is put.

XIX. The context-free account

We have seen how Kenny defines the distinction solely in terms of types of verb, the implication being that where one finds a particular verb in whatever context that verb will fulfil the conditions for being either a performance or an activity verb but not for both, and that once a performance verb always a performance verb and vice versa. And we have seen certain objections made against this way of making the distinction. I have shown that the verb can be modified in a sentence in such a way that the verb crosses categories. I shall now attempt to see if a modified context-free account can be given in terms of any other component of the sentence either in isolation or in combination with other components, or in terms of the sentence taken as a whole.

XX. Verbs

At the risk of being tedious, I would like to take one last look at the role the verb plays in this discussion. Let us take the verb 'to walk'. Let us take three possible uses of the verb 'to walk' in a sentence:

a) 'X is walking'.

b) 'X is walking' (where the sentence is elliptical).

c) 'X is walking to his room'.

Now a) satisfies the conditions for an activity verb. 'X is walking' does not imply 'X has not walked' - indeed, in one sense it implies that he has walked in the sense that he has put at least one foot forward in this particular instance of X's motion.

1 Cf also Evans op. cit.
c) on the other hand satisfies the conditions for a performance verb. 'X is walking to his room' implies that he has not walked to his room, since if he had he would not still be walking there.

Now in any case where we find the sentence 'X is walking', it will not be obvious that what we have is an instance of a) which is an activity verb, or of b) which is elliptical and may in one case indicate (i) a) which is an activity verb; or (ii) 'X is walking' where the verb is elliptical and ambiguous, since its indefiniteness may indicate 'nowhere in particular' which implies an activity verb, or 'somewhere in particular' which implies a performance verb ('X is walking somewhere in particular' implies 'X has not walked to that particular somewhere').

So that b) indicates an ambiguity between a) and c). In order to resolve this ambiguity it would be necessary to look at the context in which the sentence was placed in order to find a resolution.

So here we have another argument against making the distinction in terms of types of verb. But one possible way out of this objection that Kenny could assert is that in the ambiguous b) case, what we have are two different kinds of verb rather than different kinds of sentence. What we would now have are the two verbs 'to walk' and 'to walk to a particular somewhere'. But now it would seem that what are being distinguished are different kinds of predicate rather than verbs.

XXI. Predicates

But as soon as we start trying to distinguish predicates in the same way the same problem arises. Let us take the predicate 'is walking to his room'. What do we now make of the sentence 'X is walking to his room regularly nowadays'? 'Is walking to his room' which was a performance predicate is now converted into an activity predicate, since 'X is walking to his room regularly nowadays' does not imply 'X has not walked to his room'.
So it now seems that if the distinction can be given any sort of context-free account at all, it must be made in terms of the sentence taken as a whole, and to quote Evans:

With the realisation that the grammatical rules apply to particular sentences and not to verbs as such comes the realisation that Kenny's grammatical criteria have lost the simplicity which was their chief appeal.

We have already discussed the resulting complexities that Evans examines. I wish now to examine the possibility of giving a context-free account of the distinction in terms of the sentence taken as a whole. Evans seems to assume that such an account can be given, so that the rest of his conclusions do not immediately concern us.

XXII. The sentence

In seeing whether the distinction can be made in terms of the sentence taken as a whole, I shall try to give a case of a sentence which is ambiguous, and for which the resolution of such ambiguity depends on the context in which the sentence is placed.

One problem which we shall not find as we did in the case of verbs and predicates is that of ellipsis. As we saw, an argument against the distinction being made in terms of verbs and predicates was that they could function in sentences which might or might not be elliptical according to the context in which they were placed. When dealing with sentences as a whole however, an elliptical sentence is not a whole sentence. Where, for example, we have the sentence 'X is walking' on the one hand, which is complete; and 'X is walking...' which is elliptical, what we are dealing with are two different sentences, which immediately resolves any ambiguity that may arise from the fact that one of the sentences is elliptical and incomplete.

1 Ibid p.297.
I shall take the two forms of sentences that have mainly concerned us so far and see how each relates to the distinction:

a) 'A is doing', where the sentence is not elliptical, but the verb lacks an object, as opposed to, for example, 'A is building a house', where 'a house' is the object of the verb 'to build' (i.e. I am not considering compound verbs such as 'to-build-a-house'). In every instance I can imagine 'A is doing' does not imply 'A has not done' and would therefore be descriptive of an activity.

b) 'A is doing y' where 'y' is the object of the very 'to do'. In most cases sentences of this form tend to describe performances. For example, 'A is running a mile' implies that A has not run the mile.

Let us take the sentence 'A is making something'. Now this seems open to two interpretations:

a) 'A is making something' in the sense that there is a particular thing which A is making, that A knows what he is making even if no one else does, and that he could tell us if we asked him. In this case 'A is making something' implies 'A has not made that something' which makes the sentence a performance sentence.

b) But what if no one knows what A is making, not even A himself. In this case we cannot say that A is bringing about p, since there is no way of determining what p is. He may say 'In a way I'm just mucking about with clay; but you never know, something might come out of it'.

Suppose that after an hour or so of messing about with the clay, A suddenly gets up and walks away. We question him about what he has been doing. He could either say 'I've just been playing around with clay. I thought I'd stop'. Or he could say; 'I have just finished an eternal monument to the agony of man'. Now in the first case he is describing what he is doing as an activity, since he just stopped doing what he was doing and there was no intrinsic reason why he had to stop when he did.
In the second case, on the other hand, there was an intrinsic reason why he stopped. He had just completed a great piece of sculpture. How do we know? He said so. It is up to us and others to determine whether it is a great piece of sculpture. But that it is a sculpture and that the sculpture is finished is true if he says it is. He can say 'At first I was just mucking about with clay. Then I suddenly saw it - the agony of man!' How do we describe what A was doing in the first case, where what would normally be taken to be the description of a performance turns out to be the description of an activity?

To recapitulate: we observe a man with some clay. The clay is being put into different shapes by the man. So, an adequate description of what A is doing at this stage is 'A is messing about with clay' which is the description of an activity. We approach A and ask him what he is doing. A says 'I am making something' and so we discover that he has not just been messing about with clay but on top of this description comes the description 'making something' which is the description of a performance. But then we ask A what he is making. And he says 'I don't know'. How now are we to describe what he is doing? On the one hand we can say that what he is doing is describable as a performance, since strictly speaking there is a something which, once he has made it, he cannot continue making. But in another sense there is no thing which, once he has made it, he can no longer be said to be making, since there is no identifiable thing which he is making.

But, accepting what he says even if we are a little confused, we await the outcome of what he is doing. But to our surprise and disappointment he suddenly swears, hurls the clay onto the ground and goes off for a drink. When he calms down we point out that what he was really doing was messing around with clay - he wasn't making any thing at all. In response he heatedly affirms that he was making something but that it didn't work out. To which we say 'Well you can always go back and finish it'. Almost in despair he cries that it would be impossible to finish it if he didn't
know what it was. He just stopped - that's all. But he was still making something. So it seems that what he has been doing is both an activity and a performance.

Let us try the scene again. We walk up to him as before but, this time knowing him to be a sculptor of some repute, we suggest that he is making another of his masterpieces. But he growls back that he is just messing about with clay, in such a tone that suggests that he is not just being modest. We watch him for a while, satisfied that what he is doing is describable as an activity. But then he suddenly stops, stands back from the clay, and says, with some satisfaction, 'There you see before you the agony of man' and the clay eventually goes off to adorn the foyer of some business establishment. But we are confused and quite reasonably say that we thought he was just messing about with clay. He replies that we now know better, that in fact he was creating his latest masterpiece. And again we seem to have a case of an action being both a performance and an activity.

Now in both these cases I think the paradox can be resolved. In both cases we can say to the sculptor that he was wrong in both instances; that in the first what he thought was a performance turned out to be only an activity; and in the second what he thought was an activity has turned out to be a performance. My point in giving this example has been, however, to show that with a sentence like 'A is making something' we have to look at the context in which the sentence is used before we can determine whether the sentence describes an activity or a performance. And secondly that this clarifies our way of looking at the distinction; i.e. we have to think of it more as a way of distinguishing actions than as a way of distinguishing pieces of language. This example has shown that we may in many cases have to address ourselves to the action first and then see how it is described, rather than the other way around.
XXIII. The context-bound account

I now want to turn to the second of the possible ways of approaching the distinction that I outlined at the beginning of the chapter.

In the last section we saw how it was necessary to look at the context in which an action was performed in order to determine whether it was a performance or an activity. I want now to look at the problems that may arise when we do look at an action in context. One of the major problems, as was suggested in the example about the sculptor, is that of intention. As well as in the case of the sculptor, we have seen the problem arise also in the discussion about non-human agents as subjects of the distinction.

Before proceeding with an examination of the role of intention in the distinction, I would like to make clear by uses of the word. The word 'intentional' is applied primarily to verbs and sentences, and is a logical property of them; an action is 'intended' when an agent intends to perform it, and in doing it he may have an intended end to be achieved. I shall use the term 'extra-intentional' to indicate that considerations of the intention of the agent, or the intentionality of the describing verb or sentence, are not relevant to the description of a particular action.

XXIV. Intentionality

Now the statement 'I am running to Yass' seems also to entail a statement of the intentions of its speaker. 'I am running to Yass' seems in many cases to be clearly related to 'intend to run to Yass'. And in this case the verb seems to be intentional, in so far at least as it satisfies Anscombe's three criteria of intentionality; Yass need not exist; the object 'Yass' resists substitution over identity, e.g. as when substituted by 'the wildest town this side of the Blue Mountains', since the agent might say 'I shall never run to the wildest town this side of the Blue Mountains' while still intending to run to Yass; and in a controversial sense the object is indefinite, i.e. there is no particular place in Yass to which he is
running, and the point at which he is in Yass, though determinable, is vague. I say that the sense of 'indefinite' being used here is controversial, since it has been objected that 'Yass' is not indefinite in the same way as 'a salesman' is indefinite in the sentence 'I am expecting a salesman'. But I do not want to involve myself here with a discussion of the logic of intentionality. I merely want to mention in passing that the fact that the verbs in this context seem to be intentional reinforces the claim that statements of the form 'I am φ ing y', where this is a performance description, function intentionally.

Is this the case with all performance descriptions which have a human being as agent? One can think of extraordinary cases. Our sculptor may be messing around with his clay and suddenly exclaim 'Good Lord! I'm creating a sculpture expressing the agony of man! I didn't intend to do that'. But this may not be a good example since once he does realise what he is doing and if he carries on doing it, then he will certainly be intending to finish this new creation. The question now becomes 'Was he creating a sculpture expressing the agony of man before he realised that this is what he was doing?' It certainly seems legitimate to say, or rather it does not sound odd to say 'I was creating a sculpture and did not realise it'. But in fact it seems that here he is putting himself in the position of an observer ascribing intention. We must break up the whole process of the coming-to-be of this sculpture into two parts; the first in which he says 'I am messing about with clay'; and the second where he says 'I am creating a sculpture'. If we could not do this here then we could not make a similar distinction in more clear-cut cases, for example if Neville Chamberlain were to reflect 'When I was at Munich I was bringing about the Second World War'. 
XXV. Redescription

But this last example raises further questions about the intentionality of performance descriptions and about the characterisation of actions generally. It also raises problems about the nature of the idea of someone bringing something about. Let us assume that the man we see on the Yass road sincerely says 'I am running to Yass'. This translates according to the definition already given as 'I am bringing it about that I have run to Yass'. Do we have to take agent A's description of what he is doing as the correct description of his action? Can we deny that he has correctly described what he is doing, yet accept that this is what he intends to do? There does seem to be difference here between doing something and trying to do something. We may know that, while A may be a very sincere and well-intentioned man, he is no runner. So that when he says 'I am running to Yass', we say 'That's a bit strong isn't it? Wouldn't it be more accurate to say that you're just trying to run to Yass?' And he says 'You wait. I'll show you'. To which we respond 'Even if you do in fact run all the way to Yass, all that can be said to be doing now is that you're trying to do so. Your getting to Yass will merely mean that you succeeded in your attempt. And if you don't make it because you're such a poor physical specimen, then you can't really expect us to say you were running to Yass in the same way that we might say that you were running to Yass once you had actually done so'.

But let us suppose A to be a health psychotic who runs to Yass every day. When we see him on the road we are less inclined to say 'A is trying to run to Yass'. Since he does this sort of thing every day we are more inclined to say that he is engaged in an activity, such that even if he dies of a heart attack on the way we would still say he was running to Yass rather than just trying to do so.

In this case we would say that 'running-to-Yass' is the operative verb rather than just 'running' in such a way that 'A is running-to-Yass' does not imply 'A has not run-to-Yass', and further that while in a strict sense
he is bringing something about, in a more important sense he is not, since as we have seen it does not matter whether in fact he makes Yass or not.

One might say that at the furthest end of this kind of activity description which looks at first as though it is a performance description, a more correct characterisation of what A is doing is something like 'A is bringing it about that he is fit'. So that running to Yass becomes the means to some further end, namely 'having got fit'. But we can redescribe almost any action, whether it be described as a performance or an activity, in this way. How are we to determine whether it is appropriate to redescribe the action or not?

The only case in which a redescription cannot be given is in the case where the agent says 'I'm just doing and that's all' and this description as 'just doing' can be the description of either a performance or an activity. For example our man on the road may say 'I'm just running; I don't want to get fit or be anywhere' and this would be an instance of an activity; or he might say 'I'm running to Yass. I just felt like it'.

But in cases where the action is capable of redescription, if the agent is running in order to get fit or is running to Yass to catch a train, it always seems possible to say 'And why are you doing that?' to all his descriptions until the agent is forced to say 'I don't know. I can't explain my action any further'. Are we to assume that the final characterisation of his action is the correct one? Let us take an example: A says 'I am running to Yass'; we ask why and he says 'to catch a train'. So the action can be redescribed as 'A is catching a train'. Why? 'To go to Melbourne'. So what he is doing becomes redescribable as 'A is going to Melbourne', and so on until we get a characterisation of his action as follows 'A is running to Yass to catch a train to go to Melbourne to collect a harpsichord to bring it back home with him to play it to enjoy himself'. Now it may be absurd to say of the A that we find on the road
that a correct description of what he is doing is 'enjoying himself' and clearly false to say he is playing a harpsichord. To say he is collecting a harpsichord seems dubious. If, on our asking him what he was doing, A were to say 'I'm collecting a harpsichord', we would, I think, find this an acceptable if in some way incomplete description. We would not say 'You could not possibly be collecting a harpsichord', in the same way that we would deny the possibility that he was playing a harpsichord.

The problem seems to be as follows:

1. We can distinguish two kinds of end to an action; a logical and a contingent end. The contingent end is the purpose of an action.

2. An action whose logical end is 'p' in the description 'bringing it about that q' such that q, which was the contingent end of the action, now becomes the logical end of the action under this second description.

3. But it is not possible in all cases correctly to redescribe the action in this way, e.g. while it is possible to redescribe an action originally described as 'catching a train' as 'collecting a harpsichord', it is not possible to redescribe the action of collecting a harpsichord, whose purpose is to play it, as 'playing a harpsichord'.

The question is: under what circumstances can we describe an action by making its purpose under one description its logical end under another, and under what circumstances are we unable to do this?

We have here a number of action descriptions which can be given in answer to the question: 'What is A doing?'. They are as follows:

1. 'A is running'
2. 'A is running to Yass'
3. 'A is catching a train'
4. 'A is collecting a harpsichord'

In this example the subsequent description has been given as the contingent end or purpose of the action under the description preceding it. For example, the purpose of 'running to Yass' has been given as 'to catch
a train'; and I have argued that the action of running to Yass is
redescribable in the form 'catching the train' by virtue of the fact
that both can be given as true answers to the question 'What is A doing?'

The question arises as to whether the fact that two different
answers can be given to the one question entails that two different
descriptions are being given of the same action. It might be argued that
'catching a train' is not a description of a performance at all, since,
although it is true to say that 'A is catching the train' implies 'A has
not caught the train' and entails 'A is bringing it about that he has
caught the train', there is no constitutive action which A must be doing
in order to qualify for the description 'A is catching the train'. In
fact A can be quite motionless, e.g. if he is sitting on the platform,
and still to be said to be catching the train.

This is different from the performance of running to Yass, since this
can only truthfully be said of A if he is in fact running. So it might
be argued that there is no particular action of which 'catching a train'
is an alternative description. This seems a very similar case to that
which Vendler mentions in referring to activities such as ruling, of which
no one action is both sufficient and necessary to constitute the activity
of ruling a country. But 'catching a train' is not an activity in this
context but a performance.

In many ways 'catching a train' like 'winning a race' seems to be capable
of functioning as a transitory act or achievement. At the same time as it is
ture to say 'A catches the train' it is true to say 'A has caught the train'.

In the discussion of Evans' distinction between basic performances
and activities, I came to the conclusion that, if basic performances were
to be distinguished, then the only proper basis on which we could
distinguish basic from compound performances was by asserting that basic per-
formances were constituted by basic activities. But now it seems that we
have a further distinction between kinds of performances. For where before we had a basic performance being distinguished on the grounds of its being constituted by a basic activity, as, for example, where the basic activity is 'moving a finger' and the corresponding basic performance is 'putting a finger on the shelf'; now we have the case where there is a distinction between performances constituted by a series of continuous activities as opposed to performances constituted by a series of discontinuous activities. For example, one can distinguish 'walking thirty miles' which consists of the series of basic activities that make up walking, from 'collecting a harpsichord in Melbourne' which may consist of a large number of activities, (and also, probably, performances), including possibly, 'walking'.

But then we also have cases where a number of performances (and activities) can come under a blanket activity description, such as Vendler's example of the ruler, who makes laws etc., as part of the activity of ruling.

So it seems that a) anything can be described as a performance or an activity; b) in many, if not all, cases a given action description can serve to describe a performance or an activity. These two points only seem to hold however, if we assume that there is no one correct description of an action. The assumption behind a) and b) is that an action is as a person, whether he be the agent or an impartial observer, conceives it to be. I shall now examine this question of the correct description of an action, especially as it relates to the intentions of the agent and the ascription of intention to the agent by an observer.

XXVI. Correct description

Let us return to our benighted sculptor. As we have seen, his bodily movements suggested the description 'A is messing around with clay'. But in one case he hotly denied that this was a correct description of what he was doing. He stated that he was engaged in the performance of making a
sculpture. If he had carried on and actually made a sculpture, his description of what he was doing would have been correct and ours would have been wrong. The question I now wish to ask is: 'Is it possible to give a description of what A is doing which precludes the possibility of our description being falsified by A's own description of what he is doing?'

Well, we can certainly say of A that his hands are manipulating the clay. And A can hardly deny this fact. But A may say that this may be what his hands are doing, but it's certainly not what he is doing. We arrive at the well-known distinction between 'My hand is moving' and 'I am moving my hand'. Let us say that A is in a trance, or is sleep-sculpting. Would it be a correct description of the event to say that 'A was moving his hand' rather than saying that his hand was moving. Say we come up to A and say 'I see you are moving your hand' and he says 'No I'm not'. And we say 'You are wrong. I distinctly saw you move your hand'. And he says 'My hand may have moved but I certainly didn't move it'. And we say 'You may not have realised it, but that's what you were doing'. A pauses for a while and says 'I suppose I must have been. I was moving my hand and didn't know it. Now isn't that a peculiar thing'. In many cases such as this we would be justified in saying that he wasn't being himself just then and may even, if we had faith in such institutions, feel justified in getting him committed to a mental hospital. For, if he 'wasn't himself' who was he? It might be objected that 'he isn't himself' is just an idiomatic use of language not to be taken too seriously. But even so it is not clear that it is appropriate to ascribe agency to A in the same way as we would where it was quite clear that he did realise what he was doing. I am afraid I am encroaching here on to problems of personal identity around which much philosophical controversy still rages. Since I do not wish to involve myself here in a discussion of these problems, I shall look for some other way out of the problem.
So far we have been looking at an example of an action being described as an activity. What if this movement of A's hand is described as a performance? What if we say to A 'Oh look! You're making a shape'. Now, 'making a shape' is a performance description since it is impossible to have made a shape while still making it. Now A says 'I'm not making a shape. What shape? I know I have been making shapes with this clay, but that happens with every movement of my hand'. There's no particular shape that I'm making'. To which we reply 'Even if neither of us knows what shape you are making, you are still at this very moment making a shape. Stop moving your hands. (He stops.) There. See? You've made a shape.'

It would seem here that the shape that is being referred to here is rather the contingent result of what A has been doing rather than its terminal point. A could have stopped at any stage and a shape would have resulted. We have seen that the terminal point of an action is that point beyond which an action cannot be continued. In this case it can be argued that there is such a point but that it cannot be identified. Is it necessary to be able to identify the terminal point of an action in order to describe that action as a performance? As a performance description has been defined so far, it would not be necessary, since the terminal point of performance has been defined as the state of affairs that exists when it is true to say 'has ed' as in 'A is bringing it about that he has ed'. So that we can feel justified in saying that A, in messing around with clay, is making a shape, whether this is what he intended or not. So it seems that an agent can be carrying out a performance without intending to do so. But this would only be the case under an observer's description, not the agent's.

Are there cases of performances which can only be described as performances because the agent intends them to be so? I think we have already seen that this can be the case with the sculptor. Having stopped his manipulation of the clay, he declares that he has finished his sculpture
expressing the agony of man. Now, as far as we may be concerned, he could
have stopped at any number of places and we would have been none the wiser.
He is engaged in the performance of creating a sculpture on the agony of
man because he says so, (although we might be justified in saying he was
doing a number of other things he did not realise he was doing, such as
scattering clay all over the place), and he has finished his work when he
says so.

Well, what does this say about the correct description of an action?
In the first place it seems that it is much easier to gain mutual agreement
between agent and observer that a particular activity is being engaged in,
than that a particular performance is being carried out. For example, it
can easily be established by both parties that the sculptor is manipulating
clay. This seems to be a correct description. But we have also seen that
it is also a correct description that the sculptor is creating a sculpture
and not just manipulating clay, if only because he says that this is what
he is doing (always assuming of course that he is not lying). So it seems
that there are a number of correct descriptions of the action and not just
one proper description. And, if this is the case, it seems that any attempt
rigorously to define the distinction between performances and activities
in terms of types of description, while it may succeed in some cases, is
always liable to be undermined by the impossibility of always being able to
apply the distinction to a certain range of events. To try to do so is to
fall into the Procrustean fallacy of trying to make events fit language, rather
than assigning language its proper function or providing an ever shifting grid
through which we can order the shapeless flux of events to our purposes.

XXVII. The problem of definition

I may now be in a position to summarise the discussion so far. We
began with Kenny's distinction between types of verb. Kenny formulated
two rules:
Rule I - verbs which take the non-continuous present are static verbs.

As we have seen, there are verbs which take the non-continuous present which can also be used in the continuous present as performance or activity verbs.

Rule II - In the case of performance verbs 'A ɒs' implies 'A has not ɒ ed' and in the case of activity verbs 'A ɒs ' implies 'A has ɒ ed'.

We have seen that this implication does not hold for all activity verbs and that the implication is too strong. It requires amendment to the effect that 'A ɒs' does not imply 'A has not ɒ ed' and is consistent with 'A has ɒ ed'. This amendment deprives the distinction of its exhaustive nature. The ensuing gap is filled by those verbs which take the non-continuous present but do not fit any of Kenny's three categories. These correspond to Vendler's achievement terms, and I have followed Evans in calling them transitory act descriptions.

I have argued, as has Evans, that the distinction cannot be made solely in terms of the verbs used. And I have gone on to argue that a purely grammatical distinction is not capable of dealing with the description of every action; that it is necessary in some cases to put the description in the context of the agent's intentions before one can make any kind of distinction in the way we are attempting.

One of the main problems of making this distinction is that there are so many different ways and modes for making it. As Potts and Taylor have pointed out both Kenny and Vendler are basing their distinctions on Aristotle's energeia-kinesis distinction. But, as Ackrill has pointed out, even Aristotle had problems. Aristotle used his distinction to cover a wide field for, as well as covering different kinds of action in a moral and psychological context, the distinction also had a metaphysical force.
In other words, not only was the distinction between an action done for its own sake and one whose end lies outside itself, but also related to processes and the way we perceive events (another reason why it might have been rash for Evans to exclude substances from the distinction). This metaphysical application can be seen by the fact that Aristotle distinguishes *energeia* from *dunamis* (actuality from potentiality).

So it seems that what contemporary philosophers have done is take a wide-ranging distinction and applied it to actions using the tools that have evolved with the development of contemporary linguistic philosophy. As has been seen a preoccupation with grammar has made the distinction either useless or impossible to make in some circumstances. Once the elegance of a purely grammatical distinction is lost we are overwhelmed by a tidal wave of complexities.

Is it possible to get to the bottom of this distinction? Or is this search for an essence misguided. A superficial examination of the complexities that are inherent in an attempt to make the distinction in a not completely grammatical way has, I think, indicated that we cannot ignore the intention of either the agent of an action or the ascription of intention to the agent by an observer, when describing what has taken place at a given time in a given place. But to what extent must we take into account such intentions and to what extent can we give an intention-free, 'objective' account of actions within the framework of the distinction?

It also seems to be the case that we can talk about the distinction, and to a large extent apply it without in fact having adequately defined it. And I would like to suggest that a neat and tidy definition is not possible. All we can hope for is a wide number of different kinds of expression of a distinction possibly as basic as that between form and matter. It would be ambitious in the extreme to hope to enumerate and analyse all such expressions and their relationships in a thesis of this scope. I would,
however, like to use this problem to take a look at the problem of the description and characterisation of action as a means for analysing a particular moral problem, without further attempting to give a rigorous definition of the distinction between performances and activity verbs, terms, sentences, descriptions or whatever. What I want to suggest is that the distinction, whatever it is, can be applied in a given context to give correspondingly different moral characterisations to a particular act, that it may illuminate how language can be used as a means for rationalisation and the confusion of moral issues.
Chapter 3. An entry into the logic of rationalisation

XXVIII. Recapitulation

So far I have argued that (1) the distinction between performances and activities has not so far been shown to be capable of comprehensive definition; (2) but it may still be a useful distinction and we may still be able to give expression to the distinction in particular cases.

I want now to expand the claim that I have made in (2). While this point may be implicit in Evans' account, he does in fact attempt a definition. Such a definition may well be useful in some limited cases. But he still seems to be clinging to the idea that there is just one definition. But what does he claim to be distinguishing? On the one hand he may be, like Kenny, making a philosophically technical distinction, such that the terms 'activity' and 'performance' are only to be understood as technical terms; in which case it seems at best limited, and at worst, arbitrary. Or on the other hand, he may be saying that this is the logical basis on which the terms are used in ordinary language; which I have already argued is false because it is not comprehensive. Ironically, this dilemma is just the one that Evans claims Kenny faces. And indeed it may be a dilemma that anyone faces in attempting to define a distinction or a term. So, on this ground if on no other, I shall try to look for distinctive features as they present themselves in our actual use of these terms rather than attempt anything more than a sketchy and ad hoc definition at most, accepting that any definition I may postulate is likely, as with fireflies, to have a very short life-span in any particular context.
XXIX. The terminal point

One distinctive feature that does stand out is the idea of the terminal point, the point beyond which an action cannot be continued and still be the same action. And this does seem to fit in with an ordinary language understanding of a performance, as an event which is limited spatially or temporally or both spatially and temporally. The trouble so far has been that of trying to define the conditions of such limitation. And I have suggested that the limitations to such events are as people see them. The relevant 'people' here are the agent and the observer; both may differ as to the limitations and these differences lead to different descriptions of the action, and maybe even different conceptions of what the action is. It is the point of this chapter to look at the significance of such differences in a particular case.

XXX. Tenses and times

But before doing this, it is worth looking further at the issues involved. It seems that many have felt themselves tied to temporal considerations over and above the fact that performances and activities occupy time. There seems to be the desire to see a particular significance in the use of tenses in the description of actions. Kenny sees the crux of the distinction in the fact that with performance descriptions 'A is \( \text{\_\_\_}\) ing' implies 'A has not \( \text{\_\_\_}\) ed'. I have already argued against this in the example of the sculptor. In an obvious way he is making a shape, but in such a case the idea of a point beyond which he cannot continue making a shape is meaningless, since he could stop at any time and still have made a shape. It is only meaningful here to talk of there being a terminal point beyond which he could not continue if it was possible to identify the shape he was making before he had made it. Any ex post facto account would involve the paradox where one says that there was a terminal point to his action, only it was impossible to know what it was until after he had made it. (I am allowing here for the case where the sculptor happens to stop and then
sees the arbitrary shape that happens to have been formed as the shape that he was looking for. But then he would have been looking for the shape, rather than making it.)

But maybe a more important example is the one where a man who, under an observer's description, is building a house, but in his own eyes is house-building. The difference is that for the observer, the agent has finished his action when the house is built, but for the builder the completion of the house is quite incidental, so that it would be meaningful for him to deny that he is 'building a house' in so far as 'building a house' is taken to be the correct description of what he is doing. It does however remain the case that if he is building a house, he cannot continue building it once it is built. And this may be useful knowledge where it is quite clear what the agent is doing. It may not be quite so useful in cases where the characterisation of the action is in doubt.

XXXI. Telos and end

The terminal point of an action needs to be distinguished from its end, although in some cases the distinction may be difficult to make. The term 'end' seems to have a wider meaning than 'terminal point'. In some cases what we mean by the end of an action may be the terminal point of the action, or it may be quite logically distinct from it, as where the action is that of running to Yass where the terminal point is to be in Yass, while the contingent end of the action may be to be in Melbourne.

Aristotle, distinguishing between energeia and kinesis, claims to be distinguishing actions whose 'ends lie outside themselves' from actions which 'contain their own end'¹ and between 'imperfect actions' which 'have a limit' and 'perfect actions' which 'have no limit'.² It has been assumed by subsequent commentators that temporal considerations determine the

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¹ Nichomachaean Ethics (1174a pp.14-23).
² Metaphysics Ø6(1048b pp.18-35).
distinction. But it depends very much on what is to be understood by the end of an action. There seems to be a difference between the limit of an action and any end it may have. The limit of an action as Aristotle expounded it appears to be its terminal point. While the end of an action, 'which lies outside itself' does not seem necessarily to be related logically to the action in the same way as its terminal point, the idea of the telos - the point - of an action seems to be independent of considerations of time. And this is at least one of the senses in which the end of an action is to be understood.

If a man is described as running to Yass, the logical end, the terminal point, of that action is the state of affairs that holds when it is true to say that he has run to Yass. But the contingent end, the telos, of running to Yass, may be something else again such as being in Melbourne or getting some exercise.

'Being in Melbourne' and 'getting exercise' seem to be different kinds of ends. While both are capable as serving as the telos of the action of running to Yass, 'being in Melbourne' lies outside the action in a way that 'getting exercise' does not. 'Being in Melbourne' is a state of affairs both temporally and spatially distinct from the action of running. 'Getting exercise' however, is spatially and temporally coextensive with running to Yass, since the agent is getting exercise all the time he is running to Yass. Another difference lies in the fact that one could say of a man that he was getting exercise while running to Yass without knowing that this was his end; whereas one would not know that he was going to Melbourne by running to Yass without knowing that this was his express intention.

But, it may be argued, this is to misunderstand what Aristotle understood by 'end' in this context, that we did not mean that it was the telos of the action which lay outside itself, but rather the terminal point. The terminal point, it may be argued, lies outside itself in the sense that
it has not been achieved while the action is being engaged in, and an action contains its own end in that it has no terminal point; that it can, logically at least, go on indefinitely. Any point at which it does stop is not logically determined by the nature of the action.

This argument seems to be the basis on which those who seek to give a purely temporal account of the distinction seem to rely. And it certainly seems to apply in many cases. But it seems also that the inadequacy of the temporal account serves to show up the inability of the above interpretation of the 'lies outside itself' - 'contains its own end' distinction. There may be another way of looking at the distinction, i.e. in terms of the end of an action, where on the one hand the means are distinguishable from the end, and on the other the end and the means are indistinguishable, as with 'running to Yass' and 'getting exercise'.

A contingent end of an action also seems to 'lie outside' the action in a stronger sense than the way in which a terminal point 'lies outside it', since the contingent end is logically quite independent of the action; while the terminal point is logically bound to the action in so far as it terminates the action and to a large extent specifies it. There seems to be a difference here between a logical account of the idea of an end lying outside the action and a spatio-temporal account.

It does seem, however, that there is a relationship between these two accounts. If 'to be in Melbourne' is the contingent end of the action 'running to Yass' then we can redescribe the action of 'running to Yass' as 'getting to Melbourne'. So that what is the contingent end of what is being done under one description turns out to be its terminal point under another description. This does not apply, however, where one has an action which lacks a terminal point. Say the contingent end of the action described as 'getting exercise' has the end 'to be sound in body, if not in mind', then the redescription 'being sound in body, if not in mind' lacks a
terminal point. But 'being sound in body' seems to be coextensive, in the way I have outlined, with the action involved in getting exercise.

So that the distinction between activity and performance in terms of a distinction between a contingent end 'lying outside itself' and 'contained in the action' as I have outlined it, may parallel the distinction being made in terms of an action having or lacking a terminal point. The difference between these two accounts may be relevant in the case of differing descriptions of an action. The case of the house builder seems to demonstrate that an observer's description of what he is doing, that he is engaged in a performance because he is building a house, may be secondary to the agent's description - that he is engaged in the activity of house-building, in the sense that it is the perfection of a skill. Or the agent might claim that the primary description of what he is doing is the building of a block of houses, not just one house. These differences of emphasis may be highly significant in a moral or legal context.

What I have tried to show is that there may be more than one way of looking at the performance - activity distinction, through our understanding of the difference between an action 'whose end lies outside itself' and one 'which contains its own'. And it seems likely that these two approaches ultimately express the same underlying distinction. I do not think, however, that it is easy to argue that one account is more basic than the other. All that we are justified in asserting is that they are alternative accounts. There may be others. The distinction between 'in' and 'by' understood in a certain sense, seems to be one. And the idea of an action done 'for its own sake', in one sense, seems to parallel the notion of an action which contains its own end.

XXXII. Aristotle on acts and activities

Aristotle, in the Nichomachaean Ethics, makes an implicit distinction between an act and an activity, and he talks of both as being good or bad,
virtuous or vicious. He also talks of dispositions and the way in which what we do affects their virtue or viciousness, and the way in which dispositions affect the virtuousness or viciousness of what we do. In Chapter I Book II he makes two main points:

1. Our actions determine our dispositions.
2. Like activities produce like dispositions.

And in Chapter II he says that once a virtuous disposition has been formed, then their virtue will be expressed in correspondingly virtuous actions.

So there seems to be three stages; the first in which particular actions determine a particular disposition, then the disposition becomes settled such that it becomes embedded in an activity, which then produces similar actions. If I may be allowed to put the difference between act and activity here rather loosely, it seems that actions 'determine' or cause the development of, dispositions; while activities 'produce' or express dispositions in particular actions. So that activities seem to form as a result of the determination of the disposition. And a particular action can be seen either on its own as the cause of a disposition or as part of an activity, where it functions as the expression of a disposition. In contemporary language we make such a distinction as when, for example, we consider a felony, in isolation, when performed by a first offender, as opposed to its performance as part of an activity engaged in by an habitual criminal.

Our discussion so far has, I think, touched on a similar kind of distinction. We have seen how, in the case of the house-builder, the character of his action changes according to whether we see what he is doing as a performance in isolation or as part of an activity. The distinction between basic and compound activities also seems to be relevant here. The kind of activity Aristotle seems to be talking about here is the compound activity, which contains a performance.
In fact, basic activities seem to function more often than not as base-level, extra-intentional descriptions of an event. I have already argued that all performances are intention-laden, unless one is treating non-human substances as agents, or human agents as non-human substances. The case of the house-builder has shown how what would normally be thought to be a fairly straightforward extra-intentional description, turns out to contain assumption about the builder's intention. There is an assumption in the description 'A is building a house' that his primary intention is to have the house built; whereas this may be quite secondary for the builder. Indeed it is conceivable that he had not even considered the completion of the house, so that it would be of no importance whatever if he finished it or not.

XXXIII. The Auschwitz builder - a moral problem

I want to conclude this thesis by examining a particular example in the light of the two main factors:

1) How the distinction between performance and activity may be relevant to the example.

2) What effect the characterisation of an action as a performance or an activity has on the moral character of the action, i.e. the responsibility of the agent, what he was responsible for, his blameworthiness etc.

X is a builder living in Nazi Germany. In the middle of Second World War he obtains a government contract to construct some buildings. The buildings he constructs turn out to be the Auschwitz concentration camp. Among the building that X has built is a gas chamber.

Now there are a number of descriptions that can be given of X's action.

a) X constructed some buildings

b) X built a concentration camp

c) X built a gas chamber
X may give us an explanation of his action:

d) That he did not know what he was building, that he was 'just doing his job'.

e) That he did know that he was building a concentration camp, but did not know that in building the concentration camp he was building a gas chamber.

f) That he knew that he was building a concentration camp and that in doing so he was building a gas chamber, but he needed the money.

g) That he believed in the Nazi policy relating to Jews.

Now a), b) and c) are all performances and in this context function as basic descriptions. All three are true. But their moral characters differ. Constructing some buildings is a morally neutral action. The construction of a concentration camp is more morally flavoured. The construction of a gas chamber has a high moral voltage.

But while X may have done what a), b) and c) describe, he may not have seen himself as doing what he did under each of these descriptions. If he did not know that he was building a concentration camp complete with gas chamber, then he could not have seen himself as building a concentration camp. His culpability lies in ignorance, not in malevolence. This would be the case with e). This contrasts with f) where he is culpable of negligent opportunism.

In the case of d), X sees what he is doing as part of an activity, that of house-building. Again he seems less culpable than in the case of g) where he would see what he was doing as part of the activity of furthering the cause of the Third Reich.

Now, on the one hand we are faced with judgements of performances, and on the other with judgements of activities. And it seems that X can rationalise a culpable performance in terms of a less culpable activity,
e.g. he can rationalise the performance of building a gas chamber by saying that he merely saw it as part of the activity of house-building. Or he could rationalise the activity of furthering the cause of the Third Reich, which subsequent events showed that he did, by saying that he was just constructing some buildings. So that the performance-activity distinction may serve to identify rationalisations and excuses. Eichman gave as a rationalisation of the performance of sending millions of Jews to the gas chamber the fact that this was part of the activity of administering the laws of the Third Reich. A more immediate example may lie in the case of the bombardier in a B-52 bomber engaged in napalming Vietnamese villages, who redescribes the activity in terms of the performance of 'bringing political stability to Asia'; or by saying that in engaging in the performance of wiping out a village, he is engaged in the activity of 'preserving the human rights to freedom and self-determination'. It seems that there is no logical end to preserving human rights, at least in the eyes of the American government. This is in contrast to, for example, the preservation of jam, for which there exists the terminal point where the jam has been preserved and is ready to be eaten.

My point in presenting these last two rather 'jarring' examples is to show how what is normally taken to be a performance - preservation - is rationalised as an activity. The moral prestidigitation on the part of the United States government lies in presenting as an activity, what would normally be taken to be a performance. While the linguistic use of the term 'preserve' seems to be correct, its underlying logic has been distorted.

There are probably many other ways in which the distinction between performances and activities has bearing on our moral judgements of actions and the agents who perform them. For example there seems to be a closer relation between the way an activity characterises its agent and the way in which a performance may do so. I have already given the example of
the way in which a particular crime may characterise the agent as an habitual criminal if the particular crime is seen as part of an activity, while no such label can be attributed to the agent for whom the particular performance is a first offence. A further examination of the application of the distinction may possibly lead to some insight into the problem of the extent to which a disposition determines an act, and an act determines a disposition. But I have been concerned here merely to suggest possible ways in which the distinction may be applied. Unfortunately a rigorous examination of these possibilities lie outside the scope of this thesis.
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