VERBS AND TIMES

I

THE fact that verbs have tenses indicates that considerations involving the concept of time are relevant to their use. These considerations are not limited merely to the obvious discrimination between past, present, and future; there is another, a more subtle dependence on that concept: the use of a verb may also suggest the particular way in which that verb presupposes and involves the notion of time.

In a number of recent publications some attention has been paid to these finer aspects, perhaps for the first time systematically. Distinctions have been made among verbs suggesting processes, states, dispositions, occurrences, tasks, achievements, and so on. Obviously these differences cannot be explained in terms of time alone: other factors, like the presence or absence of an object, conditions, intended states of affairs, also enter the picture. Nevertheless one feels that the time element remains crucial; at least it is important enough to warrant separate treatment. Indeed, as I intend to show, if we focus our attention primarily upon the time schemata presupposed by various verbs,[1] we are able to throw light on some of the obscurities which still remain in these matters. These time schemata will appear as important constituents of the concepts that prompt us to use those terms the way we consistently do.

There are a few such schemata of very wide application. Once they have been discovered in some typical examples, they may be used as models of comparison in exploring and clarifying the behavior of any verb whatever.

In indicating these schemata, I do not claim that they represent all possible ways in which verbs can be used correctly with respect to time determination nor that a verb exhibiting a use fairly covered by one schema cannot have divergent uses, which

in turn may be described in terms of the other schemata. As a matter of fact, precisely those verbs that call for two or more time schemata will provide the most interesting instances of conceptual divergence in this respect—an ambiguity which, if undetected, might lead to confusion. Thus my intention is not to give rules about how to use certain terms but to suggest a way of describing the use of those terms. I shall present some "*objects of comparison* which are meant to throw light on the facts of our language by way not only of similarities, but also of dissimilarities . . . a measuring rod; not as a preconceived idea to which reality *must* correspond."[2]

II

Our first task therefore will be to locate and to describe the most common time schemata implied by the use of English verbs. To do this I need some clear-cut examples which, at least in their dominant use, show forth these schemata in pure form. At this stage, I shall try to avoid ambiguous terms and ignore stretched and borderline uses.

I start with the well-known difference between verbs that possess continuous tenses and verbs that do not. The question, "What are you doing?" might be answered by "I am running (or writing, working, and so on)," but not by "I am knowing (or loving, recognizing, and so on)."[3] On the other hand, the appropriate question and answer, "Do you know . . .?" "Yes, I do," have no counterparts like "Do you run?" "Yes, I do."[4]

This difference suggests that running, writing, and the like are processes going on in time, i.e., roughly, that they consist of successive phases following one another in time. Indeed, the man who is running lifts up his right leg one moment, drops it the next, then lifts his other leg, drops it, and so on. But although it can be true of a subject that he knows something at a given moment or for a certain period, knowing and its kin are not processes

[2] L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York, 1953), pt. I, nos. 130-131.

[3] The presence or absence of an object is irrelevant here. "I am pushing a cart" is a correct sentence, while "I am loving you" remains nonsense.

[4] Unless a very different meaning of "running" is involved, which I shall discuss later.

going on in time. It may be the case that I know geography now, but this does not mean that a process of knowing geography is going on at present consisting of phases succeeding one another in time.

First let us focus our attention on the group of verbs that admit continuous tenses. There is a marked cleavage within the group itself. If I say that someone is running or pushing a cart, my statement does not imply any assumption as to how long that running or pushing will go on; he might stop the next moment or he might keep running or pushing for half an hour. On the other hand, if I say of a person that he is running a mile or of someone else 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.[5] Thus we see that while running or pushing a cart has no set terminal point, running a mile and drawing a circle do have a "climax," which has to be reached if the action is to be what it is claimed to be. In other words, if someone stops running a mile, he did not run a mile; if one stops drawing a circle, he did not draw a circle. But the man who stops running did run, and he who stops pushing the cart did push it. 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.

Accordingly, the question, "For how long did he push the cart?" is a significant one, while "How long did it take to push the cart?" sounds odd. On the other hand, "How long did it take to draw the circle?" is the appropriate question, and "For how long did he draw the circle?" is somewhat queer. And, of course, the corresponding answers will be, "He was pushing it for half an hour" and "It took him twenty seconds to draw the circle" or "He did it in twenty seconds," and not vice versa. Pushing a cart may go on for a time, but it does not take any definite time; the activity of drawing may also go on for a time, but it takes a certain time to draw a circle.

A very interesting consequence follows. If it is true that someone

[5] Of course it might remain true that they tried to run a mile or draw a circle.

has been running for half an hour, then it must be true that he has been running for every period within that half-hour. But even if it is true that a runner has run a mile in four minutes, it cannot be true that he has run a mile in any period which is a real part of that time, although it remains true that he was running, or that he was engaged in running a mile during any substretch of those four minutes. Similarly, in case I wrote a letter in an hour, I did not write it, say, in the first quarter of that hour. It appears, then, that running and its kind go on in time in a homogeneous way; any part of the process is of the same nature as the whole. Not so with running a mile or writing a letter; they also go on in time, but they proceed toward a terminus which is logically necessary to their being what they are. Somehow this climax casts its shadow backward, giving a new color to all that went before.

Thus we have arrived at the time schemata of two important species of verb. Let us call the first type, that of "running," "pushing a cart," and so forth *activity terms*, and the second type, that of "running a mile," "drawing a circle," and so forth *accomplishment terms*.[6] The description of these first two categories also illustrates what I mean by exhibiting the "time schemata" of verbs.

When one turns to the other genus, that is, to the verbs lacking continuous tenses, one discovers a specific difference there too. As we said above, verbs like "knowing" and "recognizing" do not indicate processes going on in time, yet they may be predicated of a subject for a given time with truth or falsity. Now some of these verbs can be predicated only for single moments of time (strictly speaking), while others can be predicated for shorter or longer periods of time. One reaches the hilltop, wins the race, spots or recognizes something, and so on at a definite moment. On the other hand, one can know or believe something, love or dominate somebody, for a short or long period. The form of pertinent questions and answers proves the point neatly: "At what

[6] In the absence of a "pure" terminology I am forced to be content with these names (and the other two to be given), which also connote aspects beyond time structure (e.g., that of success). If we do not forget that our point of view is limited to time schemata, however, we shall not be surprised

time did you reach the top?" ("At noon sharp") and "At what moment did you spot the plane? ("At 10 : 53 A.M."); but "For how long did you love her?" ("For three years") and "How long did you believe in the stork?" ("Till I was seven"), and not the other way around.[7]

Before going any further let us call the first family (that of "reaching the top") *achievement terms*, and the second (that of "loving") *state terms*. Then we can say that achievements occur at a single moment, while states last for a period of time.

Our conclusion about achievements is reinforced by a curious feature pointed out in an example by G. Ryle (following Aristotle), namely, that "I can say 'I have seen it' as soon as I can say 'I see it.' "[8] As a matter of fact the point can be made stronger still: 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.

The fact that we often say things like, "It took him three hours to reach the summit" or "He found it in five minutes" might tempt a novice to confuse achievements (which belong to the second genus) with accomplishments (which belong to the first). A little reflection is sufficient to expose the fallacy. When I say that it took me an hour to write a letter (which is an accomplishment), I imply that the writing of the letter went on during that hour. This is not the case with achievements. Even if one says that it took him three hours to reach the summit, one does not mean that the *reaching* of the summit went on during those hours.[9] Obviously it took three hours of climbing to reach the top. Put in another way: if I write a letter in an hour, then I can say, "I am writing a letter" at any time during that hour; but if it takes three

[7] Even in "I knew it only for a moment," the use of "for" indicates that a period, though very short, is to be understood.

[8] *Dilemmas* (New York, 1954), p. 102. He quotes Aristotle's *Met.* IX, vi, 7-10. As we shall see later, this particular example is a bit misleading.

[9] For those who like oddities: "It took the battalion twenty minutes to cross the border"; "They are crossing the border." Such are the borderline cases I mean to ignore at this stage.

hours to reach the top, I cannot say, "I am reaching the top" at any moment of that period.

As to states, the lack of continuous tenses (e.g., "I am knowing, loving, and so forth") is enough to distinguish them from activities and accomplishments, and the form of time determination ("How long . . .?" "For such-and-such a period") should be sufficient to keep them from being confused with achievements.

Still, I think it might be useful to mention, by way of digression, a surprising feature about states which is not strictly connected with considerations of time.

When I say that I could run if my legs were not tied, I do not imply that I would run if my legs were not tied. On the other hand, there is a sense of "can" in which "He could know the answer if he had read Kant" does mean that in that case he would know the answer. Similarly, in an obvious sense, to say that I could like her if she were not selfish is to say that I would like her if she were not selfish. One feels something strange in "Even if I could like her I would not like her." It appears, therefore, that in conditionals "could" is often interchangeable with "would" in connection with states. For the same reason, "can" might become redundant in indicative sentences of this kind. Hence the airy feeling about "I can know," "I can love," "I can like," and so forth. This also explains why "I can believe it" is very often used instead of "I believe it." And, to anticipate, the question "Do you see the rabbit?" can be answered equivalently by "Yes, I can see it" or "Yes, I see it." Later on, in connection with a concrete example, I shall take up this matter again and try to be more specific. For the present, it is enough to mention that while to be able to run is never the same thing as to run or to be able to write a letter is by no means the same as to write it, it seems to be the case that, in some sense, to be able to know is to know, to be able to love is to love, and to be able to see is to see.

One might point out that some achievements also share this feature. Indeed, in some sense, to be able to recognize is to recognize and to be able to spot the plane is to spot the plane. On the other hand, to be able to start or stop running is by no means the same thing as to start or stop running, although to start or to stop running are clearly achievements according to their

time schema. Thus here the consideration of the time element is not sufficient; we have to look for another criterion. If we consider that one can start or stop running deliberately or carefully and also that one can be accused of, or held responsible for, having started or stopped running but not of having spotted or recognized something, then we realize that the above-mentioned curious behavior with respect to "can" is proper to verbs denoting achievements that cannot be regarded as voluntary (or involuntary) actions.

Following this lead back to states, we find indeed that one cannot know, believe, or love deliberately or carefully, and none of us can be accused of, or held responsible for, having "done" so either.[10] We may conclude this digression by saying that states and some achievements cannot be qualified as actions at all.[11]

By way of illustration to this section, I add four examples which demonstrate our time schemata from another angle.

For activities: "*A* was running at time *t*" means that time instant *t* is on *a* time stretch throughout which *A* was running.

For accomplishments: "*A* was drawing a circle at *t*" means that *t* is on *the* time stretch in which *A* drew that circle.

For achievements: "*A* won a race between t_1 and t_2" means that *the* time instant at which *A* won that race is between t_1 and t_2.

For states: "*A* loved somebody from t_1 to t_2" means that at *any* instant between t_1 and t_2 *A* loved that person.

This shows that the concept of activities calls for periods of time that are not unique or definite. Accomplishments, on the other hand, imply the notion of unique and definite time periods. In an analogous way, while achievements involve unique and definite time instants, states involve time instants in an indefinite and nonunique sense.

This division has an air of completeness about it. Perhaps it is more than a mere presumption to think that all verbs can be analyzed in terms of these four schemata.

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[10] They are not "done" or "performed" at all.

[11] In my remarks on "can" and in taking "deliberately" and "carefully" as criteria for genuine actions, I have made use of my (not very trustworthy) recollection of Professor J. L. Austin's lectures at Harvard.

III

Having thus formed and polished our conceptual tools, in this last section I shall try to show how they can be used in practice. Here, of course, it would be foolish to claim any completeness: all I can do is to make some remarks on a few verbs or groups of verbs and hope that the reader, if he deems it worth while, will be able to proceed to other verbs in which he is interested.

There is a very large number of verbs that fall completely, or at least in their dominant use, within one of these categories.[12] A little reflection shows that running, walking, swimming, pushing or pulling something, and the like are almost unambiguous cases of activity. Painting a picture, making a chair, building a house, writing or reading a novel, delivering a sermon, giving or attending a class, playing a game of chess, and so forth, as also growing up, recovering from illness, getting ready for something, and so on, are clearly accomplishments. Recognizing, realizing, spotting and identifying something, losing or finding an object, reaching the summit, winning the race, crossing the border, starting, stopping, and resuming something, being born, or even dying fall squarely into the class of achievements. Having, possessing, desiring, or wanting something, liking, disliking, loving, hating, ruling, or dominating somebody or something, and, of course, knowing or believing things are manifestly states.

In connection with the last group, an obvious idea emerges. From the point of view of time schemata, being married, being present or absent, healthy or ill, and so on also behave like states. But then we can take one more step and realize that this is true of all qualities. Indeed, something is hard, hot, or yellow for a time, yet to be yellow, for instance, does not mean that a process of yellowing is going on. Similarly, although hardening is a process (activity or accomplishment), being hard is a state. Now perhaps we understand why desiring, knowing, loving, and so on, that is, the so-called "immanent operations" of traditional philosophy, can be and have been looked upon as qualities.

Habits (in a broader sense including occupations, dispositions,

[12] In order to cut down the forest of inverted commas, I shall be somewhat casual with respect to the "use versus mention" of verbs.

abilities, and so forth) are also states in our sense. Compare the two questions: "Are you smoking?" and "Do you smoke?" The first one asks about an activity, the second, a state. This difference explains why a chess player can say at all times that he plays chess and why a worker for the General Electric Company can say, while sunbathing on the beach, that he works for General Electric.

It is not only activities that are "habit-forming" in this sense. Writers are people who write books or articles, and writing a book is an accomplishment; dogcatchers are men who catch dogs, and catching a dog is an achievement.

Now the curious thing is that while cabdrivers—that is, people of whom one can always say that they drive a cab—sometimes are actually driving a cab, rulers—that is, people of whom one can always say that they rule a country—are never actually ruling a country, i.e., they are never engaged in the specific activity of ruling a country comparable to the specific activity of driving a cab. A cabdriver might say that he was driving his cab all morning, but the king of Cambodia can hardly say that he was ruling Cambodia all morning. The obvious explanation is that while driving a cab is a fairly uniform thing, as are also smoking, painting, and writing, actions which a ruler as such is supposed to perform are manifold and quite disparate in nature.[13] Is he "ruling" only while he is addressing the assembly and surveying troups, or also while he is eating lobster at a state dinner? We feel that some of his 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.

Adopting G. Ryle's terminology,[14] I shall call the states of smokers, painters, dogcatchers, and the like *specific* states and the states of rulers, servants, educators (and grocers, who not only are never actually grocing but also do not groce: the verb "grocing" does not happen to exist) *generic* states.

[13] As pointed out by G. Ryle in *The Concept of Mind* (London, 1949), pp. 44, 118. [14] *Ibid.*, p. 118.

This much it seemed necessary to say about states, that puzzling type in which the role of verb melts into that of predicate, and actions fade into qualities and relations.

As we see, the distinction between the activity sense and the state sense of "to smoke," "to paint," and the like is a general distinction, not peculiar to the concept of smoking or painting alone. Many activities (and some accomplishments and achievements) have a "derived" state sense. There is, however, a group of verbs with conceptual divergences of their own. With respect to many of these verbs, it is hardly possible to establish the category to which they "originally" belong. The group of verbs I have in mind comprises philosophically notorious specimens like "to think," "to know," "to understand" on the one hand, and "to see," "to hear," and their kindred on the other.[15] In recent years a number of excellent publications have succeeded in pointing out that the alleged epistemological problems surrounding this family look far less formidable when we become aware of the mistakes of category that are embedded in their very formulation; one can hardly state the problem so long as one refuses to talk incorrect English.

Now I venture to claim that our categories, based upon time schemata, not only do justice to these recent discoveries but, beyond that, can be employed in exposing and eliminating certain mistakes and oversimplifications which are apt to discredit the whole method. Let us begin with "thinking." It is clear that it is used in two basic senses. "Thinking" functions differently in "He is thinking about Jones" and in "He thinks that Jones is a rascal." The first "thinking" is a process, the second a state. The first sentence can be used to describe what one is doing; the second cannot. This becomes obvious when we consider that while "He thinks that Jones is a rascal" might be said truthfully of someone who is sound asleep, "He is thinking about Jones" cannot. It shows that thinking about something is a process that goes on in time, an activity one can carry on deliberately or carefully, but this is by no means true of thinking that something is the case. If it is true that he was thinking about Jones for

[15] We shall see that, although knowing remains quite a typical state, at this stage it deserves another look.

half an hour, then it must be the case that he was thinking about Jones during all parts of that period. But even if it is true that he thought that Jones was a rascal for a year, that does not necessarily mean that he was thinking about Jones, the rascal, for any minute of that time.

The last fact shows that "thinking that" is not related to "thinking about" the way "smoking" in its habit sense is related to "smoking" in its activity sense. "Thinking that" is rather like "ruling," that is, it is based upon actions of various kinds. Consider the behavior of the farmer who thinks that it is going to rain. We may say, then, that "thinking that" is a generic state. On the other hand, the state of a "thinker" is a specific state: he is a man who is very often engaged in thinking about ponderous matters.[16]

It is easy to see that "believing that" is also a generic state. As a matter of fact, "he believes that" can be exchanged for "he thinks that" in most cases. "Believing *in*," though different in meaning, belongs to the same category; one can believe in the right cause even while asleep.

"Knowing" is clearly a state in its dominant uses ("knowing *that*," "knowing *how*," "knowing something [somebody]"). Furthermore, since "I am knowing" does not exist in English, knowing seems to be a generic state. For example, the fact that I know that Harvard is in Cambridge is behind a host of my actions that range from addressing letters to boarding busses. Yet none of these actions in particular can be qualified as "knowing." Doubts might arise, however, from uses like "And then suddenly I knew!" or "Now I know it!" This sounds like an achievement. Indeed, this insight sense of knowing fits more or less into that category. Yet it would be a mistake to think that this kind of "knowing" is related to the state sense in the same way that catching dogs is related to the specific state of dogcatchers. A little reflection shows that they are related rather as getting married (achievement) is to being married (generic state). This is best shown in an example. Suppose someone is trying to

[16] I am in doubt about "thinking *of* something." Its use is not steady enough. It seems to me, though, that very often it has an achievement sense: "Every time I see that picture I think of you."

solve a problem in mathematics. Suddenly he cries out "Now I know it!" After ten minutes he explains the solution to me. Obviously he still knows it, which means that no flashes of understanding are necessary for him to explain it. Indeed, so long as he knows it (in a state sense), it is logically impossible that he will "know" it (in an achievement sense). "Now I know it!" indicates that he did not know it before.

One is tempted here to say that "knowing" means to start knowing. This is a dangerous temptation; it makes us think that just as to start running begins the activity of running, to start knowing begins the activity of knowing. Of course, the fact that "to start (or to stop) knowing" does not make sense demonstrates that "knowing" is not the beginning of an activity but the beginning of a state. In general, it is important to distinguish achievements that start activities from achievements that initiate a state.

The same distinctions hold for "understanding." Its achievement sense, however, is perhaps more common than that of "knowing"; we have just now mentioned "flashes" of understanding. But these flashes of understanding are also achievements initiating the generic state of understanding.

We must keep in mind all these subtleties as we proceed to the arduous task of analyzing the concept of "seeing" from the point of view of temporal structure. G. Ryle in *The Concept of Mind*[17] and also in the *Dilemmas*[18] quite consistently maintains that seeing is not a process nor a state but a kind of achievement or success, in many respects similar to winning a race or finding something. Recently F. N. Sibley has pointed out that in a number of its significant uses, "seeing" functions quite differently from achievement terms, precisely from the point of view of temporal structure.[19] He concludes that since seeing is not, at least not always, an achievement, it may turn out to be an activity after all.

There is no question that seeing can be an achievement in our sense. Uses like "At that moment I saw him," together with the

[17] Ch. v. [18] Ch. vii.

[19] "Seeking, Scrutinizing and Seeing," *Mind*, LXIV (1955), 455-478. On p. 472 he is induced to say things like "one must *throughout that length of time* be seeing it."

above-mentioned possibility of saying "I have seen it" as soon as one is able to say "I see it," show that much. I shall refer to this "spotting" sense of seeing (which is somewhat analogous to the insight sense of "knowing," or rather "understanding") as "seeing."

Now, I think, "seeing" is not the only sense of seeing. "How long did you see the killer?" "Oh, I am quite tall, I saw him all the time he was in the courtroom. I was watching him" suggests another possibility. "Do you *still* see the plane?" points in the same direction. Furthermore, "I spotted him crossing the street" is a loose way of saying, "I spotted him while he was crossing the street"; even "I spotted him running" is not quite so good as "I spotted him while he was running." On the other hand, "I saw him crossing the street" and "I saw him while he was crossing the street" are both correct, and they do not mean the same thing, as also "I saw him running" has a different meaning from "I saw him while he was running." Our time schemata explain this difference. Spotting (an achievement) connotes a unique and indivisible time instant. Now running or crossing the street are processes *going on* in time (the latter also takes time) and as such cannot be broken down into indivisible time instants: their very notion indicates a time stretch. Thus there is a logical difficulty in spotting somebody running or crossing the street. One can spot somebody while he is running, or on the street, but "while" and "on" here indicate states, and states can be broken down into time instants. Then it is clear that seeing in "I saw him while he was running (or crossing the street)" may mean merely "seeing," but seeing in "I saw him running (or crossing the street)" must have a sense that admits a period of time: a process or a state.

But seeing cannot be a process. "What are you doing?" can never, in good English, be answered by "I am seeing. . . ." Thus notwithstanding the fact that one might see something for a long period, it does not mean that he "is seeing" that thing for any period, yet it remains true that he sees it at all moments during that period. In addition, "deliberately" or "carefully" fail to describe or misdescribe seeing, as no one can be accused of or held responsible for having seen something, though one can be

accused of or held responsible for having looked at or watched something. Thus seeing is not an action which is "done" or "performed" at all. Finally the curious equivalence of "I see it" and "I can see it" or even "I saw him all the time" and "I could see him all the time" also confirms our claim that seeing is not a process but a state or achievement. Being able to see can hardly be conceived of as a process.

A serious difficulty, however, looms from that corner. After an eye operation the doctor might say that now the patient can see without suggesting that he sees through the bandage, much as he might say of a patient after an orthopedic operation that he can walk without implying that he is actually walking. Therefore—the objection goes—as the bodily state of being able to walk is not the same thing as walking, the bodily state of being able to see is not the same thing as seeing. Yet they are related the same way: the state of being able to walk is necessary for the activity of walking, and the state of being able to see is necessary for the activity of seeing. Furthermore, as we also suggested, we can say of a man who is sound asleep that he knows geography, or that he thinks that Jones is a rascal, or that he loves Lucy, but no one can say of somebody who is sound asleep that he sees something in any ordinary sense of "seeing." One might say, however, that he can see, meaning that he is not blind. Thus to be able to see is a state like knowing but seeing is not.

This reasoning confuses two senses of "can." There are people who can drink a gallon of wine in one draught. Suppose one of them has performed that remarkable feat a minute ago. Then it is quite unlikely that he can do it again now. Should we say then, at this moment, that he can, or rather that he cannot, drink a gallon of wine in one draught? He can and he cannot. Let us refer to the first "can" (in "he can") as "can_2," and to the second (in "he cannot") as "can_1." Of course, he can_2 means that he $could_1$ if his stomach were empty. When his stomach is empty he both can_2 and can_1. Thus can_2 involves can_1 conditionally: he can_1 if certain conditions are fulfilled. Can_1 does not involve any further can-s: he can actually. Yet even "can_1 drink a gallon of wine" does not mean that he actually does drink or is drinking that amazing draught.

Now the doctor's "can" in "Now he can see," spoken while the patient's eyes are still bandaged, is a "can$_2$": if the bandage were removed and if his eyes were open (everything else, like light in the room, and so forth, remaining the same), then he could$_1$ see some things in the room; that is, he would see some things in the room. Thus the above-mentioned equivalence holds between "see" and "can$_1$ see," that is, the lowest-level "can" that does not involve any further "can"-s conditionally. And this equivalence does not hold for activities: the other patient can$_2$ walk, though his legs are still tied to the bed; if he were released he could$_1$ walk, yet it may be he would not be walking.[20]

But the adversary might continue: "You obviously overlook a glaring difference. Walking is a voluntary action, while seeing is a spontaneous one. If you are not blind, if there is some light, and if you open your eyes, then you cannot help seeing something: the spontaneous activity of seeing starts. Digestion, you agree, is a process, yet the equivalence you speak about also holds there, because it also is a spontaneous activity. When I say that I can digest pork, I mean that if I had eaten pork, I could digest pork, that is, I would be digesting pork. If I have not eaten pork, I cannot digest pork. So there is a sense in which 'can digest pork' and 'is digesting pork' mean the same thing."

This objection is a shrewd one. It is quite true that no one can be running if he is not running, as nothing can be a cat if it is not a cat. But this "can" is a logical modality like "must" in "All cats must be cats." In this sense, of course, "can be digesting" is the same as "digesting." But our "can," if you like, is a physical modality. It is silly to point at a pork chop and say: "Now I cannot digest it, but when I have eaten it, I shall be able to digest it for a while, till I have digested it, and then I shall not be able to digest it any more." But it is by no means foolish to say: "Now I cannot see the moon, but when the cloud goes away, I shall be able to see it."

We can safely conclude then that seeing has a state sense too.

[20] Now it becomes clear that, for instance, "He could$_1$ know the answer if he had read Kant" means that in that case he would know the answer, but "He could$_2$ know . . ." does not mean that in that case he would know the answer.

Now, since there is no such process as seeing, yet there is an achievement of "seeing" (the "spotting" sense), the question arises whether "seeing" is related to seeing as catching dogs is related to the state of dogcatchers, or rather as "knowing" (the achievement) is related to knowing (the state). It is quite clear that the latter is the case. "At that moment I saw him (spotted him)" *means* that I did not see him before that moment. Thus "seeing" is an achievement initiating the generic state of seeing.

As will be recalled, there are scores of activities, accomplishments, and achievements involved in the notion of ruling or knowing that something is the case. Thus the problem remains: what activities, accomplishments, and achievements are connected in this way with the notion of seeing? Did I not know that Harvard is in Cambridge, I could not perform a great number of actions the way I do perform them. In an analogous way, if I do not see my hand, I cannot watch, scan, observe, or scrutinize it; I cannot gaze upon it, keep it in sight, focus my eyes on it, or follow it with my eyes; I cannot see that it is dirty, I cannot notice, or easily find out, tell, or describe what color it has or what it looks like at present; then also I cannot (in a sense) look at it and see it as an instrument or as an animal with five tentacles, and so on.

Of course, none of these actions have to be performed all at the same time, or one after the other, while we see an object. When I am writing, I see the pencil all the time, otherwise I could not write the way I do write. Nevertheless I do not watch, observe, or scrutinize it; I might not look at it at all; I might even not notice its color. The same way, when I am walking up and down in my room, absorbed in thoughts, I do not pay any attention to the furniture around me, yet I see it most of the time; otherwise I would bounce against tables and chairs every so often. Think of the way we see our noses or the frame of our spectacles.

Notice that none of the actions I have enumerated are mysterious in the way that seeing is claimed to be mysterious. Any good dictionary can tell us what we mean by "watching," "scrutinizing," and so on without even mentioning "seeing."[21] On the

[21] E.g., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 4th ed., defines "watching" (relevant sense): "keep eyes fixed on, keep under observation, follow observantly"; "scrutinizing": "look closely at, examine in detail."

other hand the meaning of "seeing" cannot be given, short of a mystery, without realizing its "state" as a state term, that is, without giving the kind of explanation I tried to give. In much the same way, the meaning of "knowing" remains something ghostly till the kind of explanation is given that, for instance, we find in *The Concept of Mind*, or, for that matter, housekeeping would remain an abstruse activity did we not all know what sort of (by no means abstruse) actions housekeepers are supposed to perform.

Before we take leave of "seeing," I shall mention two borderline senses. If one tells us that he saw *Carmen* last night, he means that he saw all four acts of *Carmen*. Besides, he might say that it took three hours to see *Carmen*. Perhaps one might even answer the question "What are you doing?" by "I am seeing *Carmen* on TV." Thus there is a queer accomplishment sense of "seeing." There is another strained usage. A "seer" sees things, and now and then he actually is seeing ghosts or pink rats. Such strained or stretched employment should not worry us. It would be a very serious mistake if one tried to explain the stock uses of "seeing" on the basis of such employment.

Thus there is no one big mystery with regard to seeing, although little puzzles remain as to "observing," "watching," and so forth. One could point out, for example, that while they are activities, sometimes, and this is true more of "observing" than of "watching," they have an accomplishment sense: it takes some time to observe the passage of Venus across the sun or to watch an ant carrying home a dead fly. There are obvious parallels between the concepts of seeing and hearing and those of watching and listening, and so on. Thus we could continue this kind of investigation, but without any specific problem it would become tedious and idle.

As a conclusion, I think, it is not too much to say that our categories, besides confirming established differences between processes and nonprocesses, may help us in clarifying the often overlooked and embarrassing differences within the class of nonprocesses. We have no reason to fear that seeing, for example, as it is not always an achievement, might turn out to be an activity after all, a mysterious process, reviving thereby all the ghosts

of epistemology. "What happens when we perceive, and what is it that makes it happen? That is the problem of perception."[22] A sailor on deck looking ahead remarks, "It is pitch dark, I don't see anything." After a while, "Now I see a star." We ask him, "What has happened?" "The cloud's gone." "But what else happened?" "Nothing else." Of course many things happened in the world and in the sailor. But his seeing is not one of them.[23]

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[22] Boring, Langfeld, and Weld, *Foundations of Psychology* (New York, 1948), ch. x, p. 216.

[23] I wish to express my gratitude to Professor Israel Scheffler for his helpful comments on the first draft of this paper.