

Actions and Achievements

The paper identifies a class of actions – described as non-progressive achievements – which have the property that there is no moment when the agent is doing them, even though the agent certainly does them. Ballistic actions – where the agent is in control of initiating a process which has the intended result but which the agent is not in control of once it starts – are often taken to be paradigmatic in the philosophy of action. I argue that these are non-progressive, and that fully controlled action, in which the agent is exercising their power to achieve some result rather than merely exercising their power to do something that is likely to result in that achievement, should be regarded as more fundamental. Taking progressive action to be fundamental means that Davidson's famous counter-example to Anscombe's principle of practical self-knowledge – intentionally making ten carbon copies – misses its target.