



Pathiaraj Rayappan

# Intention in Action

The Philosophy of G. E. M. Anscombe



Peter Lang

G. E. M. Anscombe was one of the important philosophers of the twentieth century. Her most famous works are *Intention and Modern Moral Philosophy* and have given origin to the new branch called Philosophy of Action and have been an impetus for the revival of Virtue Ethics. This book studies G. E. M. Anscombe's evaluation of moral theories and moral actions based on her findings in Philosophical Psychology. The author argues that a moral evaluation solely from the point of view of intention is insufficient and looks for a way in which this insufficiency can be overcome. Taking inspiration from Martin Rhonheimer, he finds a way to overcome this insufficiency through concepts such as the moral object, the anthropological truth of man and the practical reason, which are other essential elements to be considered in moral evaluation in addition to intention.

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## Intention in Action

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*To Abhishegam, Robert, Ravi, Anthonyraj,  
Jayaseeli, Sagayamary and Arokiamary.*

*To the loving memory of my beloved parents  
Rayappan and Santhosam*





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Pathiaraj Rayappan



# Introduction

Given the present prevalent contraceptive culture, due to scientific developments in the medical field, it is not too rare to come across serious minded youngsters, desirous of knowing the truth, who ask ‘what is wrong with contraceptive intercourse within marriage?’ – it is a good and effective way of controlling population, avoiding unwanted pregnancies, spacing births, expressing mutual love! When they hear it said that it is against nature, they are confused. How is it against nature? they want to know. They give the example of the contraceptive pill which renders the sexual act in no way different from the ordinary sexual intercourse. Although intuitively we do perceive the difference between these acts and realize that there is ‘something wrong’ in it, we are at a loss to confront on a deeper rational basis. Considered by the intention embedded in the very action, contraceptive sexual intercourse (in whatever form it be) becomes problematic (we will have occasion to discuss this issue at length in this book). Hence, the concept of intention in moral actions is important, although it is not the only decisive element in the moral evaluation of human actions. Also, the right understanding of the concept of intention is needed. For example, Paul Touvier, a French Nazi collaborator who served a pro-Nazi militia set up by the collaborationist Vichy government (France), was condemned in 1994 for having executed seven Jews in 1944 in Rillieux-la-Pape near Lyon. During the legal process, Paul Touvier argued that his action should not be considered as ‘executing seven Jews’ rather as ‘saving ninety-three Jews’ because the Germans had demanded that hundred Jews be put to death to avenge the assassination of Philippe Henriot, the Vichy Minister of Information, by the Resistance fighters in Paris. Paul Touvier claimed that he had bargained the Germans and brought down the number to thirty and then killed only seven of them to appease the Nazis. Thus, he claimed to have ‘saved’ ninety-three Jews!<sup>1</sup>

1 Cf. Martin Rhonheimer, “Intentional Actions and the Meaning of Object: A Reply to McCormick,” *The Perspective of the Acting Person: Essays in the Renewal of Thomistic Moral Philosophy*, edited with an Introduction by William F. Murphy Jr. (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), p. 78.

And intention, in the sense of further intentions, is to be distinguished from the intention embedded in the action. Further intentions, although important, are not as decisive as the intention inherent in the action for the moral goodness or evil of the action. Or else one can find any number of ‘further intentions’ to justify any atrocity: Former US President Harry S. Truman justified his dropping of atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by his intention to end the war and prevent further loss of lives!

Thus, we realize the importance of the clarity of the concept of intention in moral philosophy. It is a very fundamental concept, it constitutes the very moral act (as we shall see later). And it is fondly hoped that this study helps in the clarification of the concept for the moral evaluation of actions. Consequently, such a clarification of the concept of intention will also serve Catholic moral philosophy and theology, as the concept of sin and guilt has its relation to the intention of the agent.

The year 2007 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of the monograph *Intention* by G.E.M. Anscombe, Cambridge analytic philosopher. It is an important work credited with having changed the course of moral philosophy. It was occasioned by the need to study this concept because, in the academic moral philosophy as well as in the society at large (at least in the English speaking world), intention was relegated to an inner act of the mind producible at will, or to include all foreseen consequences of one’s actions. There was a need to demonstrate the mistakenness of these approaches which was destroying the rational ethical fabric of the human society. *Intention* sought to do it. Soon this became widely known, studied and discussed. It has given rise to a new branch in analytic philosophy called the philosophy of action or action theory.<sup>2</sup> Anscombe has demonstrated intention as part of philosophical psychology which is intrinsically related to moral philosophy. What is the relation of philosophical psychology and moral philosophy? Relation is this: to judge an action good or bad or right or wrong (which is the concern of moral philosophy), we should know first of all *what* one has done (which is the concern of philosophical psychology). So the moral philosophy should take into consideration the findings of moral psychology: how intention is formed; how inten-

2 Cf. John Haldane, “In Memoriam: G.E.M. Anscombe (1919–2001),” *The Review of Metaphysics* 53 (2000), p. 1020.

tion is realised in action; how intention can be discovered; how further intentions differ from the basic intention; etc.

Hence, I propose to deal with the topic of Intention in Action according to G.E.M. Anscombe because of its potential in clarifying important concepts in moral philosophy. A further question may be posed: why Anscombe and not another? For one, she is a good Catholic<sup>3</sup> and a very staunch one at that, being a convert to Catholicism in her teens. And she defends Catholic moral doctrines with philosophical arguments.<sup>4</sup>

The present research is, by no means, the first or the only one of its kind. Far from that. The publication of *Intention* in 1957 had attracted attention and elicited critical studies from researchers especially from the English speaking world. Not mentioning the numerous scholarly articles published in acclaimed international journals (many of which will form the bibliography of this research) and international research seminars and conventions, I shall limit myself to some doctoral researches and recent studies related to the concept of intention. Eddy Carli (University of Padova, 2003) has taken up for discussion the causal explanation of intention in *Intention* §10–19, under the title *Cause, ragioni, intenzioni: Spiegazione causale e comprensione di senso*. The same was published later in her book.<sup>5</sup> José Maria Torralba (Preliminary Research, University of Navarre, 2005) has made a study of *Intention* under the title *Acción intencional y razonamiento práctico según G.E.M. Anscombe*. The same has also appeared as a book.<sup>6</sup> Roger Teichmann in his book *The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*<sup>7</sup> gives a global picture of her philosophy in which intention and related concepts occupy the central place. Edmund Runggaldier uses the findings

3 Along with her husband Peter Geach, she was conferred the papal medal *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* in 1999. See also the Foreword of Cardinal Cahal B. Daly to *Moral Truth and Moral Tradition: Essays in Honour of Peter Geach and Elizabeth Anscombe*, edited by Luke Gormally (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1994), pp. vii–ix.

4 See her articles in the collection *Faith in a Hard Ground: Essays on Religion, Philosophy and Ethics by G.E.M. Anscombe*, edited by Mary Geach and Luke Gormally (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2008).

5 Eddy Carli, *Mente e azione: Un'indagine nella analitica, Wittgenstein, Anscombe, Von Wright, Davidson* (Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2003).

6 José Maria Torralba, *Acción intencional y razonamiento práctico según G.E.M. Anscombe* (Pamplona: Eunsa, 2005).

7 Roger Teichmann, *The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

of Anscombe in his work.<sup>8</sup> So does Martin Rhonheimer as we shall in the later part of this book.

What is the place of the present research in the background of the researches mentioned above and the other ongoing researches? This research, presenting her intentional analysis of action and her evaluation of moral problems (as well as moral theories) from the point of view of intention, surveys the philosophical discussion that has followed demonstrating the validity of her positions. Evaluation of moral problems from the intention point of view reveals that intention alone is insufficient for moral evaluation and that it needs to be complemented by other concepts such as the moral object, anthropological truth of man and practical reason which are found in the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas (according to the interpretation of Martin Rhonheimer). This would be the contribution of this research. We have chosen Martin Rhonheimer (Professor of ethics and political philosophy at the Holy Cross Pontifical University, Rome) because of his relationship to Thomistic texts as well as to Anscombe. He is a faithful interpreter of St. Thomas, being faithful to his texts. He owes to Anscombe the importance of understanding human actions as intentional actions.<sup>9</sup>

Hence, I detail below how the research is structured. In addition to this introduction and a general conclusion, the book is laid out in five chapters. The first chapter aims to situate the topic of intention in the history of moral philosophy with special reference to Aristotle (to whom Anscombe constantly calls our attention) and St. Thomas Aquinas. The second chapter presents her ideas from her book *Intention*. The third chapter will be dedicated to her evaluation of moral problems such as war and contraceptive sexual intercourse; and moral theories such as the doctrine of double effect and consequentialism. Our concern is to see how she utilises her findings from her study of intention in moral evaluation.

As it has already been mentioned, her concepts quickly attracted attention, let us say critical attention, which means that they were objects of philosophical discussions (or battles!). Not claiming to be exhaustive,

8 Edmund Runggaldier, *Che cosa sono le azioni? Un confronto filosofico con il naturalismo* (Milano: Vita e pensiero, 2000).

9 Cf. William F. Murphy, "Aquinas on the Object and Evaluation of the Moral Act: Rhonheimer's Approach and Some Recent Interlocutors," *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 15 (2008), p. 212.



we choose and treat only some contested ideas. This will demonstrate the validity or philosophical correctness of her positions. This will be the subject of the fourth chapter. Evaluation of moral problems from the point of view of intention makes us realize the necessity of complementing intention with other concepts such as moral object, anthropological truth of man and practical reason. This we take from the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, as interpreted by a contemporary philosopher, Martin Rhonheimer. This will be the concern of the fifth chapter.

To understand a philosopher, his intellectual itinerary would be of great help. I shall try to provide a brief intellectual biography of Anscombe, avoiding biographical details which can be found elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> Anscombe must have been naturally gifted with a capacity to understand, evaluate, take a stance and live by it, come what may. This is evident in her conversion to Catholicism. It was in her early teens that she read a book on the works and sufferings of recusant priests in Elizabethan England.<sup>11</sup> She was drawn to Catholicism. This set her working. She began taking classes from a Dominican priest and became a Catholic in her first year at St. Hugh's College, Oxford.

The subjects of her undergraduate course consisted of classical literature, ancient history and philosophy. She almost neglected the other

- 10 Jane O'Grady, "Obituary: Elizabeth Anscombe," *Guardian*, January 11, 2001, electronic copy at <<http://guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4115443,00.html>> (27.01.2007); Robert P. George, "Elizabeth Anscombe, R.I.P.," *National Review Online* (February 3–4, 2001) electronic copy at <<http://www.nationalreview.com/weekend/philosophy/philosophy-george020301.shtml>> (28.01.2007); "G.E.M. Anscombe," *Wikipedia* at <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GEM\\_Anscombe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GEM_Anscombe)> (27.01.2007); John M. Dolan, "G.E.M. Anscombe: Living the Truth," *First Things* 113 (May, 2003), pp. 11–13 electronic copy at <<http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft0105/opinion/dolan.html>> (30.12.2006); Jenny Teichman, "Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe 1919–2001," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 115 (2001), pp. 31–50 electronic copy at <<http://www.proc.britac.ac.uk/tfiles/043852A/115p031.pdf>> (27.01.2007); John Haldane, "In Memoriam: G.E.M. Anscombe (1919–2001)," *The Review of Metaphysics* 53 (2000), pp. 1019–1021; Cora Diamond, "Anscombe, G[ertrude] E[lizabeth] M[argaret] (1919–2001)," *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, edited by Lawrence C. Becker and Charlotte B. Becker, Vol. 1 (New York: Routledge, 2001<sup>2</sup>), pp. 74–75; Philippa Foot, "Elizabeth Anscombe (1919–2001)," *Somerville College Review* (2001), pp. 119–120.
- 11 Cf. G.E.M. Anscombe, *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind, The Collected Philosophical Papers of G.E.M. Anscombe*, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), p. vii.

two in favour of philosophy. As an undergraduate student she read Aristotle's *Etica Nicomachea* and St. Thomas' *Summa Theologiae*.<sup>12</sup> Later she would mine *Summa Theologiae* for philosophical points.<sup>13</sup> As an undergraduate she had also read Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (later she would even write a book *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus* (1959)). She became enthusiastic and confident that Wittgenstein's therapeutic method would help her solve philosophical difficulties in a way that her training in traditional systematic philosophy did not. In 1942, she was a research fellow at Newnham College, Cambridge. There, she met Wittgenstein and started attending his classes. She continued to attend his classes even after she moved to Oxford. They became close friends. She was one of the few academics that Wittgenstein trusted.<sup>14</sup>

Over the years, the intellectual friendship between Wittgenstein and Anscombe grew. He commissioned her to translate his *Philosophical Investigations* and arranged for her to stay for a period in Vienna, Austria, his native town to learn the nuances of the German language in that place. Her translation is an undisputed classic. While she made Wittgenstein known to the world, she came to have a firsthand knowledge of Wittgenstein's philosophy. At his death in 1951, Wittgenstein nominated her as one of his three literary executors, along with Rush Rhees and G.H. von Wright. And so she was in contact with all of Wittgenstein's works, translating, editing and publishing them.

Though loyal to Wittgenstein, she was not his disciple. What she had in common with him was a bold and original cast of mind. And this led her to hold views very different from him in many respects.<sup>15</sup> She agreed with Wittgenstein that to solve philosophical problems it is useful to enquire into ordinary concepts – how those concepts are formed, learned and used.<sup>16</sup> She differed from him on many others, for example, her attitude

12 Cf. *Ibid.*

13 Cf. Mary Geach, "Introduction," *Faith in a Hard Ground*, *op. cit.*, p. xiv.

14 Cf. Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1990), pp. 497–498.

15 Cf. Robert P. George, "Elizabeth Anscombe, R.I.P.," p. 1. See also K. W. Rankin, Review of *Intention* by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), *Mind* 68 (1959), p. 261. See also Andrew Beards, "Assessing Anscombe," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 47 (2007), p. 47. See also Roger Teichmann, *The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, p. 4.

16 Cf. Jenny Teichman, "Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe 1919–2001," p. 40.

to political and social evils and ethics.<sup>17</sup> She was an analytic philosopher but differed from the analytical philosophers! She herself explained,

Analytic philosophy is characterised by styles of argument and investigation than by doctrinal content. It is thus possible for people of widely different beliefs to be practitioners of this sort of philosophy. It ought not to surprise any one that a serious believing Catholic Christian should also be an analytic philosopher.<sup>18</sup>

She was a keen observer and had an intuitive grasp of things. She realized that the academic moral philosophy in Oxford and in Cambridge and other American universities ‘colonised’ by them and the society at large in the English speaking world had endorsed and lived what she named ‘consequentialism’: an ethical theory that judges the goodness or evil of an action from its foreseen consequences. And digging through history she discovered its roots in modern philosophy going back to Henry Sidgwick. It was to counter consequentialists’ faulty understanding of human action that she directed her *Intention* and “Modern Moral Philosophy” – two of her most famous works. And most of her later writings were dealing with various themes arising out of these such as causality, individuation of action, non-observational knowledge, ‘under a description’, practical reasoning, etc. But it is not to deny that she has not produced philosophical pieces on other topics, indeed she has done some acclaimed ones. Her *Intention*, which changed the consciousness of Anglo-Saxon philosophy, is the founding document of the analytic philosophy of action, in fact, it gave birth to this branch of philosophy.<sup>19</sup> Her “Modern Moral Philosophy” gave a call to return to Aristotelian model of virtue ethics as a viable option in the search for doing ethics without God. This has inspired the revival of Virtue Ethics.

17 Cf. Roger Teichmann, *The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe*, pp. 4–5. See also Guido Maria Miglietta, “La verità morale e il suo linguaggio nel pensiero di Elizabeth Anscombe,” *Verità e libertà oggi*, edited by Battista Mondin (Milano: Massimo, 1999), pp. 234–235.

18 G. E. M. Anscombe, “Twenty Opinions Common among Modern Anglo-American Philosophers,” *Faith in a Hard Ground*, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

19 Cf. John M. Dolan, “G. E. M. Anscombe: Living the Truth,” p. 12. See also David Solomon, “Elizabeth Anscombe’s ‘Modern Moral Philosophy’: Fifty Years Later,” *Christian Bioethics* 14 (2008), pp. 110, 112. See also John W. Yolton, “Action Theory as the Foundation for the Sciences of Man,” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 3 (1973), p. 89.



## Chapter One

# Intention in Moral Philosophy

Intention has always been considered an important element in the moral evaluation of one's actions. In this chapter, we shall see how intention in action was discussed in the history of philosophy. And we shall do this in reference to Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas. Our choice of Aristotle is guided by G.E.M. Anscombe's invitation to return to his virtue ethics as a viable way of doing secular ethics. And our choice of St. Thomas is guided by the fact that his philosophy is a development on Aristotle and also by the fact that his philosophy can be used to complete what is lacking in Anscombe's treatment of intentional action, as we shall see later.

### 1.1 Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics

*Nicomachean Ethics*<sup>1</sup> is an important contribution of Aristotle to the field of Ethics. It has a detailed treatment of human actions, which is related to the discussion of intentional action, the focus of this research. Given this orientation, in what follows, I shall analyse only those sections of *Nicomachean Ethics* that pertain strictly to the topic of intentional action.

*Nicomachean Ethics* has the following structure. It is divided into ten books.<sup>2</sup> They deal with the following: Book I: The good for man;

1 It is not his only contribution to ethics. There are other works such as *Eudemian Ethics*, *Moralia Magna* and *Virtues and Vices*, authenticity of some of which are disputed. *Nicomachean Ethics* takes its name from Nicomachus, which could refer either to Aristotle's father or his son, for both of them were called by that name. It may have been *dedicated* to his father Nicomachus, or it may have been *edited* and given its present form by his son Nicomachus.

2 'Book' here, refers to the amount of text that was contained in one papyrus roll.

Book II: Moral virtue: – General account; Book III: Moral virtue: – Conditions of responsibility for action, Moral virtue: – Particular virtues; Books IV & V: Moral virtue: – Particular virtues; Book VI: Intellectual virtue; Book VII: Continence and incontinence, Pleasure; Books VIII & IX: Friendship; Book X: Pleasure, Happiness. Book III, 1–5 deals with the conditions of responsibility for actions. In this section, Aristotle treats of human actions and their classifications. This section is the focal point of our discussion in the first part of the present chapter.

To whom was *Nicomachean Ethics* addressed? The students of Aristotle's lectures on ethics were young wealthy men who looked forward to a political career in the city states and desired to act in accordance with the right reason. But Aristotle demanded that the hearers of his lectures should not be too young in years or youthful in character, because the subject of the lectures were actions that occur in life, of which the young boy has no experience and also because, as the youngster is directed by his passions, the study would be unprofitable.<sup>3</sup>

The subject under study in *Nicomachean Ethics* is the human action and pursuit; matters concerned with conduct and the questions of what is good for man.<sup>4</sup> The aim of the lectures on ethics was to provide the future legislators an account of how a good person should live,<sup>5</sup> an account of how to differentiate between *hekousion* (voluntary) and *akousion* (involuntary) actions so that conferring of honours and punishments by legislators would be easier.<sup>6</sup> He did not want his students merely to have conceptual knowledge but he wanted to lead them to perform actions in accordance with right reason (virtuous actions).<sup>7</sup>

3 Cf. 1095<sup>a</sup>2–10. A note on reference to Aristotle's works: The standard system has a combination of numbers and a letter. The number before the letter refers to the page, and the letter to the column, and the number after the letter to the line of the standard Berlin Greek text. References to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, is from W.D. Ross' translation found in *Great Books of the Western World*, edited by Mortimer J. Adler, Vol. 8 (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, INC., 1990<sup>2</sup>), pp. 339–436.

4 Cf. 1094<sup>a</sup>1; 1104<sup>a</sup>4.

5 Cf. 1103<sup>b</sup>28.

6 Cf. 1109<sup>b</sup>33–34.

7 Cf. 1095<sup>a</sup>5.

### 1.11 Virtuous Actions

It is evident from the outline of *Nicomachean Ethics* that Aristotle deals at length about virtues. But one may ask how are virtues related to the discussion of human actions. We know that the virtues are expressed in actions and the choice that underlies them. Virtues are concerned with passions and actions. Hence the need to investigate them.

Let us start with the question, what is goal of human action? Already at the start, when we speak about the goal of human action, it needs to be clarified that ‘human’ action does not have the technical sense it now has: human act as distinguished from acts of man. In Aristotle, human action refers to all actions done by man. Of course, he does not discuss processes such as digestion, sneezing, coughing, etc. Aristotle’s analysis starts from ordinary life experiences. He finds that we do some actions and in each of these actions we aim at achieving something. We eat food. In eating food we aim at health or enjoyment of the food or something else. We do physical exercise in order to be healthy. “Everyone who acts, acts for an end.”<sup>8</sup> Now, the end is in a particular relation to the action that is performed. What is that relation? The relation is that the end is to be achieved by the action that is performed. It is *through* that particular action that the end of that action is to be seen, i.e., the end cannot be seen separated from the action.

Of the good that we aim at in our actions, we find that some are subordinated to others. I go to the office to pay the electricity bill; I pay the electricity bill to have light in my house; I want to have light in my house to be able to work well; I want to work well; I want to earn a living; ... And the chain goes on. In this chain of objectives we find that the higher objectives are better than the lower objectives. And not all things that we choose are chosen for something else. If it were so, it would go on to infinity making our desire empty and vain. Therefore, there is something that we desire for its own sake and for the sake of which everything else is desired. That for the sake of which everything else is desired must be the chief good, the highest of all goods achievable by action.<sup>9</sup> This chief good Aristotle calls *eudaimonia*. Everything that we choose, we choose for the sake of something else except *eudai-*

8 1139<sup>a</sup>36.

9 Cf. 1094<sup>a</sup>18–23.

*monia* which is final and self-sufficient. *Eudaimonia* is rendered in English variously as happiness,<sup>10</sup> successful life<sup>11</sup> and fulfilled life.<sup>12</sup>

Denying that *eudaimonia* is neither pleasure nor wealth nor abstract ‘Platonic’ good nor disposition nor quality, Aristotle affirms that it is an activity, an activity of the soul (a rational activity) in accordance with virtue,<sup>13</sup> throughout a life time. Being a being directed by a rational soul, the best way for man to live is to live according to his rational nature. *Eudaimonia* is to be achieved by habituation. In short, *eudaimonia* is a virtuous activity, doing of virtuous actions.

### 1.111 Moral Virtues

Aristotle distinguishes two elements in the soul: the rational and the irrational. The vegetative element and the impulses are classed under the irrational. Our study of human action concerns the impulses (the appetite, the element of desire) because they seem to move contrary to (resist) the rational principle. As there are two elements in the soul, there are two types of virtues: some virtues are moral (states of character) and some are intellectual virtues (states of the mind).<sup>14</sup> We treat first of the moral virtues.

What is the nature of the moral virtue? The man who indulges in every pleasure is self-indulgent and the man who shuns every pleasure is insensible and the man who is proportionate in indulging in pleasure is temperate. This is Aristotle’s ‘doctrine of the mean.’ Every virtue lies in the middle between two associated vices, one in the direction of too much emotion, the other in the direction of too little emotion.<sup>15</sup> Moral virtue consists in having the irrational elements of the soul such as anger, fear, lust, envy, hatred, resentment, pity, etc. ruled by the rational element.<sup>16</sup> It is a state of character, a disposition by which we are enabled to respond to and act in a particular situation which involves our

10 It is the standard translation (W. D. Ross).

11 Cf. D. S. Hutchinson, “Ethics”, *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, edited by Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 200.

12 Cf. Gerard J. Hughes, *Aristotle: On Ethics* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 22.

13 Cf. 1098<sup>a</sup>17.

14 Cf. 1102<sup>b</sup>29–1103<sup>a</sup>10.

15 Cf. 1106<sup>a</sup>26–<sup>b</sup>7.

16 Cf. 1102<sup>a</sup>26–1103<sup>a</sup>10.



passions in a balanced manner. Now, what is that balanced response? It is the response which the rational part of us tells us it is, the response which is according to reason, i.e., the mean is to be decided by the rational principle, the practical wisdom.<sup>17</sup>

How is the moral virtue acquired? Just as in the case of the arts, we become virtuous by repetition of the corresponding acts: by doing just acts we become just as we become brave by doing brave acts. Thus, moral virtue is the result of habit.<sup>18</sup> It is acquired by training over a long period of time. One may ask if there was a way to know whether a state of character has been attained? Aristotle says that the sign that a character has been attained would be the joy or the pain that accompanies the action. For example, if a man abstains from bodily pleasures and is happy about it, it is a sign of virtue. Instead, if he is annoyed and pained by it, it is a sign that state of character has not yet been attained.<sup>19</sup>

Courage, temperance, liberality, magnificence, pride, ambition, good temper and justice are the moral virtues enumerated by Aristotle. And virtues are related to choice and intentional actions. We shall briefly deal with two virtues: temperance and justice. The virtue of temperance is related to pleasures, especially bodily pleasures such as food and sex. Temperate man chooses the pleasures which he *ought, as* he ought and *when* he ought, as the right rule directs.<sup>20</sup> The opposite vices are self-indulgence and insensibility. The self-indulgent, led by his appetite, chooses the pleasant things at the cost of everything else.<sup>21</sup> Insensibility is the opposite extreme of shunning every pleasure. The virtue of justice is a kind of equality,<sup>22</sup> a proportional equality in distribution of common possessions and an arithmetical equality in transactions between man and man,<sup>23</sup> the equal being the intermediate between the greater and the less.<sup>24</sup> Aristotle claims that virtue of justice is not part of virtue but the entire virtue.<sup>25</sup>

17 Cf. 1107<sup>a</sup>2.

18 Cf. 1103<sup>a</sup>17–18.

19 Cf. 1104<sup>b</sup>5–8.

20 Cf. 1119<sup>b</sup>14.

21 Cf. 1119<sup>a</sup>2.

22 Cf. 1131<sup>a</sup>13.

23 Cf. 1131<sup>b</sup>12; 1132<sup>a</sup>2.

24 Cf. 1132<sup>a</sup>15.

25 Cf. 1130<sup>a</sup>9.

In virtues we are speaking of a state of character. And the state of character is always revealed in the individual acts. And Aristotle distinguishes the state of character and the individual acts. He says that though a man, by his character, be unjust, his actions do not automatically become unjust. Whether an action is just or unjust has to be judged from that particular act that one has done.<sup>26</sup>

### *1.112 Intellectual Virtues*

Intellectual virtues are dispositions of the mind which enable us to know the truth.<sup>27</sup> According to Aristotle the intellectual virtues are five: skill or art, scientific knowledge, comprehension or intuitive reason, contemplation or philosophic wisdom and practical wisdom.<sup>28</sup> But why do we study the intellectual virtues? We have seen that moral virtue is the mean between the excess and the defect and that the mean is decided by the dictates of the right rule.<sup>29</sup> Dictates of the right rule is the field of intellectual virtue. Hence, the intellectual and moral virtues are intimately related to each other.

Sensation, reason and desire are the three parts of the soul which are concerned with action and truth.<sup>30</sup> That which is peculiar to man is reason and desire (wanting). The lower animals also have sensation but it does not originate action. Reason is concerned with affirmation and negation. It has two parts: scientific and calculative. Scientific intellect is the faculty by which one contemplates about the invariables such as the first principles; and the calculative or practical intellect contemplates the variables.<sup>31</sup> Desire is concerned with pursuit and avoidance (to do or not to do). Desire acts on what is presented by reason. The desire (the choice) to be good should follow what reason asserts as true.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the action originates from choice and choice has its origin in desire and reasoning with a view to an end. Therefore, choice cannot exist without reason.<sup>33</sup>

26 Cf. 1135<sup>a</sup>22.

27 Cf. D. S. Hutchinson, "Ethics", pp. 205–206.

28 Cf. 1139<sup>b</sup>17.

29 Cf. 1138<sup>b</sup>19.

30 Cf. 1139<sup>a</sup>18.

31 Cf. 1139<sup>a</sup>8–9.

32 Cf. 1139<sup>a</sup>22–25.

33 Cf. 1139<sup>a</sup>32–34.

Let us see an example of an intellectual virtue: practical wisdom (*phronesis*). It is the capacity to act in agreement with the right desire. Right desire is the desire which is in agreement with right reason. We can say that there are two parts of practical wisdom. First, it is an appreciation of that which is good for man as man (conversely what is bad for man),<sup>34</sup> i.e., what is conducive to good life in general. Secondly, it is an appreciation of what is good for the agent in the particular situation.<sup>35</sup> Thus, practical wisdom deals with actions and with good that can be brought about by action.

A question may be raised in this connection: if moral virtues make us to do what is right, is there a need for practical wisdom, for it seems to be doing the same function? Aristotle says, "Virtue makes us aim at the right mark, and practical wisdom makes us take the right means."<sup>36</sup> Therefore, their function is different: the function of practical wisdom is to put into practice, i.e., in the particular and contingent action, the correct orientation to the end which is provided by moral virtues.<sup>37</sup>

There are three minor virtues that help practical wisdom: deliberation, understanding and judgment. *Deliberation* is calculation of or inquiry into what is good for man as man.<sup>38</sup> A man of practical wisdom deliberates well what is conducive to good life. *Understanding* refers to evaluation of what others say about matters with which practical wisdom is concerned.<sup>39</sup> And *judgment* is the right discrimination of the equitable,<sup>40</sup> i.e., to judge about things with which practical wisdom is concerned.

34 Cf. 1140<sup>a</sup>5–6.

35 Cf. 1141<sup>b</sup>11.

36 1144<sup>a</sup>8.

37 Cf. D. S. Hutchinson, "Ethics", p. 208.

38 Cf. 1142<sup>b</sup>32.

39 Cf. 1143<sup>a</sup>14.

40 Cf. 1143<sup>a</sup>21.

### 1.12 Action and Accountability

In discussing human action Aristotle distinguishes between *hekousion* and *akousion*, which have been variously translated as: voluntary-involuntary,<sup>41</sup> willingly-unwillingly<sup>42</sup> and intentional-non-intentional.<sup>43</sup> The variety of translations reveals that none of them capture accurately the sense of the characterization given by Aristotle. In consideration of these difficulties, in this research the Greek words *hekousion* and *akousion* will be retained. *Hekousion* actions are spontaneous actions, those that have their moving principle in the agent and those that are done with knowledge. Instead, *akousion* actions are those that are done under compulsion and ignorance. In discussing action and accountability, what actions does Aristotle consider? He does not consider actions in general or actions in the abstract, i.e., actions without reference to particular concrete situations. Rather, he considers particular actions.<sup>44</sup> Only in concrete actions desire and choice are manifested.

#### 1.121 *Akousion*

Those actions which are called *akousion* by Aristotle are those which are done under external compulsion and those done by reason of ignorance.

(1) *Compulsion*. Aristotle gives the following examples to illustrate compulsion: A man is carried away by wind; a man is bound and carried by persons who have him in their power; and my hand is used by another to hit a third person.<sup>45</sup> So, the concept of compulsion that Aristotle has in mind is that of external forces or circumstances, and the agent does not contribute anything to the action.<sup>46</sup> Now, we may ask whether it could be called an action at all, as the person does not actually act; it is rather done to him.<sup>47</sup> All that Aristotle would like to emphasize is the

41 W.D. Ross' translation.

42 Cf. Gerard J. Hughes, *Aristotle: On Ethics*, p. 118.

43 Cf. David Charles, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Action* (London: Duckworth, 1984), p. 61.

44 Cf. 1110<sup>a</sup>13–14.

45 Cf. 1110<sup>a</sup>1–4; 1135<sup>a</sup>23–28.

46 Cf. 1110<sup>b</sup>2–3, 15.

47 Cf. Gerard J. Hughes, *Aristotle: On Ethics*, p. 119.