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Beyond Consequentialist Ethics: Intentional Action and the Virtuous Citizen in the Age of AI

Abstract. This study examines how to channel the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) toward the common good, emphasizing the ethical responsibility of those who program, regulate, and use it. Assuming a classical Aristotelian-Thomist perspective, our paper argues that, lacking intelligence and will in the philosophical sense, AI cannot be a moral agent nor responsible for its actions. In response to the challenge of AI ethics, two ethical proposals are analyzed as candidates for the ethics required in an AI-based world: consequentialism and the ethics of intentional stance. We dismiss consequentialism due to its insufficiency for such a task and opt instead for an ethics of intentional action, inspired by Martin Rhonheimer's work, which, ultimately, should be grounded in a metaphysical theory of action like Aquinas's. Our research concludes that, in order to live well in an AI-based society, designing technically ethical systems, in the spirit of consequentialism, is not enough; rather, it is essential to cultivate

citizens who, as AI users, are endowed with virtues and, first and foremost, the virtue of prudence.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence; Ethics; Philosophy of action; Behavior; Christianity; Virtue ethics.

Contribution. The original contribution of this paper lies in shifting the normative locus of AI ethics: rather than attempting to embed consequentialist algorithms into machines devoid of moral agency, it applies Rhonheimer's ethics of intentional action to human agents. The core novelty of this study is its philosophical demonstration that the common good in a technologically saturated society is not achieved by designing 'ethical systems,' but through the cultivation of citizens—both developers and users—endowed with classical virtues, preeminently prudence.

Use of AI. The use of AI has been reduced to basic text editing features.

Introduction

The development of artificial intelligence (AI) has had a significant impact on contemporary society, presenting new philosophical challenges, particularly ethical ones. In a world where machines are increasingly capable of processing information, learning, and making decisions, the fundamental question concerning the nature of intelligence and morality gains renewed relevance. Consequently, AI raises profound questions within the field of ethics.

The rapid advancement of AI has enabled the implementation of autonomous systems across various domains, from medicine to transportation and defense. These developments have brought significant advantages, such as increased efficiency, reduced human error, and the ability to process vast amounts of information in shorter periods (Russell and Norvig 2018). However, situations have also emerged in which decisions made by AI systems involve far-reaching ethical dilemmas. In this regard, it is essential to consider how these decisions should be made. Let us examine only a few examples of actions that AI might undertake.

One paradigmatic case is that of autonomous vehicles. These vehicles, equipped with AI systems, must make split-second decisions when faced with potential collisions. For instance, if a self-driving car encounters a situation where it must either strike a pedestrian or swerve and endanger the life of its passenger, under what criterion should it act?

A second case illustrating the ethical problem of AI is its use in military defense systems. Currently, there are autonomous weapon systems capable of identifying and attacking targets without direct human intervention. This raises several moral questions. In this study, we shall confine our analysis to two of these issues, examined through the lens of Thomistic philosophy: if an autonomous drone carries out a lethal action, who is responsible? Furthermore, how should this responsible party be “educated,” or what ethical system could assist it in making “appropriate” decisions?

We are thus presented with two questions. The first might well be: Is AI responsible for the actions it carries out, or is it the one who programs or controls it? Could there come a day when the responsible party is the AI itself?

The second question is, once the responsible party has been identified, how shall we “educate” it, or what ethical system could help it make “appropriate” decisions? Many argue that, at least for now, certain human beings may be responsible for the actions performed by AI. Hence, we contemplate the emergence of various protocols and regulations, especially in Europe (European Comision 2019; IEE 2019).

This paper is organized as follows. In this paper, we explore whether Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy can offer insights into this issue. Consequently, in Section 2, we demonstrate why, according to Thomas Aquinas, AI cannot be held responsible for its actions. In that regard, we will focus on presenting intelligence and will as exclusively human capacities and the grounding capacities of moral responsibility. One might reasonably ask: is it truly necessary to invoke Thomas Aquinas when the focus is on AI ethics? We contend that to grasp the full scope of artificial intelligence ethics, we must return to its deepest philosophical roots. Furthermore, the education of citizens acquires its full significance specifically in the context of rational agents. In Section 3, we explore

consequentialism and, following Martin Rhonheimer's work, the ethics of intentional action as two alternative ethical paths for AI users. We also explain why searching for the common good requires accepting the ethics of intentional action and rejecting consequentialism. Finally, we make some conclusive remarks in Section 4.

1. Is AI Responsible for Its Actions?

In classical ethics, for an action to be considered ethical (a human act, not merely an act of man), it must involve both consciousness (knowledge) and will (freedom). If either is lacking, it ceases to be so. For instance, the beating of the heart during sleep is typically considered an act of man, not a human or ethical act. This is a common doctrine, acknowledged by most Western legal systems, inherited from Roman law. Thus, if someone, during a panic attack or believing they were shooting at a wild animal attacking them, accidentally shoots their child, they will not be held guilty with the same severity as if the act had been premeditated (or, under certain circumstances, invincible ignorance could render them innocent). This does not imply that the physical act itself is good; evidently, killing one's innocent child is an evil. However, culpability may be reduced or even nullified by the circumstances. We are therefore referring to reason (intelligence) and to will (freedom).

1.1. Intelligence and Will as Specifically Human Capacities

According to classical philosophy, intelligence and will are the two fundamental faculties that distinguish human beings from all other entities in the universe. Aristotle already noted in his *Metaphysics* that reason constitutes the defining characteristic of humanity, establishing an ontological foundation for the intellectual capacity that differentiates human beings from other creatures (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, bk. 1). Similarly, Plato emphasized in *The Republic* that the rational part of the soul is what guides the individual toward knowledge of the good and, consequently, toward the true fulfilment of their nature (Plato, *Republic*,

bk. 4). Following this tradition, Aquinas maintains that intelligence is the faculty that enables human beings to grasp the truth and discern between what is real and what is merely apparent, while will is the capacity to deliberately choose (elect) the good, guided by that knowledge (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 79, a. 3; I-II, q. 18, a. 1)¹. According to Aquinas and his intellectual tradition, reason possesses the faculty of knowing the good—this capacity is called intelligence. Will, in turn, possesses the faculty of choosing the known good—this capacity is called freedom, and the act of choosing (elect) the good is love. This is the case not only for the most classical Christian thinkers; even those who are wary of the more scholastic tradition—for example, existentialism—have come to posit that the human person is an “intimate relationship of truth and love” (Del Hierro Dies 2023, 1).

With the rise of AI, one might ask whether this distinctive feature of human nature is at risk of disappearing. Could AI ever develop intelligence comparable to that of humans? Indeed, some argue that AI will not only match but surpass human intelligence, evolving into a “superintelligence”—an intellect that far exceeds the most advanced human minds in virtually every domain, including scientific creativity, general wisdom, and social skills (Bostrom, 2014, 15). But could AI ever possess will and love? Given that will depends on intelligence, if it could be demonstrated that AI does not, in the proper sense, possess intelligence, then it would no longer be necessary (though still possible) to prove that it also lacks the capacity for love, understood as the act of choosing the good. Therefore, let us focus on the first question: Could AI ever possess intelligence comparable to that of human beings? To answer this, we must first analyze what is specific to human intelligence.

1.1.1. Human Intelligence

To address the previous question, we shall begin by analyzing what has made human intelligence unique—at least until now. Human intelligence is unique because it possesses the capacity to grasp universals, which Aquinas refers to as the knowledge of essences. Unlike animals, which

¹ Hereafter, the *Summa Theologiae* will be cited as *S.Th.*

operate by instinct and sensory perception, human beings have the ability to go beyond the particular and discern the essence of things. Thomas Aquinas explains that man has two principal cognitive faculties: the senses and the intellect. The senses apprehend the particular and the concrete—what we see, touch, hear, etc. The intellect, on the other hand, apprehends the universal and the abstract—ideas, concepts, and essences. As he states: “The sense knows the particular, but the intellect knows the universal. For the senses are incapable of knowing the universal, since sensory knowledge is always knowledge of the singular” (Aquinas, *S.Th.* I, q. 84, a. 6).²

Thus, among material beings, only humans possess intellect. Not even the most advanced animals can, in the strict sense, be said to have an intelligence capable of grasping the universal essences of things—though this does not exclude their ability to perceive sensible forms. For instance, a dog may recognize its owner, but it cannot formulate the abstract concepts of “humanity” or “friendship.” The human intellect, however, can. Therefore, human intelligence not only receives information but also has an active capacity to process it, analyze it, and attain knowledge beyond the merely empirical. Moreover, human intelligence is spiritual (not merely immaterial) and is distinguished by the following characteristics:

- a) The intellect does not rely on a material organ. Unlike the senses, the intellect does not directly depend on a bodily organ for its operation. In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas states: “The act of understanding is not carried out through a bodily organ. The operation of the senses is carried out through a bodily organ, whereas the operation of the intellect is not.” (Aquinas, *S.Th.* I, q. 75, a. 2). The senses depend on material organs—the eyes for vision, the ears for hearing, etc.—whereas the intellect can operate without direct reliance on any specific organ. While the brain is necessary for processing images and sensory data, the very act of comprehending universals cannot be reduced to a material function.

² All translations of classical texts into English are the author’s own, based on the editions listed in the final bibliography.

Thus, when the intellect apprehends the essence of *rockness*, it does not itself become a rock. This suggests that the intellect operates in a manner distinct from matter. As Aquinas explains: “If the intellect had a material nature, then in knowing the nature of a stone, it would itself become a stone.” (Aquinas, *S.Th.* I, q. 75, a. 5). Material organs, such as the retina, undergo physical changes when they perceive something (for instance, the retina is stimulated by light). However, the intellect does not alter its nature when it understands something, indicating that its operation is immaterial.

If intelligence were purely material, it would depend entirely on direct experience and be incapable of conceiving things it has never perceived. However, the human intellect can conceive objects such as the million-sided polygon (millionechaedron) or purely abstract concepts such as justice, infinity, or the essence of beauty. This demonstrates that the human intellect transcends what is merely sensory and material.

- b) The Abstraction of Universals. Human intelligence abstracts universal concepts from sensory data. For example, when a person sees a dog, their intellect does not merely retain the image of that particular dog but instead abstracts the universal idea of dog. This process of abstraction is not possible for a purely material being: “The intellect knows the universal, whereas the senses know only the particular.” (Aquinas, *S.Th.* I, q. 86, a. 1). If the intellect were a material faculty, it would be constrained by the limitations of matter, preventing it from grasping universals. However, the fact that we can conceive general essences demonstrates that the intellect operates immaterially. The million-sided polygon (millionechaedron) once again provides an apt example. We can conceive of a geometric figure with a million sides without ever having seen such a figure in reality. The intellect can form the abstract notion of a shape with a million sides, even though no sense has ever perceived such an object, and it may not even exist. This illustrates that the

intellect is not merely limited to reproducing what it experiences through the senses; rather, it has the capacity to generate purely mental concepts and entities.

- c) The Reflexivity of the Intellect (Self-Knowledge). The human intellect not only apprehends the external world but also possesses the capacity for self-knowledge. It can analyze its own acts, question its own nature, and reflect upon its own existence. This is something that neither the senses nor purely material beings can do: “The intellect understands itself, for it can turn back upon itself and know its own operation” (Aquinas, *De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 9). If the intellect were material, it would be limited to knowing only external objects. However, its capacity for introspection suggests that it is a spiritual reality, fundamentally distinct from any other being in the universe.
- d) The Intellect’s Unlimited Capacity. The human intellect has the capacity to apprehend any reality, whether material or immaterial. There is no inherent limit to the number of concepts it can grasp. Unlike a material organ, which has a fixed capacity (for example, the eye can only perceive certain wavelengths of light), the intellect is not bound by such constraints. As Thomas Aquinas states in the *Summa contra Gentiles*: “If the intellect were corporeal, its capacity for understanding would be limited to certain objects, as is the case with the senses. But the human intellect is capable of knowing all things, both material and immaterial” (Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*. II, 49). This suggests that its operation is not material but spiritual. Contemporary philosophers, such as Leonardo Polo, also arrive, through other avenues, at the unrestricted growth of the human being (Polo 2015, 113).

To sum up, the human intellect is unique because: a) It does not depend directly on a material organ; it does not become identical with the object it knows (as illustrated by the example of *stoneness*); b) It is capable of abstraction and universal knowledge; c) It can attain self-knowledge and engage in reflection; d) It possesses an unlimited capacity for knowledge; it is incorruptible and transcends matter.

All of these considerations demonstrate that human intelligence is spiritual in nature and fundamentally distinct from any other form of cognition within the natural world.

1.1.2. Is AI Intelligent in the Strict Sense?

Thomas Aquinas, in his theory of knowledge and of the intellect, follows an Aristotelian view in which intelligence is the capacity of the rational soul to abstract universal concepts from sensible data. According to his doctrine, the human intellect has two essential faculties: the agent intellect (which abstracts intelligible forms from sensible data) and the possible intellect (which receives and comprehends these forms). From this perspective, intelligence is not merely the ability to process information or perform calculations, but involves understanding, judgment, and the abstraction of universals—something that, according to Aquinas, only a being endowed with a rational soul can accomplish.

Thus, AI, in the proper philosophical sense, is not and cannot be intelligence because: 1) it possesses neither agent intellect nor possible intellect. Perhaps one could claim that AI abstracts *per accidens*. In deep learning, there may be strategies that generate stable configurations resembling what would be a universal. Deep learning techniques are sometimes capable of revealing hidden patterns in the most successful problem-solving strategies—patterns that were previously unknown to humans (Sánchez-Cañizares 2020). Nevertheless, AI does not understand what it does or why it works; it does not truly possess a universal. Nor does it grasp the essence of things but simply recognizes patterns within data. 2) AI lacks self-consciousness and will. Intelligence is bound to the will and to the capacity for self-determination. And AI has no proper ends of its own; it merely follows instructions given by programmers or learns through statistical models without understanding their meaning. 3) Finally, AI does not possess knowledge in the proper sense. For, in classical philosophy, to know implies an immaterial activity of the rational soul. In AI, however, information must always be translated by the programmer. But, the translation of natural processes into information is never neutral or univocal. AI physically processes “translated” information through electronic circuits, without any act of knowledge in the strict sense.

In this sense, Aquinas offers the example of a blind person who has never seen colors to illustrate that knowledge is not merely the processing of information, but the real experience of the intelligible form. Just as someone born blind can learn facts about color but never experience what “red” truly means, AI can process language and data without comprehending their real significance. The same is true of a stone: it does not know, even though it is affected by its environment. AI, analogously, may change according to the data it receives, but it has no awareness of its state nor of what the information it handles actually “means.” Therefore, we can say that AI is not intelligence in the philosophical sense, because it lacks a rational soul, does not abstract universals, and possesses neither will nor genuine understanding. It may process information, but this is not equivalent to the act of knowing proper to the human being.

1.2. AI Is Neither Intelligent Nor Morally Responsible

With this, it has become evident that AI is not—and never will be—a true intelligence (in the classical philosophical sense). That is, it neither has nor will have the capacity to orient itself toward truth and goodness. This entails that it also cannot know truth and goodness by itself. In other words, it is likewise deprived of will or freedom (the capacity to freely choose the good), for what is not known cannot be loved (nor chosen) (cf. Aquinas, S.Th. I, q. 4, a. 4). Thus, for example, Romeo could not love Juliet before knowing of her existence. Therefore, once it is demonstrated that AI does not and will not possess intelligence, the first dilemma is resolved: ethical responsibility does not lie with AI, but with the one who controls and/or programs it—that is, the human being. And consequently, it is the human person who must be prepared and educated in order to act ethically.

1.3. If AI Is Not “Intelligence” What Is It?

In the context of Aristotelian philosophy, AI does not align with the traditional concept of “intelligence” as understood by Aristotle. Rather, AI can be more accurately described as a *techné* (art or craft).

The Greek word *techné* refers to a craft or art that involves the application of knowledge to produce something. AI fits this description more closely, as it involves the development and implementation of computational systems that provide guidelines and criteria for carrying out tasks that would normally require human skills, such as reasoning, learning, and problem-solving (Cappello et al. 2023; Khang, Darda, and Pendse 2025; Zhang 2021). Thus, AI systems are designed to emulate human cognitive processes through advanced algorithms and computational models, which is a hallmark of *techné* (Lexcellent 2019; Darda and Pendse 2025).

Nevertheless, we maintain that AI cannot be confused with *sophia* (practical wisdom or skill), contrary to the claims of some authors (Sancipriano and Buttafarro 2018; Sharma 2021; Naves 2024; Anand, Raja, and Sheela 2023), because this virtue implies the use of intelligence, something we have just demonstrated AI does not possess.

While AI does not embody *intelligence* in the Aristotelian sense, it may be understood as a form of *techné*. This represents the application of human knowledge and skills to create systems that perform tasks requiring cognitive abilities, thereby aligning more closely with the concepts of art and practical wisdom than with pure intelligence. This finding is consistent with point 35 of the note “Antiqua et Nova,” which reads in its 35th entry: “AI should not be seen as an artificial form of human intelligence but as a product of it.” (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Culture and Education 2025, 35).

2. Ethics for the Citizen: Virtue as a Path to the Common Good through AI

In the age of AI, we are confronted with an inescapable ethical challenge: AI is not a moral agent. Its “actions” are not intrinsically attributable to it, for responsibility falls upon human beings. Much like channeled water, which can vivify and give energy, AI can serve as an instrument for the common good; however, if not properly directed, it risks becoming

a destructive force. The central question, then, is how to channel this *techné* in a way that serves humanity and contributes to the construction of virtuous and just societies. In other words, once the responsible party is identified—namely, each citizen—how is that individual to be “educated”? What ethical system can guide those making decisions in the realm of AI so that those decisions are truly appropriate?

At present, at least three ethical systems can be distinguished that aim to guide the development and use of AI in society: consequentialism, deontological ethics (focused on adherence to rules or duties, which we shall not explore in this essay³), and virtue ethics (which emphasizes the character and virtues of the moral agent). A contemporary variant of the latter is the ethics of intentional action, as advanced by Martin Rhonheimer (Rhonheimer 2007, 2011). Thus, in this third part of the text we will address: 1) what consequentialist ethics is and why it proves insufficient for AI; and 2) what virtue ethics is in its contemporary formulation, particularly in the theory of intentional action, and why it is the ethical framework required for the flourishing of an AI-based society.

2.1. Is Consequentialist Ethics Sufficient for the Flourishing of the AI Society?

Consequentialism is a normative ethical theory which holds that the moral rightness of an action is determined solely by its consequences. This means that an action is considered morally right if it leads to the best possible outcomes or consequences when compared to alternative actions. The term “consequentialism” was first introduced by the philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe in 1958. She used it to describe ethical theories that judge actions based on their results (Anscombe 1958). Two of the main characteristics of consequentialism are: 1) it evaluates actions according to the value of their outcomes. This may involve various criteria, such as

³ We have opted to exclude deontology from this discussion because, as Rhonheimer demonstrates, the so-called “deontologist” merely asserts that “certain actions are characterized precisely by producing bad consequences that cannot be offset by any other foreseeable bad consequence resulting from their omission; thus, in principle, they cannot be part of a weighing of goods” (Rhonheimer, 2011, 402).

pleasure, happiness, or utility; 2) recent developments in consequentialist thought have evolved to become highly flexible and abstract, allowing them to address a broad range of moral scenarios and objections.

Some authors, with whom we agree, argue that consequentialism reduces the morality of action to an *ex-post facto* evaluation—that is, to the assessment of its final outcomes. This gives rise to two fundamental problems:

- a) The instrumentalization of morality: If an action is morally good or bad solely by virtue of its consequences, this opens the door to justifying morally wrong means if they lead to desirable ends.
- b) The impossibility of calculating all consequences: Consequentialism presupposes that it is possible to know and assess all future ramifications of an action—something that is, in practice, unattainable.

From this perspective, consequentialism cannot serve as the foundation of a truly human ethics, much less a path toward the common good, because it ignores the intentional dimension of moral action.

It is in this context that virtue ethics and the ethics of intentional action are offered as alternatives. Particularly, the philosopher Martin Rhonheimer develops an ethics grounded in virtue and the moral intention of the agent that criticizes consequentialism on fundamental terms. Rhonheimer's perspective is rooted in the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition and emphasizes that the morality of an action cannot be reduced to its effects but is determined by the moral disposition of the agent and the object of the action itself. Some of its key characteristics include:

- a) The primacy of intentionality. According to the theory of intentional action, the morality of an act depends on its intentional structure. This means it is not enough to assess the outcomes; it is essential to analyze the intentionality with which the action is performed and the intrinsic good sought by the agent.
- b) Virtue as a moral disposition. Virtue ethics proposes that an action is good when it arises from a proper moral disposition—that is, when the agent acts with prudence, justice, and other virtues. For Rhonheimer, prudence is the key to morally right action, as

it enables discernment of what is ethically appropriate in each concrete situation (Rhonheimer 2007, 312).

Therefore, applying a consequentialist ethic to the development and use of AI raises serious concerns. If only consequences are considered, one might justify the use of AI in decisions that harm certain individuals for the sake of a “greater good.” Nevertheless, consequentialist-based AI must then face the following problems:

- a) Unpredictability of consequences: AI systems generate outcomes that cannot always be fully foreseen, making it difficult to evaluate their morality based solely on effects.
- b) Lack of regard for human dignity: A system based purely on outcomes might make decisions that violate fundamental human rights if they result in a greater global benefit.
- c) Need for intrinsic moral principles: AI must operate according to predefined ethical norms that respect human dignity, something consequentialism cannot absolutely guarantee.

In conclusion, consequentialism is an insufficient ethics because it reduces morality to its effects, disregarding the moral intention and virtuous disposition of the agent. We therefore believe that an ethics grounded in virtue and the theory of intentional action provides a better grounding for moral evaluation—both in human action and in the regulation of artificial intelligence. In a world where AI plays an increasingly decisive role, it is essential to root ethics in principles that safeguard human dignity and human rights.

2.2. Ethics of Intentional Action: An Ethical Framework for AI-users

The ethics of intentional action maintains that the fundamental criterion for evaluating the morality of an act lies in its moral object, understood not merely as an external description of the action, but as a reality intrinsically linked to the agent’s intention. In this sense, the moral object cannot be reduced either to its consequences or to mere conformity with an external norm; rather, it is determined by the internal dynamics of the subject’s rational choice.

One of Martin Rhonheimer's key contributions lies in his critique of *moral physicalism* (Rhonheimer 2007, 161), a perspective that identifies the moral object of an act with its physical or material structure. In contrast to this view, Rhonheimer argues that the moral meaning of an action cannot be properly understood apart from the agent's intention and the practical context in which the act takes place. This implies that actions which are externally identical may possess distinct moral meanings, depending on the intention and the intentional structure that motivates them.

From this perspective, Rhonheimer reformulates the Thomistic doctrine of the moral act, placing emphasis on practical reason as the determining principle of morality. Instead of a view that artificially separates the intention from the object of the act, he proposes an integrated account in which the action is understood from within, according to its rational dynamism. Thus, for instance, he distinguishes between killing and murder: the former may be morally neutral or even justifiable (as in the case of legitimate self-defense), whereas the latter involves a disordered intention and is therefore always illicit.

In his critique of certain misapplications of the doctrine of double effect, Rhonheimer contends that it is insufficient for a secondary effect to be merely unintended in order for an action to be morally licit. Rather, he insists that the primary intention must be rightly ordered within a structure of moral practical rationality. His analysis is especially relevant in bioethical and political contexts, where a nuanced understanding of the relationship between intention, moral object, and the context of action is required—and will become even more so in the domain of AI.

Rhonheimer's ethics of intentional action represents a significant contribution to contemporary moral debate, recovering the Thomistic legacy in dialogue with recent developments in action theory. His approach enables a deeper grasp of morality, avoiding reductionisms that obscure the complexity of ethical judgment and the moral responsibility of the agent. Let us emphasize three key points: (1) the motives of action as components of the moral object; (2) the structure of intentional actions (basic act, means and ends, choice and intention); and (3) the moral difference.

1. The Motives of Action as Components of the Moral Object. One of the fundamental aspects of Rhonheimer's ethical framework is the relationship between the motives of action and the moral object. The object of an action is not a mere external description of the act; rather, it is intrinsically determined by the agent's intention and the end pursued. Thus, the moral evaluation of action cannot be undertaken without reference to the motives that guide the agent's choice and the orientation imparted by practical reason (Rhonheimer 2007, 101-102).
2. The Structure of Intentional Actions. Rhonheimer delineates distinct levels within the structure of intentional action:
 - a) Basic intentional action: This is the foundational level of action, wherein the agent acts in view of an end perceived as good. At this stage, the will is directed toward a particular good that the rational subject apprehends and values (Rhonheimer 2007, 104-109).
 - b) Means and end: The choice of a means is subordinated to the intention of an end. Within the structure of action, means are not mere instruments; rather, they possess their own moral relevance insofar as they are integrated into the agent's practical rationality. Their moral status is determined not only by their physical configuration but by their embeddedness within the deliberative process oriented toward a morally significant telos (Rhonheimer 2007, 109-110).
 - c) Choosing and intending: Choice (*electio*) and intention (*intentio*) are acts of the will that preserve a structural unity. Choice refers to the deliberate act through which the agent determines a specific course of action, while intending refers to the dimension in which the action is actually enacted in the order of reality. These are not separable psychological events but dimensions of a unified praxis shaped by practical reason (Rhonheimer 2007, 110-113).
3. The Moral Distinction: Right and Disordered Intention. The fundamental criterion that distinguishes a morally good action from a morally bad one lies in the direction of the intention.

Rhonheimer affirms that an intention rightly ordered toward the good is a necessary condition for moral goodness. In contrast, an action carried out with a disordered intention—directed toward an end that is morally inadequate—corrupts the act as a whole. The moral quality of an action is not to be gauged merely by its consequences, but rather by the intentional structure that constitutes its form. Hence, it is insufficient for an act to bring about good effects; its internal structure must be aligned with practical reason and with the objective moral order (Rhonheimer 2007, 115-118).

In sum, Rhonheimer's ethics of intentional action highlights the need for an integral comprehension of morality, one in which practical reason, the choice of means and ends, and intention are all considered together in assessing the moral quality of an act. His approach avoids reductive moral theories and articulates a philosophically robust and coherent vision that remains faithful to the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition.

The common good requires an alignment of the practical reason of the human agents that form society with an objective and true moral order (Harari 2024). While the use of practical reason without objective orientation turns into sheer subjectivism, the obtention of moral order without the exercise of practical reason becomes sheer inhuman calculation. It should be clear by now why the internal structure defended by Rhonheimer's ethics of the intentional action overcomes any form of consequentialism that, at the end of the day, makes ethics a matter of calculating the technically greater good by AI.

Conclusions

Throughout this study, we have examined how to channel the potential of AI toward the common good. We have established that moral responsibility for actions involving AI may fall upon those concrete individuals capable of exercising some mode of control over it—whether by designing, regulating, or deploying it—given that AI, lacking genuine intelligence in the philosophical sense, cannot itself be considered a moral subject.

In the face of this challenge, we have analyzed two ethical frameworks. Consequentialism has been rejected in favor of an ethics of intentional action, which offers a more adequate path for ensuring the responsible use of AI. It has become clear that the mere design of technically “ethical” systems is not sufficient; it is essential to form citizens endowed with stable virtues, capable of directing AI use toward the common good. Prudence, justice, and solidarity must not be relegated to a secondary plane but rather cultivated actively through education.

As Martha Nussbaum has emphasized, education in the humanities is essential for the health of democracy (Nusbaum 2010), and in this context, its importance becomes even more urgent. If we are to ensure that AI contributes to human flourishing, we must educate those who create and utilize it to act with full awareness of their ethical responsibility. Only in this way can we transform this powerful tool into an instrument of human development rather than a threat. The challenge is clear: to form virtuous citizens capable of directing AI toward a more just and authentically human future.

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