I

St Thomas Aquinas (ST IaIIæ.1.3 & ad 3) distinguishes deliberate from non-deliberate actions. Non-deliberate – to take his examples – are such automatic or semi-automatic gestures as the stroking of the beard or involuntary movements of hands or feet. We can add the involuntary and non-conscious dilation of one's pupils in response to increased interest, the spontaneous effort to regain one's balance or one's instantaneous response to another's stumble. Suchlike actions as do not "proceed from reasonable deliberation which is properly the principle of human action" he calls "acts of a man" because they occur in humans but are not chosen (note that it is possible by training to override some spontaneous responses as, for instance, trainee circus clowns train themselves to override their spontaneous effort to regain their balance.) The acts that proceed from reasonable deliberation and decision he calls "human acts." We deliberate and decide in order to attain an end or goal. There are practical questions as to how an envisaged end is to be achieved but whether or not to choose the means, that is, the set actions judged likely to achieve the envisaged end, is not itself a practical question. Theft or embezzlement are well known means of attaining the envisaged end of gaining money; whether or not to employ them is a moral not a practical question. Whether or not, given the available technical and physical resources, one can build a bridge across a gorge is a practical question; if one cannot build the bridge the question as to whether or not to build one does not arise; if one can build the bridge that question may arise and is within the moral realm..

What I suggest here is that only and all human acts so defined constitute the moral realm. Correspondingly, the range or scope of [moral] action is the range or scope of deliberate action. A deliberate action is chosen. Some choices are, for various reasons, considerably more important than others – most will agree that the decision whether or not to get married is more important than whether or not or where to go on holiday – but no choice is outside the moral realm, and no choice, as Aristotle already made clear, is made in the abstract. All actual choices are made in the prevailing circumstances as they are understood by the person choosing. There are no abstract and no non-moral choices.

II

We are born unable to speak; we are potential but not yet actual speakers. We are infants – etymologically non-speakers. To become actual speakers we need to learn from those who can already speak. We learn our language from others – and notice that in learning our mother-tongue, we learn not only that particular language but also language; language exists only as particular languages just as birds exist only as particular species of bird. Puffins and geese are birds; but no bird is not a type or species of bird.

The twentieth century French linguist, Jean Gagnepain, in a lecture that I heard in Rennes thirty-six years ago, remarked that we learn our morals as we learn our language. As we learn our language from others, so we learn from others the moral views, the ethical code, prevailing in our community. And as we learn the prevailing code we also learn to become actually moral beings. We learn not only a particular code (a particular language) but also morality (language). We learn our morals while we learn our language and like the way we learn our language.

As we learn to speak we learn that speech can be correct or incorrect and we are coercively persuaded to speak correctly, and dissuaded from speaking incorrectly. “Correct” and “incorrect” are defined by what our teachers think. The child, however, does not know that. The child simply accepts what is taught. Think of these verbs in modern English: to sing, to bring, to fling. In the first person singular in the present tense, they are similar: I sing, I bring, I fling. In the simple or uncomposed past they not: I sang, I brought, I flung. Why those differences have emerged is a question within historical linguistics and young speakers incline to impose on their language a non-existent regularity and often say, for example, I bring, I brang, I have brung. They are taught that those regularities are mistakes but not why they are, and the young speakers are required to adopt the prevailing usage in their community. The present task is not to discuss the many and enjoyable vagaries of the very many ‘standard’ and ‘non-standard’ forms and changes in modern English, but to illustrate that in learning language, the infant learns what is correct and what is incorrect, what is acceptable and what is unacceptable, what is good and what is bad. What is good is what he ought to say and do; what is bad is what ought not say or do. (Notice that to speak is to do something.) He is taught that he ought to do what he is told to do, and to refrain

from doing what he is told not to do; he is told that what is to be said is “cow” and “bovine”, “pig” and “porcine”, “bird” and “avian”, “horse” and “equine” but “elephant” and “elephantine”…and the answer to the question as to why that is so is commonly simply “that is what is said” as the rules of etiquette, what Hobbes called small morals, state “what is done”. The child is an hierarchical animal and, as other hierarchical animals, accepts the authority of those who impose it upon him. (In adulthood we remain to a greater or lesser extent hierarchical animals.)

Underlying the command to do or not do, is the assumption that the child is able to do or not do what he is told. It is useless to tell someone that he ought to do or not do something that quite literally he cannot do or avoid doing. It is useless to tell someone who has been pushed out a window not to fall, or who cannot read to tell what it says is in the paper. We do not deliberate, as Aristotle already noticed, about what we think cannot be otherwise.

As the child learns to speak he also learns, through word and gesture, a large set of actions that, like speech, are distinguished into correct and incorrect; he learns the moral code of his community. He learns through persuasion and coercion so that it is easy, perhaps even inevitable, for him to learn to think of the code both as what is to be obeyed and as what defines morality. As the child grows he learns not only the code itself but also how the code is thought of. For many centuries in European culture important rules of the prevailing code were given in the Ten Commandments which, in turn, were thought of as given to Moses by God who was accepted as authorized to impose them. In the early Hebrew tradition the Law was given by God but freely and explicitly accepted by the people: “So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. The people all answered as one: ‘everything that the Lord has spoken we will do.’ Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord.” (The Second Book of Moses or Exodus 19:7-8) As Christianity developed in Europe from its Hebrew roots the image of Law as covenant faded and the rhetoric of command, already prominent in the Torah, perhaps particularly in the Third Book of Mosts or Leviticus, became more prominent, and the idea of morality as obedience became widespread.

The Decalogue is in two parts; the first part sets out the rules governing how the people should be with their God; the second part sets out how they should deal with one another. Reflection on the second part reveals the rules to be very ordinary rules upon the

reasonably common observance of which the enduring peace of the everyday life of a community depends. Considered in that way, they are functional. But, because they were thought to be imposed by God, the rhetoric of command tended to predominate and the rules began to be thought of by some – William of Occam being the prime and influential example – to be good because commanded. So, in the Occamian tradition, the rule that one should not bear false witness against one's neighbour is thought to be good because God had so commanded, whereas for St Thomas' , as later for Thomas Hobbes, not to bear false witness was intrinsically good, that is, intrinsic to the character or nature of the activity, and could be discovered to be good. It was, St Thomas thought, commanded by God in the Decalogue to teach us that it was good lest we corruptly overlook or repudiate it. (The question as to whether an action was good because commanded or commanded because good was not new but, as was well known, had been raised in Plato's *Eutyphro*; it is Occam's answer and its influence that is important as it is one of the roots of modern positivism where the ruler, "that great Leviathan, that Mortall God" takes the place of the immortal God.)

III

The child who learns the moral code of his community learns that what is commanded is good but why it is thought good is not often concentrated upon and two associated ideas begin to dominate. The first is the idea of moral action as obedience to authority. The second is the idea that the the range or scope of moral action is defined by what is commanded.

As we develop into adulthood we learn more or less clearly three unsettling truths. The first is that we cannot in the end always be compelled to obey; we cannot, for example, be compelled to believe what we hold to be false, although we may be more or less successfully coerced into pretending to believe. Coercive power is great but limited. The second truth is that we begin, or may begin, to question the goodness of at least some features of the prevailing ethical code. The third and incomparably the most important is that we discover that, in the detailed circumstances of our lives, we must ask– that is, we cannot but ask– what we ought to do, and decide whether or not to do what we think we ought to do, and that while we may choose in the light of the prevailing rules but even if they have

contributed greatly to our personal moral context or background they do not determine our answer, for the good is always concrete and particular; it is what is to be done now in these circumstances. We ask what we ought to do and we decide, or fail to decide, to do it. We do not choose to be, we already are, moral beings.

One who reflects on those unsettling truths may, again more or less clearly, begin to grasp, in practice more than in theory, that the range or scope of [moral] action is not defined by a code, however good, but by the question: what in the present circumstances ought I now to do? That shift in attitude is a shift to an autonomous morality that does not necessarily, indeed does not usually, and perhaps cannot utterly, repudiate the prevailing code in all respects; it is a personal and responsible attitude to it. Morality is no longer obedience to another.

Whenever I do something, I bring into the world a situation that would not otherwise have existed. The question as to what I ought to do now may, therefore, be recast: what situation ought to be brought about in the present circumstances and what contribution ought I make to bringing it about? The situation that I judge that I ought to contribute to bringing about is what St Thomas, in the question referred to, calls “the [envisaged] end”. I act in order to bring about a situation which is the “end” of my decision. Whenever I judge that I ought to bring about a situation, I give myself a moral rule; whenever I decide and act in accord with my judgment, I obey the rule that I have given myself.

The situation that I conclude ought to be brought about is what I have judged to be good. But my judgment as to what is good is not merely fallible, as are all human judgements; it may well be corrupt. Moral judgment is neither more nor less certain than factual judgment but corruption is more likely as I may allow my own perceived benefit trump others’ entitlements. Nor does my moral judgement that I to do X determine that I shall choose to do X.

IV

I end with two illustrations. The first is imaginary: I find myself in a situation in which there exists both the relevance and possibility of bearing false witness against my neighbour. I

may be tempted to do so because it seems to me to be to my immediate benefit. I know that if I am successful I shall bring about a situation in which those concerned will believe the world to be other than it is. That is precisely what I intend; it is my envisaged end. Because to bear false witness is disapproved of, I can hardly avoid wondering if that is a situation that I ought to bring about but when it becomes habitual for me to lie whenever it is in my interest to do so that question fades. There is no axiom that I cannot repudiate even if sometimes, by avoiding squarely to face the question, I repudiate it only in corrupted practice. How I answer that question in the immediate and concrete circumstances, and how I habitually answer it, contributes to my developing construction of myself. How I habitually answer the question shows the kind of person that I have made myself. It becomes as it were the fragile existential moral context and axiom which is myself within which and from which I move. There exists a rule that, as St Paul wrote in Romans (13:8-10) sums up the entire Law: love your neighbour as yourself: *Kærleikurinn gjörir ekki náunganum mein. Þess vegna er kærleikurinn fylling lögmálsins*. (? ????? ?? ??????? ????? ??? ?????????. ??????? ??? ????? ? ?????. Love does no harm to another, therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.) But why one judges and decides to treat one's neighbour as oneself derives not from some unavoidable axiom but from an attitude, a feeling, a way of being with others. Morality is not like a geometry where from an initial set of axioms one tries to discover the nature of an implied imagined world. A person's fragile moral axiom is how he or she has chosen and chooses to be. Love may well do no harm to another and so fulfill the law – in Roman law (Institutes I.1.3 from Ulpian recalling Cicero) the second of the three traditional principles of justice is *alterum non lædere* (do not harm another). But why choose it as one's originating moral attitude, as one's way of being with others? The basic moral principle is not a rule however good; it is the human person him or herself who cannot avoid moral questions. The basic principle is oneself and we are present to ourselves as beings who must choose. To recall Pascal of whom Giorgio Baruchello writes in his paper at this seminar: what Pascal called the heart, the person as he or she now concretely is, is the source of choice.

The second illustration is existential; it is the situation in which we all now find ourselves. I presume that we have come here to honour and to thank Mikael as I now have the opportunity to do for over twenty years of generous friendship. there may well be other reasons that I do not know. What I do know is that each of us has some reason or reasons for being here rather than elsewhere; I do know – on the presumption that no-one has been

physically coerced – that each of us has, for whatever reason, chosen to be here. The judgment that each of us individually made that it was good for him or her to come rather than to stay away is a moral judgment. The decision to act on that judgment is a [moral] choice.

The scope or range of [moral] action is, then, the scope or range of the moral questions: what ought I to do now? what kind of person ought I to be? What kind of person do I choose to be? What will I do now? My specific choices are limited to what is now possible for me; those human acts for which I can now be responsible. The range of morality is the range of responsibility.