ON THE NATURALISTIC FALLACY AND ST. THOMAS

Introduction

The debate about the naturalistic fallacy, or about whether value judgments and 'ought' judgments are factual or 'is' judgments, has been a lively one this century, ever since G.E. Moore coined the term 'naturalistic fallacy.'[1] This debate has died down rather, especially in analytic philosophy, but it has flared up again among students of St. Thomas Aquinas. This is largely because of the controversial interpretations of Germain Grisez and John Finnis. These authors contend, in opposition to other interpreters of St. Thomas, that reason is practical and makes prescriptions of its own nature and not on the presupposition of some prior act of will. They also contend that the grasp by reason of human goods is always practical and never just theoretical.[2] In an excellent article Janice Schultz has gone over these contentions and developed some serious criticisms.[3] I will not repeat her arguments here, though I will use some of them later on. What I want to do in this article is to locate her arguments and contentions in a different context: not the context of the interpretations of Grisez and Finnis, but that of the naturalistic fallacy debate as this developed from Moore to R.M. Hare. My reason for wanting to do so is that this debate uncovered a series of important features about good and 'ought' that must be incorporated into any moral theory if that theory is to be at all adequate. Modern proponents of

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[1] G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, p. 10. The discussion of this and related problems, at least under this title, was confined to the English speaking world, but the same problems were discussed under other names elsewhere, as especially in M. Scheler, *Formalism*, pt. II, ch. 4.

[2] The main works are J. Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, and G. Grisez, 'The First Principle of Practical Reason: a Commentary on *Summa Theologica* Ia IIae, q. 94, a. 2.' in *Natural Law Forum*, vol. 10, pp. 162-201. Other references are handily collected in J. Schultz, 'Is-Ought: Prescribing and a Present Controversy,' in *The Thomist*, vol. 49, pp. 1-2.

[3] As cited in the previous note. Other critics of the Finnis-Grisez position who are worth expressly noting here are Russell Hittinger in his *A Critique of the New Natural Law Theory* and Ralph McInerny in his *Ethica Thomistica*. A number of helpful essays, by supporters as well as critics, can be found in two collections edited by Robert George, *Natural Law Theory* and *Natural Law and Moral Enquiry*.

naturalistic ethics, or of the thesis that value judgments are factual judgments, have tended to play down or ignore these features (largely because they point in the contrary, nonnaturalist direction). St. Thomas did not. His moral theory is superior as a result. It can be said to constitute a model for all defensible naturalistic ethics. This can best be seen if his theory is expounded as a response to the points about good and 'ought' made by nonnaturalists. The first part of what follows is therefore an attempt to state the key theses of nonnaturalism. The succeeding parts attempt to expound St. Thomas' position in response to them.

The Naturalistic Fallacy

As Moore first coined the name 'naturalistic fallacy' and initiated the debate about it, one should begin with him. According to Moore, the naturalistic fallacy is a fallacy concerning the idea of goodness. Goodness, he said, is a simple, indefinable notion, like yellow or red, and the fallacy is committed when people try to define or analyze it.[4] For when they do try to define it they always identify it with some natural or observable property (as pleasure, say). But good is not such an object. It is a nonnatural property that is unique and peculiar to itself.

There are two parts to this claim. The first is that good is indefinable; the second is that it is something nonnatural. Moore endeavored to establish the first part by means of the so-called open-question argument. Whatever definition one proposes for good, he said, it is always possible to ask of the definition whether it is itself good. For instance, if one defines good as pleasure or what promotes the greatest happiness, it is always possible to ask, with significance, whether pleasure or what promotes the greatest happiness is after all good. But this would be impossible if the proposed definition really were a definition. The question would then not be significant. Good would just *mean* 'pleasure' or 'what promotes the greatest happiness,' and the

question whether pleasure or what promotes the greatest happiness is good would not be a significant or open one. It would be answered in the asking. This result will always happen whatever definition one proposes for good. Hence good must be indefinable.[5]

Precisely what this argument achieves has been a matter of dispute.[6] That it establishes something about good seems clear. Whether it establishes that good is a simple, indefinable property is another question. Those who followed Moore have generally conceded that he did hit on some error or fallacy about good. They disagreed about how to formulate the error because, as will be explained shortly, they rejected his own theory about the nature of goodness.

The other part of Moore's claim was that good was a nonnatural property. It was not like yellow and red, for instance, which were natural properties. What Moore meant by 'natural' he did not make altogether clear, save for saying that natural things or properties are: observable, the objects of experience, real existents, and the subject matter of the sciences.[7] It would appear that Moore, like many before and since, equated the natural with the scientific and the scientific with the value-free. Hence good could be no part of the natural.

With this claim of Moore's about nature most of his successors were in agreement. What they objected to was the claim that good was some property whose presence one could somehow know. There were three reasons for this. The first concerns the way we know this supposed property of good. Moore said we intuited it but did not explain what sort of thing this intuition was.[8] The intuition was posited on the grounds that goodness was a property, and a property of a peculiar sort (a nonnatural sort), and that hence there must be some special faculty we possessed

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[4] *Principia Ethica,* ch.1, passim.
[5] *Principia Ethica,* pp. 11-17.
[6] For the details, see the discussions in D.W. Hudson, *Modern Moral Philosophy*, pp. 69-87, and in Simpson, *Goodness and Nature*, ch.1.
[7] *Principia Ethica,* pp. 38-41.
[8] *Principia Ethica,* p. 148.

for knowing it. But this was too much like begging the question. Whether good was a property was itself at issue, so some independent proof of the existence of the intuition was required, not an appeal to the supposed property of goodness itself. Besides, the recourse to intuition seemed fatally subjective. If different people claim to have different intuitions about what is good, as is in fact the case, then there will be no way to arbitrate between them.[9]

The second concerns the fact that good has some connection with action. It has a certain 'magnetism' or moving force. One is generally moved to pursue what one thinks good.[10] Moore was completely silent about this feature of good. He assumed it as a fact but failed to give any explanation of it. Indeed it was not at all clear how a thing's possession of Moore's simple, unanalyzable property should have any necessary connection with what it concerns us to do.

Thirdly, Moore held good to be an independent property that stood on its own, like the property yellow or red, and that was identifiable as such. But this could not be the case. A comparison between good and yellow showed that good was always dependent on other properties by reference to which it had to be understood. For instance, it is clearly legitimate to say that *x* and *y* are exactly alike save that *x* is yellow and *y* is not. It is not legitimate to say that *x* and *y* are exactly alike save that *x* is good and *y* is not. If *x* really is good while *y* is not, this can only be because *x* and *y* differ in some other respect. If *x* is a strawberry it will be good, say, because it is red and juicy, and *y* will be bad because it is not.[11]

This last feature of good was called 'supervenience.' In terms of it one can get a better understanding of what Moore was driving at in his argument about definitions. Good is supervenient in the way indicated because it always follows or is tied to ('supervenes' upon)

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[9] A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, pp. 140-41.
[10] C.L. Stevenson, *Facts and values*, p. 3.
[11] R.M. Hare, *Language of Morals*, pp. 80-81, 130-31. For all three criticisms of Moore see G.J. Warnock, *Contemporary Moral Philosophy*, pp. 15-17.

other properties. Nevertheless it is not the case that good just signifies these properties or just means these properties. A certain strawberry *S* is good, say, because it is red and juicy. But if 'good' just means here 'red and juicy', then this assertion will collapse to '*S* is red and juicy because it is red and juicy', and that is not what was originally meant. Good always signifies something more than the properties because of which it is predicated. It is never reducible to these properties alone.[12]

The question, of course, that next arises is how to explain the 'something more' of good. Moore's answer was rejected because, as was said, it appealed to an unexplained kind of knowing, did not account for the moving force of good, and did not explain how good could be a property necessarily tied to other properties. The solution adopted by emotivists and prescriptivists (the two main schools that followed Moore) was that good was not a property at all, or not an object of cognition. It served rather to express attitudes or volitions or prescriptions. To say something was good was not a way of asserting something about it; it was a way of expressing one's approval of it, or of commending it. Good was more properly a volitional than a cognitive term.[13] According to this theory the naturalistic fallacy is committed when one tries to analyze value-judgments in factual or cognitive terms.

The advantage of this solution was that it met at once all the objections raised against Moore. The 'something more' was explained, not as an independent property, but as an attitude to or a commendation of certain other properties. The connection with action was immediate because good already expressed a volitional commitment. The unexplained kind of knowing was avoided because there was nothing to know--making predications of goodness was all a question of willing, not knowing. This solution also had the advantage of leaving intact the claim that the

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[12] Hare, *Language of Morals*, pp. 85-86.
[13] For Stevenson's emotive meaning see *Ethics and Language*, p. 37ff; for Hare's prescriptive or evaluative meaning

natural and real are the province of value-free science.[14] The facts of a thing never include goodness. Goodness is an attitude towards or a commendation of facts and not itself a fact.

Such is an account of the naturalistic fallacy as it appears in the principal protagonists. It can be seen to break down into a number of separate claims: the claims about supervenience, about the value-free character of nature and the facts, about knowledge, and finally about the connection between good and action. These claims may all be summed together under the headings of the two distinctions by which the naturalistic fallacy is also and usually characterized: the 'fact-value' distinction and the 'is-ought' distinction. According to the first values are said not to be facts or knowable properties of things but something over and above them. According to the second statements of what is the case are said not to be injunctions about how one should behave, and hence value-judgments, which involve such injunctions, are said not to be statements of what is the case. The distinction between facts and values may be taken to embrace the first three claims just listed and the distinction between 'is' and 'ought' to embrace the last.

Of the theories to explain these features of the naturalistic fallacy, the prescriptivist or emotivist seem the most powerful and the most attractive. They explain them all through one basic contention, that good expresses something volitional not something cognitive. This element of volition becomes the something more of supervenience, explains by its absence the value-free character of science, removes the need to appeal to some special kind of knowing, and is the connection between good and action. In these theories the 'fact-value' and the 'is-ought' distinction turn out to be just different ways of expressing one and the same distinction.

St. Thomas was not a prescriptivist or an emotivist. He gave a cognitive analysis of good.

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see *Freedom and Reason*, pp. 22ff. 198.

[14] Stevenson was particularly keen on stressing this claim, *Ethics and Language*, pp. 2ff.

This means that either he has some other way of accounting for the features of the naturalistic fallacy just listed, or his theory does not stand. It also means that for him the 'fact-value' and 'is-ought' distinctions are not the same distinction. One explanation will not solve both together. For even if his analysis of good accounts for supervenience and so on, it will not yet account for how knowledge of this good will lead to action. The examination of his theory must therefore fall into at least two parts.

St. Thomas on Facts and Values

The key to understanding St. Thomas on this question is what he says about knowledge. Those who say naturalism is a fallacy tend to limit knowledge to the directly observable or to the scientifically verifiable. St. Thomas extends knowledge to being, the whole of being or being as such. This, he says, is the proper object of mind. What we know when we know or reflect upon some sensible object is not just the sensible or quantifiable properties, but the reality or existence of the thing and its properties. The fact that things *are*, this is what impresses itself on the mind. What the mind knows in knowing anything about a given reality is some aspect or way of its being. Even scientists in observing and knowing facts, or quantifiable data, are knowing some real actuality of things.[15]

To understand the scope of the objects of knowledge, therefore, it is necessary to consider being and its divisions. According to St. Thomas there are two basic ways of being or ways of considering being: the way of the categories and the way of the transcendentals (St. Thomas did not use the word 'transcendental' but it expresses his meaning well enough). The categories are specific ways in which things are, ways that are distinct and exclusive of each other. The transcendentals are general ways in which things are, ways that are in some way inclusive of

each other.[16]

Let us take the categories first. There are several of these because it can be seen on reflection that a thing's being must be viewed according to several quite distinct differentiations. A horse, for instance, exists or has being first of all when viewed as a self-subsistent reality, that is, as an entity that exists in and by itself and not as the modification of another thing. Then, equally clearly, the horse exists as modified in certain ways: as being so colored or so shaped or so big or as occupying such and such a place. These ways of being are evidently different and exclusive of each other. A horse does not cease to be a horse when it changes its color or its position. Nor does it change its color when it changes its place. Yet it would have to do so if these ways of being were the same, that is, if the being whereby the horse is colored were the same being as that whereby it is in a certain place or has a certain size. These ways of being of the horse are, of course, all present together in the same horse; they are not identical with each other. Classically there are ten such ways or categories of being (those listed by Aristotle). St. Thomas accepts Aristotle's listing but it is not necessary for my purpose to go into the details. It is sufficient to recognize that there are some such categories or special ways of being, not how many or which they are.

The so-called transcendentals are understood by contrast with the categories. Unlike the categories, these are general ways of being, ways of being that belong to each and all of the other ways of being. Each way of being, for instance, is precisely that, a way of being. Being colored is a way of being of the horse as is also its being of a certain size. Both are being. Further, when predicated of each, 'being' signifies the being of each, not some other or additional being. To predicate being of color is not like predicating color of a horse. It is not to add some other way of

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[15] *De Veritate*, q.1, a.1.
[16] *De Veritate*, q.1, a.1; q.21, a.1. My remarks in the following paragraphs are elaborations of the thought of these

being to being a color. It is simply to say that very being a color itself. The same holds when being is predicated of being a certain size or being in a certain place. In each case 'being' when predicated of each says the being of each. There are other terms like 'being.' St. Thomas numbers six in all, starting with being as the first. The others are thing, one, something, true, and good. Just as each category is, as such, a being, so it is, also as such, each of these others as well. There is no need, for present purposes, to expound St. Thomas on each of these transcendentals. It is enough to expound what he says about good. However, to get a fuller and firmer grasp of what is meant by a transcendental, and how a term that expresses a transcendental functions, it will be preferable to begin with the term 'one'. This is perhaps the easiest of the transcendentals to understand. Seeing how it behaves will enable us better to see how good behaves.

That one is a transcendental means, as just indicated, that it serves to express an aspect of being that is common to all being everywhere. It is not confined to some one category. Whiteness, for instance, expresses the being white of a thing and this being white is a special mode of being; it belongs to what is called the category of quality. Oneness is not like that. Being one is something that every being and way of being is just as such--whether substance or quality or any of the others. A horse is one in being a substance or a self-subsistent reality, for it is one substance; its color is one in being a color, for it is one color; its shape is one in being a shape, for it is one shape. But a horse is not white in being a substance; it is white by addition to it of the being white. The oneness of something, therefore, since it is not some addition to its being, is just the very being of the thing itself. A horse is one just as and just because it is a horse, while it is white not just as and just because it is a horse but only by the addition to it of the further determination or category of whiteness. This is why the oneness of each thing differs according to the thing in question. The oneness of a horse is not the oneness of a color, or the oneness of a

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thought, because the being of a horse is not the being of a color or a thought.

There is thus a crucial difference between what happens when ‘one’ is predicated of a horse and when ‘white’ is so predicated. The term ‘white’ expresses a distinct sort of being over and above the being of the horse, and it is this additional being that is understood when ‘white’ is predicated. But the term ‘one’ expresses just the being itself of the horse; it does not express any further being whatever. This, however, cannot entail that ‘one’ just means what ‘horse’ means. To say a horse is a horse is not to say a horse is one. The term ‘one’ evidently says something more than ‘horse’ says. This something more cannot be some additional being (as it is in the case of the term ‘white’). It must be simply a consideration or aspect of the very being of the horse, but a consideration or aspect that is not expressed by the term ‘horse’ by itself. According to St. Thomas, and indeed as is evident to reflection, this consideration or aspect is the aspect of undividedness. To say a horse is one is to advert to the fact that the horse is, in its being, undivided. The horse is this just by and in itself, but this is not expressed by the term ‘horse’ on its own. It is expressed by the term ‘one’. Since every being and way of being--substance, quality, and so on--is, in like manner, undivided in its being, the term ‘one’, when predicated of them, indicates this undividedness, which the subject terms themselves do not indicate. To put it in other words: the term ‘one’ expresses the same being as the subject term of which it is predicated--because it takes its being from the subject term; but not the same idea--because it expresses the idea of the undividedness of this being.[17] In this sense ‘one’ is supervenient to the subject term. It follows the being of the subject term, and yet expresses a something more, the something more, not of an additional property, but of a certain consideration or aspect of that being. Thus the term ‘one’, as analyzed by St. Thomas, has the features that are characteristic of supervenience.

St. Thomas held good, like one, to be a transcendental. Hence he held it to be supervenient in the way discussed in the debate about the naturalistic fallacy. His theory of good, therefore, cannot be accused of committing this fallacy in the sense of ignoring supervenience. This result is important because St. Thomas, unlike prescriptivists and others, explained this supervenience cognitively and not volitionally. The example of the term 'one' shows that this is possible. For 'one', despite its supervenience, is a cognitive term. The same is true, according to St. Thomas, of the term 'good'.

St. Thomas takes 'good' along with 'true' because, he says, the sort of something more that these terms express arises not when one considers a being with respect to itself (as in the case of undividedness), but when one considers it in connection with something else. The something else in the case of true is mind, and in the case of good it is desire. Truth expresses the being of a thing with respect to the cognizing and judging mind. What the mind judges in a judgment is not something other than the being that is judged (for that would be to fail to judge it); it judges just that being as such, and declares that it is as it is. Truth, says St. Thomas, expresses the being of a thing along with the idea of 'this is how being is', that is to say, along with the idea of a judgment that so it is. This consideration arises from the being of a thing itself, not from the addition of some further being to that thing; and it is a consideration that involves reference to the judging mind.

Good is similar to true. It involves reference to desire and fulfillment. Good expresses the idea that the being of a thing, just as such, responds to or fulfills desire. It expresses how that being, just as such a being, is a fulfillment and completion of being (whether its own being or also another's). Good expresses being along with the idea of end or goal, or of fulfillment or perfection. This fact is most obvious in the case of our own conscious desires (though in fact it

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[17] Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1003b22-25.

holds true of every desire, including natural and unconscious desires). When we desire something, a strawberry say, what is it that we desire in it, or what is it that makes us call it good and desirable? Nothing other than the fact of its being a strawberry, and a strawberry of a certain sort--red, juicy, etc. The strawberry is not good by the addition to it of some further property. It is good just by being what it is, because just by being what it is it is the fulfillment of our desire of it. The goodness of a red, juicy strawberry is just its being red, juicy, and a strawberry, though as considered along with the idea of fulfillment. A red, juicy strawberry is, just by being the strawberry it is, such as to fulfill the desire of it.

One must be careful to note that this way of analyzing good, while it involves a reference to desire and fulfillment, does not relativize good to desire.[18] Rather it relativizes desire to being. Goodness properly belongs to the being of the thing and it is this being that draws desire. The being is not good because desire focuses on it; rather desire focuses on it because being is good. Even in the absence of desire being would still be good. For being would still be being and so, by the same token, it would still be fulfillment. Thus, whether desired or not, it would still be everything that could possibly be desired.

This account of good explains quite neatly the supervenience of good. According to the category-transcendental distinction, 'good' is a term that follows or is tied to ('supervenes' upon) the being of a thing (with its properties) and yet expresses the something more of a reference to desire. The predication of 'good' is not a tautology nor is it the predication of some special property of its own. It is the predication of a certain consideration of the being of the thing, not a further addition of being to it. This account of the supervenience of goodness is also a cognitive explanation. To say that good is being considered along with a reference to desire and fulfillment

[18] Contra some of the objections of Seifert, *Essere e Persona*, pp. 272-78. See also Crosby, 'The Idea of Value and the Reform of the Traditional Metaphysics of Bonum,' in *Aletheia*.

is to say that good is, as such, an object of knowledge or cognition (for it is the cognizing mind that does the considering in question). What remains, then, is to say how this account allows for the value-free character of science and what kind of knowing it requires (the other two parts of the naturalistic fallacy to be dealt with here).

That it must in principle be possible to consider how things are without considering their goodness is an implication of the above analysis of good. If good is being taken under a certain consideration, then to set aside that consideration is to set aside goodness. Such setting aside is what science does. For modern science, since it aims to be quantitative, is heavily indebted to mathematics in its method, and it is typical of mathematics not to consider goodness. Mathematics does not consider things in their moving, that is, with respect to their directedness to ends and the ends to which they are directed. Hence it does not consider being under its aspect of fulfillment or completion of desire. Modern science, being mathematical in its method, ignores the goal-directedness and goal-fulfillment of things. It ignores the teleology of nature. Hence it ignores the goodness of things. Its 'facts', or whatever truths it discovers about things, are necessarily value-free.

One may protest that nature is not teleological, that there is no natural goodness in things, that all the truths we discover about nature must be value-free. It is not that modern science fails to consider the goodness of things; there just is no goodness of things anyway for science to consider. To this one may make two points in reply. First, teleology for St. Thomas does not imply consciousness, which is usually what is most objected to in teleology. It expresses the idea that things in a state of motion or change are things on the way to becoming something (or ceasing to be something if they are decaying). The something they are becoming is the goal or end of that becoming. This is not contrary to the evidence of nature, since nature is precisely an

organized whole of moving or changing things.[19] Second, if one wishes to deny teleology to nature and on this ground to accuse St. Thomas of committing the naturalistic fallacy, then the ground of one's criticism has shifted. This criticism is no longer based on logic. It is based on physics or one's view of nature. If naturalism is a fallacy it will be because it is first an error about the nature of nature.[20] Whether this view of nature is an error is a question that belongs to another occasion and cannot be dealt with here. It is enough to state what St. Thomas' position is, for that will show how his theory relates to the problems and how these problems do or do not constitute problems for him.

The question of knowledge is more easily dealt with. The way we know goodness is the way we know any other being or reality, that is, by the mind. We recognize that things exist or are one through reflection on the evidence of the senses. We recognize that the being of these things also has the aspect of goodness in the same way. There is nothing peculiar about this sort of knowing. Or if there is it is a peculiarity that attaches to our knowing of being and things in general, including the knowing one finds in science. Any difficulties on this score cannot be supposed to be exclusive to cognitive accounts of good.

St. Thomas on the Is and the Ought

St. Thomas' theory of good, then, can clearly answer the elements of the naturalistic fallacy summed up under the heading of the 'fact-value' distinction. What remains to consider is whether it can also answer the elements or element summed under the heading of the 'is-ought' distinction. One might initially think that it cannot do so because the theory is a cognitivist one and the 'is-ought' distinction seems fatal to all cognitivist theories. The central point of that

[19] See in particular William Wallace, *The Modelling of Nature*, especially chs. 1 and 6.
[20] See the exact remarks of Dewey, *Theory of Valuation*, pp. 1-3.

distinction is that value-judgments are action-guiding and hence entail or involve ‘ought’ judgments or judgments that indicate what one should do. ‘Ought’ judgments are not ‘is’ judgments or not statements of what is the case, nor can they follow from such statements. Consequently value-judgments cannot be ‘is’ judgments or statements of what is the case.

The puzzle that is being got at here might be put, not just in terms of the relation between certain judgments, but also in terms of the relation between thinking and willing. The question then becomes how thinking can move one to desire or will something. The implication of the ‘is-ought’ distinction is that this cannot be done. Thinking and willing belong to different spheres. If thinking did affect one’s choices it could only be because one was already committed to or engaged with what one was thinking about. For instance, if seeing that *x* is *y* makes one choose *x*, this could only be because one was already committed to *y*. Thinking by itself cannot, so it is alleged, create a commitment or desire *de novo*. There are thus two angles to the ‘is-ought’ problem: the angle of judgments and the angle of the relationship between different faculties. St. Thomas’ answer embraces both.

In St. Thomas’ theory the key to understanding this puzzle, as to understanding the previous ones, is a correct understanding of goodness. This is the ‘bridging’ concept between thinking and desire. According to St. Thomas, good is in both spheres, and not just in one, as prescriptivists and emotivists assume. This is because good is the sort of cognitive concept that it is. Understood cognitively good is being as object of desire. Hence this one and the same consideration of being is an object for both thought and desire at once. But if the object is the same, the approach to it is not. Thought takes good as something to consider and know; desire takes it as something to get and enjoy. The move from thought to desire turns on this fact: the object is one but the orientations to it are different. According to St. Thomas the mind moves

desire by presenting it with its objects, namely goods. The mind conceives some good and this conception of good then becomes a focus for desire. So just by the fact that thought and desire are what they are, and that they share a common object, the move from thinking a good to desiring it becomes readily intelligible. What the one conceives and knows, the other comes to desire. This is a natural process that arises just because thought is what it is and desire is what it is.[21]

Note that this move from thought to desire finds its explanation in desire, not in thought. Unless desire were as such ordered to the good, no amount of thinking about good would move one to desire anything. An analogous thing happens in the case of sight. The visible is to sight as good is to desire in this sense, and no amount of visible things would make the eye see if the eye were not already in itself ordered towards the visible as its object.[22] There is thus a certain truth to the claim that thinking does not move desire unless one is already committed to what one is thinking about. The commitment to good on the part of desire has to be presupposed to any act of desiring (as the commitment to truth on the part of the mind has to be presupposed to any act of knowing). But this commitment is not an explicit act of desire. It is the structure of desire as such, which belongs to it whether one is actually desiring anything or not (as it is the structure of the eye to be ordered to the visible whether an act of seeing is taking place or not). Moreover, nothing about this commitment requires one to deny that good is something cognitive; it is just that this commitment is a commitment of desire.

Such is the way St. Thomas explains how (theoretical) thought can move to desire. It answers the objection of Grisez and Finnis that no theoretical truth can move to desire. Theory can do this by presenting desire with its objects. But Grisez and Finnis, along with most

[21] *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, q.9, a.1.
[22] *Summa Theologica*, q.10, a.1, 2.

nonnaturalists, are right to hold that it is not theory as such that explains this fact. They are just wrong to suppose that therefore theory cannot move desire at all. They are failing to pay sufficient attention to the fact of desire and its natural orderedness to good.[23]

Given this account one can now see how the move from thought to desire begins with an 'is', namely the 'is' of goodness. One can also see how St. Thomas' position relates to the other angle of the 'is-ought' problem, the angle of judgments. The question is how to get from an 'is' judgment to an 'ought' judgment. The first part of the answer has already been given, namely how one gets a desire of good from a theoretical judgment that *x* is good. The rest of the answer lies in noting how desire, once focused on some good presented to it by thought, turns back on thought and moves it to a different kind of thinking, namely practical thinking. Practical thinking differs from theoretical thinking in its end, that is to say, in its orientation. The end of theory is truth and the end of practice is action. In practical thinking one thinks in order to discover what to do. Action proceeds not just from thought by itself but only from thought with desire (or desire alone in the case of passions), since we act because we desire to act. Practical thinking is thinking informed by desire, or thinking set in the service of desire.[24]

It is of some importance to understand the structure of this thinking. It is thinking that takes good as its starting point, since action is for the sake of some good. But it approaches this good from the angle of desire and not that of theory; its orientation to good is that of desire. The starting point of practical thinking is not so much good as the desire of good. Or in other words it begins with desire and its function is to reason out how to act to satisfy desire. The first principle of practical thinking must therefore reflect this priority of desire. According to St. Thomas, it does so in the form of an 'ought' or a gerundive. The first principle is 'the good is to be pursued

[23] See Schultz, 'Is-Ought: Prescribing and a Present Controversy,' pp. 13-14.
[24] *Summa Theologica*, Ia, q.79, a.11.

and done.' This 'is to be' is a sort of 'ought', so one may say that for St. Thomas practical thinking begins with an 'ought' and not with an 'is'. It does not derive this 'ought' from some prior theoretical 'is'; it does not derive it at all, but rather begins with it. It is what first constitutes practical thinking as practical thinking. This does not mean that the 'ought' springs up from nowhere. Rather it comes from desire. 'Ought' just expresses at the level of reason the orientation to good of desire.[25]

An 'ought' judgment is not thereby something volitional instead of a judgment of reason. On the contrary it is very much a judgment of reason, for it is a judgment about what to do in order to attain some good. 'Ought' just expresses the order of action to some good or end, and says that the action is due in view of that good (there is no categorical 'ought' for St. Thomas as there is for Kant; for St. Thomas 'ought' is always subordinate to some good).[26] The only thing to note in the case of practical 'oughts' is that they are made from the point of view of desire. Their truth consists in their conformity to right desire, that is, to the proper end of human life and action.[27] It is this conformity also, of course, that gives to these truths about the order of action to good the element of prescription or their imperative force.[28]

Practical thinking may therefore be called 'ought' thinking. The point of such thinking is to discover by reason what to do here and now in order to satisfy the desire which set practical thinking going in the first place. In this sense it proceeds from a first or fundamental 'ought' about good to particular 'oughts' in the here and now. Here there may indeed be a process of logical deduction. But it is a deduction from 'ought' to 'ought' and not from 'is' to 'ought'.

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[25] *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, q.94, a.2; q.3, a.4 ad 3; q.9, a.1; q.17, a.1.
[26] *Summa Theologica*, q.90, a.2. The same criticism of Kant can be found forcibly presented in Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics*, pt. 1, ch. 1.
[27] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1139a29-31.
[28] *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, q.17, a.1. See also Schultz, 'Is-Ought: Prescribing and a Present Controversy,' pp. 21-23.

There is for St. Thomas no logically valid inference from ‘is’ to ‘ought’. There is nevertheless a move from ‘is’ to ‘ought’, but it is understood in terms of theory of mind (as we call it) and not in terms of logic. What one has to understand is how the first ‘is’ thinking about what things are good (made at the level of theory) gives rise to desire of good, and how this desire of good in turn gives rise to another kind of thinking, practical or ‘ought’ thinking. Understanding this is understanding the interrelationships between thinking and desiring, not points of logic. The gap between ‘is’ and ‘ought’ is thus for St. Thomas both there and not there. It is there in the sense that there is no move of logic from one to the other. It is not there in the sense that there is a move from one to the other, though it is a move that involves a toing and froing between the faculties of thought and desire.

This is how for St. Thomas an assertion of value, as that *x* is good, can both be a theoretical or descriptive truth and yet be a guide to action or give rise to prescriptions about what to do. The recognition of good moves desire and desire then moves thought to think about how to get this good. Prescriptive or practical judgments thus begin in a fundamental ‘ought’ and in an act of volition. But this ‘ought’ and volition are themselves founded on a more fundamental grasp of good by theoretical mind as an aspect of the being of things. This is how St. Thomas can be a naturalist about value, that is, deny the ‘fact-value’ distinction, and a sort of nonnaturalist about prescription, that is, maintain the ‘is-ought’ distinction. The subtlety of this position lies in the way he relates the ‘ought’ back to the ‘is’ via an analysis of thinking and desiring.

Conclusion

This concludes my account of the thinking of St. Thomas as it relates to the problems of the naturalistic fallacy. One can see how this account copes with the puzzles while still remaining

fundamentally naturalistic. Predications of value are genuine predications, or genuine descriptive judgments, and yet are supervenient and allow a place for a value-free science. Also these predications, without being themselves prescriptions or imperatives, allow for prescriptions and imperatives because of the input of desire. This keeps the ‘is-ought’ distinction while drawing its nonnaturalist sting. No contemporary account keeps such a balance between the conflicting positions over the naturalistic fallacy.

One can also see from all this how St. Thomas’ position differs from the Grisez-Finnis position. They lack his analysis of the relations between thought and desire. That is why they deny that predications of good can be theoretical and why they assert that mind is practical or prescriptive of its own nature rather than because of the input of desire. These claims are not necessary to make sense of good and ‘ought’. Nor do they reflect the genuine thought of St. Thomas.