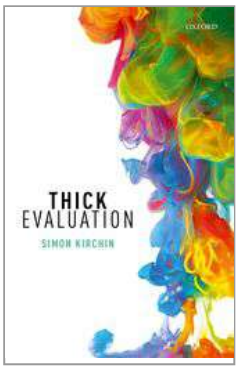

Thick Evaluation
Simon Kirchin

Print publication date: 2017
Print ISBN-13: 9780198803430
Published to Oxford Scholarship Online: December 2017
DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198803430.001.0001

Conceptual Relations

Simon Kirchin

DOI:10.1093/oso/9780198803430.003.0003

Abstract and Keywords

This chapter is designed to lay the foundations for the consideration of three anti-separationist strategies, in Chapters Four, Five, and Six. It lays out two models of how thin and thick concepts may relate to one another: the *genus–species* model and the determinable–determinate model. It argues that the *genus–species* model is simply separationism by another name. It argues that nonseparationists should not adopt either model because neither can accommodate 'evaluative flexibility', which is itself introduced and motivated. The chapter ends by suggesting a different model of conceptual relations that nonseparationists can adopt to understand the relation between thin and thick concepts.

Keywords: conceptual models, determinable–determinate, evaluative flexibility, genus–species, separationism

3.1 Introduction

We now have an idea of what separationism amounts to, the form of some of its varieties, and its appeal. The aim of this chapter is to dig deeper and put us in a position—in Chapters Four and Five—to introduce and understand arguments that have been raised against it.

In this chapter I introduce two models of conceptual relations: '*genus–species*' and 'determinable–determinate'. Both models tell us how exactly the relations are to be conceived between families of general and specific concepts. Given that thin concepts are thought to be general concepts and thick concepts are thought to be specific concepts, and given also that both thin and thick concepts

are evaluative and, thus, related, then it stands to reason that these models are worth investigation.

My overall claim is that neither model applies to thin and thick concepts. I believe that neither model can satisfactorily accommodate evaluative flexibility, and I believe that doing so is highly desirable. In addition, I believe that the *genus–species* model is separationism in disguise. That additional belief is important, for the introduction of the *genus–species* model will enable us both to understand separationism better and to put pressure on it in Chapters Four and Five.

The structure and aims of this chapter are as follows. In §3.2 I outline the *genus–species* model. In §3.3 I outline the determinable–determinate model. In §3.4 I briefly show why we should think the two models are distinct. (Although keeping them distinct is not crucial to my overall argument because I disregard both, keeping them apart makes my argumentative narrative cleaner.) In §3.5 I explain evaluative flexibility and motivate it. My case for evaluative flexibility concludes when we reach Chapter Six where I show how it relates to other parts of my view. So I aim only to show evaluative flexibility in a positive light in this chapter, not conclusively show it as correct. Even with that modest aim, this present chapter still makes progress. First, I show that separationists who wish to adopt evaluative flexibility need to pause, as this idea seems to be in tension with the *genus–species* model. The tension can be resolved only by changing the idea of evaluative flexibility into something different from the idea I argue for. Second, I also show why nonseparationists should be wary of the determinable–determinate model, because it also is in tension with evaluative flexibility and this is something they should think of adopting. In §3.6 I discuss **(p.44)** evaluative flexibility and the *genus–species* model, and in §3.7 I discuss it in relation to the determinable–determinate model.[1] Having shown problems with both models, I briefly suggest what sort of model of conceptual relations nonseparationists should find agreeable.

One final note. The idea of there being relations involves the idea that there are *relata*—in this case thin and thick concepts—and it is natural and essential to assume that the *relata* differ in kind in such relations. I will not argue in this chapter that thin and thick concepts differ in kind, but it will be the first claim argued for in the next chapter. I discuss it later rather than now because what I say in connection with it immediately opens up a criticism of separationism. So, for now, when entertaining the idea of conceptual relations I assume that thin and thick concepts differ in kind.

3.2 The *Genus–Species* Model

The *genus–species* model has it that we begin with some general concept, which is assumed to be our *genus* concept, and then, in order to derive a specific concept assumed to be the *species* concept, we have to be able to isolate some

unique *differentia* that picks out that *species* concept from the other *species* concepts that belong to the same *genus*.[2] For example, we might begin with the *genus* concept ANIMAL or ANIMALHOOD. How might we capture what it is to be *homo sapiens*? One way in which to distinguish *homo sapiens* from other animals is to introduce the idea of rationality. That is, *homo sapiens* are, uniquely, the rational animals.

Two features of this model mark it as the model it is. First, we *begin* with the *genus* concept and then we *derive* the *species* concept. The idea is that the *genus* concept is thought to be conceptually or logically prior to the *species* concept. The one is defined in terms of the other. In everyday thought we clearly have knowledge both of what it is to be an animal and of various animals. But in order for the model to apply to this case, we must in theory have to have understanding of what it is to be an animal, understanding that makes no reference to any particular animals and their traits, such that it then makes sense to think of the relationship between the general and specific concepts in terms of conceptual priority and derivation. Second, not only has **(p.45)** the *differentia* to be unique to the *species*, but it also has to be something that can be understood separately from, and prior to, the *species* concept, otherwise talk of derivation is misplaced. In other words, we have two independent ingredients that are prior to our outcome and which come together to form it.

There are problems with this model. First, we might worry how widely applicable it is. For a start, we need to make sure that the *genus* concept really is understood in a way that is decent enough to enable the derivation. Perhaps in the case of *homo sapiens* we can avoid this worry by concentrating on matters of reproduction, respiration, and the like when trying to characterize what it is to be an animal. But, besides this, we need to think about the *differentia*. Talking simply of rationality in the case of humans seems inadequate since, arguably, other animals are rational in some fashion. Recall that the *differentia* has to be characterized prior to the *species* concept, so we cannot say that the rationality in which we are interested is the rationality typical of *homo sapiens*. Finding some way of picking out the *differentia* can be harder than it seems in some cases.[3] These points do not threaten the distinctive nature of the model, but they do threaten the extent of its applicability.

Second, and aside from this general issue of applicability, we might worry whether this model applies to thin and thick concepts. As mentioned, it is natural enough that our thin concepts will be the *genus* concepts and our thick ones will be the *species* concepts. KIND, COMPASSIONATE, WISE, and BEAUTIFUL all seem to be *species* of GOOD. If we think that the model applies then it seems, briefly, that we assume that we have some decent understanding of what it is for something to be good *apart from* any understanding of what it is for anything to be kind, wise, and so on. Also, it seems that we will have to think that there will be some particular *differentia* that will uniquely pick out the kind,

and some particular differentia that will uniquely pick out the wise, and so on. Adoption of this model should strongly incline us towards viewing thick concepts as constructed from separable elements. In fact, on further reflection we can see that adoption of this model entails this view of the thick or even—my view in this study—that this model when applied to the thick *simply is* separationism by another name. We have our evaluative thin *genus* concept, we add to it a *differentia*—characterized in wholly nonevaluative, descriptive terms, presumably—and, hence, a thick concept is constructed and captured. On this understanding thick concepts are concepts that can be decomposed into separable, smaller elements.[4]

This idea holds whether we adopt simple separationism or a more complex version. The basic idea behind any type of separationism is that we have distinct elements that are added together to create thick concepts, and which are intelligible independently of our understanding of the thick. It is this run of ideas that I take to be key in providing the link between separationism and the *genus–species* model.

(p.46) Of course, there are different ways of construing the elements that constitute thick concepts. Many separationists, as we know, are noncognitivists. As I pointed out in the previous chapter, it is not quite right to talk of them thinking there is some thin *conceptual content* that is the *genus*. Rather, there is some thin attitude, characterized as something evinced by judges, that plays the role as our *genus*. But the general point remains. In order to analyse what thick concepts are, we have two (or more) types of element that are thought to be conceptually or logically prior to the thick, and which are moulded together to create it.

Another way in which separationists disagree among themselves is how thin they characterize the *genus* thin concept or element. Some construe it in a very thin way. Although they may use GOOD or BAD in their analyses and discussion, they pretty obviously really mean PRO or CON. Alternatively, we could identify it with some noncognitive feeling that is more specific than a bare approval. As mentioned in note 24 in Chapter Two, Gibbard, in his analysis of LEWD, imagines a feeling that he labels ‘L-censoriousness’.[5] I discuss this in Chapter Four, but it is worth noting the issue now. The key point, again, is that thick concepts are created and constructed from ingredients that are independently intelligible and conceptually prior to thick concepts, so they cannot be understood, characterized, isolated, or identified by using thick concepts.

Because the *genus–species* model is so clearly in tune with separationism, nonseparationists need to think about other models of conceptual relations.

3.3 The Determinable–Determinate Model

The modern characterization and labelling of the determinable–determinate model is due to W. E. Johnson, primarily in Johnson (1921), chapter XI, supplemented by discussions spread around Johnson (1922) and (1924).[6] This model links general and specific concepts, but we do not have to understand the general concept prior to the specific one, and there is no separable, prior *differentiae* that uniquely pick out individual specific concepts. For illustration, consider the canonical example of COLOUR (or COLOURED or BEING A COLOUR) and various colour concepts such as RED (or REDNESS or BEING RED).[7] Do these concepts fit the *genus–species* model? One worry is whether we have enough understanding of what it is to be coloured aside from understanding what it is to be any of the specific colours. Even if that can be solved, the possibility of supplying *differentia* is considered highly problematic. If the *genus–species* model is applicable, we should be able to claim that RED is the 'X sort of colour', or 'the colour with X-ness', say, where the uniquely identifying X is **(p.47)** something independently intelligible from and conceptually prior to RED. But there seems to be nothing to fill this role. Saying 'RED is the colour with *this* sort of wavelength' will not do, it is commonly supposed, because talk of wavelengths is simply a different presentation of RED itself, not something independent of and conceptually prior to it. Hence, we need a different model to accommodate such an example.

According to the determinable–determinate model we simply state that there is some link, but that the general concept (the determinable) is not conceptually prior to any specific concept (some determinate), nor is there any *differentia*. As well as the case of colours, other examples that fit this model are lengths, ages, and sizes. For example, A LENGTH OF 5 METRES and A LENGTH OF 6 METRES are both determinates of the determinable A LENGTH BETWEEN 4 METRES AND 7 METRES. It is clear also that the application of this model to thin and thick concepts will be amenable to those who think that thick concepts are, in some fashion, concepts that admit of no separation into component parts.

There are two further points that it is useful to make in readiness for later discussion. First, a concept can be both a determinable and a determinate. RED is a determinate of COLOUR, but it is a determinable towards other colour determinates, such as SCARLET and CHERRY. Second, we might ask what links various concepts together in a family. With the *genus–species* model the answer is obvious: various *species* concepts are linked by being derived from the same *genus* concept. What of this model? Why are RED and BLUE, but not SQUARE, deemed to be determinates of a common determinable concept?

Here is the commonly given explanation. We cannot pursue any strategy that explains why RED and BLUE are part of the same family in terms of a commonality or commonalities between them, and further say they are distinguished from each other by something unique to them individually, for this

is simply a restatement of the *genus–species* model. Instead, Johnson and subsequent writers pursued a different strategy, by focusing not on commonality but on exclusivity or, in David Armstrong's words, by considering 'mutual detestation societies'.[8] What makes it the case that RED and BLUE are determinates of a common determinable is that both concepts cannot apply, or be instantiated if one prefers, at the same time in the same place (or, at the same time by the same object). Similarly, in the case of lengths, nothing can instantiate the same concepts (ONLY) A LENGTH OF 5 METRES and (ONLY) A LENGTH OF 6 METRES at the same time, at least along the same side. However, it is clear that something can be both red and square at the same time. We can link this to our first point. Some colour patch cannot be both red and blue at the same time, and this reflects our intuitive thought that RED and BLUE are at the same 'conceptual level'. But clearly something can be both red and scarlet at the same time. This simply reflects **(p.48)** another common intuition, namely that RED and SCARLET are at different conceptual levels. One is more specific than the other, just as COLOUR and RED are. I return to the phenomenon of exclusion below.

3.4 Are the Models Distinct?

In this section I raise and briefly answer this question: are the two models distinct?[9] I have followed many commentators in assuming they are. But this assumption is arguable. In a moment I consider and briefly reject two reasons for thinking that the distinction can be questioned. As I have mentioned, whether or not we keep to a sharp dividing line between the models does not affect my overall argumentative narrative, since in the end I reject both models for thin and thick concepts. My main target is the *genus–species* model since it seems so obviously in tune with separationism. If the determinable–determinate model is closer to it than appears, then it may also be affected by my general arguments in later chapters. That is something I do not mind. It is just cleaner for my narrative to keep them apart.

Here are two reasons for not thinking them distinct, both found in Sanford (2006), especially §1.3 and §3.[10] First, it is not as if the two models have *nothing* in common: they both deal with general and specific concepts and, importantly, they both have exclusion as part of what they say. So perhaps they are a lot closer than we may think. But we should also note, *contra* Sanford's simple challenge, that the explanation of exclusion provided by the two models is very different. On the *genus–species* model *homo sapiens* and cats exclude each other in the sense that no animal can be both, and this is just because the *differentia* for each is unique. Exclusion works differently in the case of the determinable–determinate model. While it is true that no object can instantiate both red and blue at the same time for example, this is just what exclusion means. In the case of this model, the phenomenon of exclusion does not depend on there being a

specific element being different in the case of the two (supposedly) exclusionary concepts which are, in turn, linked by having an element in common.

Second, Sanford thinks that we can construct various conjunctive and disjunctive definitions of some supposedly clear-cut determinable–determinate examples. These definitions show how easy it is to transform these examples into *genus–species* examples, and thus our confidence in the sharpness of the division between the two models should be undermined. For example, he characterizes, that is defines, RED as: 'x is red = (df.) (x is colored) & (x is red or x is not colored)'. We have a unique *differentia*, which is a (gerrymandered) concept (or predicate) that is not RED. One quick and fatal counter to this, however, is that this concept still includes RED and so presupposes some understanding of it. This clearly cuts against applying the **(p.49)** *genus–species* model. It is still very unclear whether we will be able to construct *differentiae* for staple determinable–determinate examples, and hence cast doubt on the division between the two models.

There is more to say on this complicated matter, but I am confident that we can proceed in thinking the two models are distinct. As I say, given I reject both of them for thin and thick concepts, then their division is of little importance to me. It just keeps my narrative cleaner if we treat them separately.

3.5 Evaluative Flexibility

I return to the two models in a while. For now we need to establish that it is attractive to think that thick concepts exhibit evaluative flexibility, for this has a bearing on both models. Remember that the point of this section is *not* to argue conclusively for this phenomenon. As I have indicated, I argue for evaluative flexibility by seeing how well it fits with other aspects of my position, something we will appreciate only in later chapters. For now, it is enough merely to show evaluative flexibility in a positive light. In the following sections I indicate why the two models cannot accommodate evaluative flexibility, at least as I define it.

We have met this phenomenon earlier, in Chapter Two, when I talked of simple separationists thinking about the flexibility of the evaluative or attitudinative part of thick concepts. Recall an example from Chapter Two, mentioned briefly. We may often praise a poem for its elegance, and its elegance can be manifested in a number of ways: the words chosen, the mood created to capture the topic, the lay-out on the page, or the rhythms of the spoken word. But we often damn a poem and do so because it is elegant. We have a certain sort of topic that really cries out for raw and earthy words, or a disjointed, jerky presentation, or something else. The poem's elegance is completely out of place and spoils what could be something good. To employ some technical words, we might say that in some contexts elegance is bad- or wrong-making: it contributes negatively in some way to the overall thing of which it is a part.

When we start to think like this, examples abound. Cherubic children can often be a bore. Cheekiness and even naughtiness in children have their rightful place: such children show spirit, independence, and invention. We are often sick of crotchety people. But crotchetiness can be a virtue in some cases, in refusing to suffer or compromise with foolishness, and the exhibited temper may be just the right thing to shock those with whom one is arguing into a better course of action. We have previously met, in Chapter Two, Blackburn's and Hare's examples of people being industrious and tidy. It appears that we can create such examples at will. It appears that many, if not all, thick evaluative concepts can vary in the evaluations that they carry or embody.

This appears fine. But can our case for evaluative flexibility lie here? No. For evaluative flexibility to be correct then the *very same* concept has to alter in **(p. 50)** evaluation depending on context. What if, instead, we have a range of evaluations (broadly positive, negative, and neutral) across a range of concepts, albeit concepts that are related and where in some instances the concepts in the range are covered by the same word?

Consider the following train of thought. We can call a poem 'too elegant' implying that it would be okay if it was elegant to some extent, but in this instance we have too much of it. We have the same concept in play, but we acknowledge that we can have too much of what is normally a good thing which results in a bad thing. (Similarly, we can have too little of a good thing, which results in something bad.) For some concepts, these excesses and deficiencies might themselves have neat, different English words. When it comes to ELEGANT we might hear people talk of something being 'over-styled' or 'affected'. So even though we have the same concept, we should not forget that concepts can be used in this way.

This might lead us to wonder whether we have, in fact, the same concept. Perhaps what we really have are two concepts, ELEGANT-PRO and ELEGANT-CON. (We may have more than that. There may be some concept which is 'extremely-pro', for example, but I will keep things simple.) My talk of excesses and deficiencies just now was deliberate, for this way of thinking recalls Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics*. In some contexts, too much of something (or the wrong amount of something in the wrong context) means that what could have been brave is in fact rash or reckless; giving us not just new words, but also new concepts, even if they are clearly related to BRAVE.[11]

This takes us back to Blackburn and the idea of the licensing model. We earlier had CUDDLY and GROSS, but we discussed them to death so I shall switch examples. When someone is short-tempered and is so unreasonably—perhaps it is not so obvious that other people are being foolish and annoying—we might call them crotchety, or awkward, or petulant, or gruff, or many other such things. When we admire someone's stance and their refusal to be sweet and

polite to those they should be quick to be angry with, we might prefer to describe such behaviour with softer words, such as ‘indignant’, or ‘riled’, or employ the more neutral ‘angry’, and even use ‘heroic’ if their aims and the situation demand it. So, goes the thought, it seems that if some behaviour or object is deemed good, one sort of concept will apply, while if it is deemed bad then another sort will apply. Why bother with talk of the flexibility of a *single* concept? Crotchety behaviour is *always* bad. That is a central reason it gets to be crotchety. Indeed, our debate about whether or not an action is crotchety is a way of debating whether or not it is good. In conclusion—and this is the important thought—this analysis generalizes for most or all thick concepts.

This train of thought raises a few issues and gives us a few ways of capturing the various phenomena. I will deal with a nonseparationist option I do not like first of all, **(p.51)** and then separationism afterwards. That will allow me to say something about my positive view.

First of all, here is the nonseparationist option that I introduce only to cover the logical terrain. It is possible to agree with the previous train of thought and be a nonseparationist about thick concepts. That is, we will multiply and allow various ELEGANCE concepts—ELEGANT-PRO and ELEGANT-CON, for example—but for each one say it is impossible to separate the evaluative from the descriptive. Note that the English presentation of these more specific concepts would be judged misleading by advocates of this view, for the hyphen clearly separates what might be thought descriptive content from an evaluation. Crucial to this nonseparationist view, however, is that we can say that there is something that these two concepts share—they are both types of ELEGANT after all—but we should not think of there being some isolatable descriptive content that is the shared element.

I do not like this view at all. True, the qualifiers at the end distinguish it in logical space from separationist views. But how is one to argue for the idea that our two concepts are both nonseparable and yet they have shared, common content that can seemingly be seen as distinct from the two different evaluative points? Arguing for this seems very difficult. Further to that, who is to say that we have just two concepts, ELEGANT-PRO and ELEGANT-CON? What are we also to make of ELEGANT-VERY-PRO? Is it a different (nonseparable) concept, or just a stronger version of the first example? Similarly, what are we to make of how our elegance concepts are linked to STYLISH-PRO and STYLISH-CON? And what are we to make of poems being HARMONIOUS-PRO and HARMONIOUS-CON, CONSTRAINED-PRO and CONSTRAINED-CON, JERKY-PRO and JERKY-CON, and so on?

To my mind, if you think that an evaluative concept is nonseparable, then it is far easier to imagine that the evaluative aspect of the concept can itself alter—in terms of specific positive or negative view that is conveyed—depending on

context and this not require you to multiply the number of concepts you have. There is no reason to pursue the nonseparationist view that we are allowed only one distinct sort of evaluative content per each concept because the alternative is too messy to contemplate. On the contrary, I think this alternative is beautifully simple.

Now consider separationism. Separationists will argue that it is routine to analyse thick concepts into more specific varieties to reflect the separation of evaluation from description. We will get some differences between separationists beyond this. The difference for Elstein and Hurka between ELEGANT and contrary concepts such as AFFECTED and CONSTRAINED when applied to our poem might be analysed in terms of isolatable conceptual elements, that is in terms of some Xs and Ys. For Blackburn, there may be some *general* descriptive dimension along which judges and their evaluations plant themselves, but then we get different specifications of this general vector because of the different attitudes to which they are conjoined. In both cases we may have many words that are used, as in our ELEGANT example. These may well indicate different concepts. In other words, and to summarize, behind the everyday **(p.52)** English words that may be used, what unites all of these separationist positions is the idea that putting matters in terms of ELEGANT-PRO and ELEGANT-CON is not a misleading presentation in the least.

Both separationism and the nonseparationist alternative I have considered just before include the idea that once we have a different evaluation—strictly, a different bare thin concept or elements—then this justifies us in speaking of two (or more) concepts. It may even entail it. My suggested view is different.

When we call two poems elegant, yet praise one for being elegant and damn the other in the same way, we can still note and pick out the elegance. We are using the same word in the same sort of way, at least, and despite the *theoretical* possibility of there being different concepts (ELEGANCE-PRO and ELEGANCE-CON) standing behind this word, the ease with which we can in many everyday contexts see the similarity and compare in that light is surely telling. This is a first suggested point in my view’s favour, designed to show that what I am entertaining is not so strange. Second, we should note that the two opposing views I have canvassed seem based only on the overly quick thought that if we have different, specific evaluations being employed—in terms of PRO and CON—that automatically means we must have at least two concepts in play. Where is the argument for that? We surely need some extensive argument, for this is a fundamental point. Further and third, I worry that adopting the position I oppose will lead to an over-multiplication of concepts, all separate and all performing their very specific role. My worry here mirrors my first point. The idea standing behind both, perhaps, is this. Those that oppose my view seem to think that if one has a variation in function or specific evaluative stance that is expressed, then one must have different concepts. I do not see that at all. Indeed, in

Chapter Six I illustrate, through discussion of Williams and Ryle, that a concept —especially an evaluative concept—can have a number of functions across a range of instances, and yet it be natural to assume that it is the same concept. As I express it there, an evaluative concept can be such that it holds together a range of specific evaluative stances of varying strengths, and this be part of the evaluative aspect of the concept; indeed and further, such evaluative stances are of and express the entire concept. (I add this rider to underline the point that the entire concept is evaluative, not just some aspect of it.)

These few thoughts are not enough to argue against separationism as yet. But they, and the previous examples, should make us pause to let evaluative flexibility in as a live possibility at least. It is also important to see that evaluative flexibility as I have characterized it slots very nicely into a nonseparationist view that I favour (and not the one from logical terrain canvassed earlier). We have a single, evaluative concept, even if we initially capture this idea by saying that it has aspects of evaluation and description. Further, a key argument raised by nonseparationists against separationists—one which has cropped up every so often—is that one can understand the descriptive aspect of a thick concept (that is, why it applies to items with certain sorts of feature) only by understanding its evaluation or evaluative point, in **(p.53)** part because such concepts are so complex. We shall see this develop into the thought that the best way of understanding what nonseparationists have been saying is that this is true because we have a range of specific evaluations, and appreciation of this range is required to understand which concepts apply and why.

We have enough motivation to think how our two conceptual models fare when we see if they can accommodate it. Evaluative flexibility has some attraction, and it seems to sit nicely with nonseparationism.

One final note before I return to those two models. I talked of Blackburn advocating evaluative flexibility, but what he supports is different from what I advocate. He thinks of there being a separable descriptive content, to which different attitudes can be conjoined; recall his ‘description+tone’ from Chapter Two. So even though we may sloppily say that ELEGANT can change its evaluation on his view, what we really mean is that there is some general descriptive dimension along which certain different attitudes are placed, resulting in different words (‘elegant’, ‘constrained’, ‘prim’, ‘stifled’).[12] They have something general in common, but the ‘description+tone’s that result are different. This may also result in us saying, for convenience’s sake, that we have ‘evaluative flexibility’, even if, strictly, what we have is the same general descriptive concept with different attitudes attached, thus resulting in *different things* with different attitudes, not the *same thing* embracing different evaluative points.[13]

3.6 The *Genus–Species* Model and Separationism

If evaluative flexibility turns out to be a real phenomenon, where it is understood as I have characterized it as referring to the flexible evaluative nature of a single concept, then we cannot adopt either of the two conceptual models discussed earlier. The same reasoning applies to both models, although it is easier to show in the case of the *genus–species* model.

Recall that in order to get a thick concept we supposedly have a thin *genus* concept to which some *differentia* is added. If we adopt evaluative flexibility (for a single **(p.54)** concept), then we are imagining that we can have at times a PRO *genus* and at times a CON *genus* to which some *differentia* is added, which then results in something which is the same concept in both additions. That plainly makes no sense. This is why putting things explicitly in terms of ELEGANT-PRO and ELEGANT-CON is so right for this model. ELEGANT-PRO and BRAVE-PRO, say, have the same *genus*, but are distinguished by their descriptive *differentiae*, and our two elegance concepts are distinguished by belonging to different *genera*.[14]

This is not to say that separationism and the *genus–species* model come apart. We should remind ourselves what is meant by evaluative flexibility in the mouths of separationists and, chiefly, Blackburn. The point was just made, but I make it again in case it was lost.

There is no tension here for Blackburn simply because he does not in the end think of evaluative flexibility as being something to do with the same concept. What we have is a general descriptive concept to which different attitudes, often conveyed through tone of voice, are then added. He might then not even want to say that we have different concepts that are constructed, strictly, although he might allow that we can talk loosely as if there are. The attitudes are placed along a descriptive dimension and we have different words that pick out those different and distinct placings. There is no notion here of the very same concept changing its evaluative aspect. By changing the evaluative part, as separationists conceive of it, you change the concept, or whatever it is that we call it.

The moral, from this simple review of Blackburn’s position, is that this goes for all separationist positions: by changing one of the ingredients, you thereby change the product, rather than alter the very same product from one instance to another.

For completeness, here is what happens with complex separationism. Complex separationists are committed to there being independent ingredients that result in a product, but the descriptive ingredient is not ‘fully’ determinate. I made play in Chapter Two with the thought that Elstein and Hurka’s analysis for ELEGANT would get more complicated if we had both a GOOD and a BAD, or both a PRO and a CON. Here we can see that it would be unwise to think that we would end

up with the same concept. Part of the worry with the analysis I presented was that it was so vague and so general as to cover very many different expressions of ‘elegant’. True it helps us to see that there will be some connection between ELEGANT-PRO and ELEGANT-CON—namely the ‘ELEGANT’ part—but then we would be better off with two distinct sorts of concept. (Or, if our language and thought typically expressed a need for a separation between ELEGANT-PRO and ELEGANT-VERY-PRO, say, then more than two distinct sorts of concept.)

(p.55) Thus, to summarize, there seems to be tension between the adoption of the *genus–species* model and evaluative flexibility *of some sort*, but this is only a passing worry. As a separationist one can adopt the *genus–species* model, and one can sign up to some general idea of evaluative flexibility, but the key rider is that this second idea cannot be the evaluative flexibility of a single concept. The view has instead to be that there is some descriptive core, which itself may be tagged with the typical thick term such as ‘elegant’ or ‘brave’, and then we end up with different resulting products, distinguished because of different evaluations, indicated by different tones of voice and the like.

This little discussion may seem unimportant. But it will help set things up for the next section, and it helps to build up a picture of separationism and the *genus–species* model. With that in mind, I summarize what has gone on in the rest of this chapter.

The *genus–species* model as applied to thin and thick concepts is simply separationism with a different name. Four aspects seem pertinent: (i) There are two or more elements that go to make any concept deemed to be a *species* concept. (ii) All elements that are assumed to be ingredients of the *species* concept have to be intelligible independently of our understanding of any *species* concept. (iii) All elements have to be conceptually prior to the *species* concept. (iv) The *differentia* has to be unique to the *species* concept. Given that the *genus* concept is likely to be shared, it is the *differentia* that will typically mark the *species* concept out as being different from other concepts.[15]

It would be easy to slide between (ii) and (iii). Undoubtedly they are linked and go nicely together. But aspect (ii) concerns the content of the two concepts, as it were, whereas aspect (iii) concerns which element, if any, comes first and which should be seen as being constructed from the other. I discuss ‘conceptual priority’ in Chapter Four. Furthermore, although I will often have simple separationism in mind when criticizing separationism generally, my comments will apply equally to various forms of complex separationism. Putting things in terms of the *genus–species* model sets the scene for two main sorts of criticism that I have already advertised. In Chapter Four I concentrate on the thin, *genus* element: what is it for something to be thin and what is involved in assuming

that thin concepts or elements are conceptually prior to thick concepts? In Chapter Five I concentrate on the *differentia*.

3.7 Nonseparationism and the Determinable–Determinate Model

Before that, one last question. I shall soon begin, in Chapter Four, to argue directly that separationism and the *genus–species* model should not be used to understand the relationship between thin and thick concepts. (I have, thus far, cast suspicion only, **(p.56)** since evaluative flexibility of a single concept cannot be accommodated within separationism.) So, therefore, does that mean that nonseparationists should adopt the determinable–determinate model? I think the answer is 'no'.[16]

On the face of it there is a very strong reason for nonseparationists to adopt the determinable–determinate model. It seems that the two models exhaust the choices that face us when choosing between models of conceptual relations where we are assuming a link between general and specific concepts. Given that separationism just is the *genus–species* model applied to thin and thick concepts, then it seems nonseparationists must choose the determinable–determinate model. However, why should we think that the two models exhaust the options?

It goes back to the phenomenon of exclusion. Recall that our aim is to explain how general and specific concepts that are assumed to be families are linked. The *genus–species* model encapsulates one very natural answer to that question, namely commonality. That commonality is of a particular kind: namely a defined and isolatable common element that can be identified as appearing in each and every one of the concepts that are, therefore, treated as *species* of the *genus*, or *species* of the common element or root. (That will be important in a moment.) Against this, the determinable–determinate model bases relations on exclusion. So it appears as if we have only two choices: relations can be based either on commonality or exclusion.

Some nonseparationists may be happy to leave things there. But I am not because evaluative flexibility cannot be handled by the determinable–determinate model. Why not? As with the *genus–species* model, the determinable–determinate model is a model between concepts considered as whole things. Thus, for example, when we say that RED is a determinate of the determinable COLOUR, what we mean to say is that every red thing is also a coloured thing or, if one prefers, every time the concept RED is instantiated, then COLOUR is instantiated. So if we want to say that, for example, HONEST is a determinate of the determinable GOOD, then we have to be committed to saying that every honest thing is also a good thing, not merely that some honest things are good things and some other honest things are not. Thus, the commitment to HONEST, for example, being a determinate of GOOD, does not respect evaluative flexibility. And, to repeat, it is not just a matter of these

specific examples: we have a general commitment about determinates always being linked to some determinable.

Just for completeness, let us consider very briefly one possible defence. There is nothing in the model that says that a concept cannot be a determinate of more than one determinable. SCARLET is a determinate of both RED and COLOUR. It even works for determinables that are at the same conceptual level. A LENGTH OF 6 METRES is always a determinate of many different determinables of the form BETWEEN X METRES AND Y METRES. So, if we favour evaluative flexibility, it seems as if we could say that HONEST is a determinate of both GOOD and BAD. However, the case of value is different from **(p.57)** the case of lengths. It is plausible to assume—and perhaps necessary to our use of these concepts to assume—that paired thin concepts such as GOOD and BAD, and RIGHT and WRONG, are opposed. Although it may not appear to be at first glance, saying that a concept can be both always good-making and always bad-making (or even be always good-making and occasionally bad-making) is as contradictory as saying that red things can be both always coloured and occasionally not-coloured. So this avenue is closed. And, in short, the determinable–determinate model is inconsistent with evaluative flexibility of a single concept.

Having said all of this, there is a gaping hole in my story. If I sign up to evaluative flexibility, and assume that this cannot be accommodated by either model of conceptual relations, then what model of conceptual relations between the general and the specific *do* I favour? This point presses a great deal given that I have set things up so that the two models that have preoccupied us apparently exhaust the options.

I here offer a broad response. We should revisit what it means to say that some general concept, for example GOOD, is a concept that is ‘held in common by’, or ‘which is part of’, or ‘which is exhibited by’, or ‘which is shown in’ more specific evaluative concepts. The *genus–species* model has it that this can be understood only if the conceptual content is something that itself is an independent ingredient that retains this character even when brought into contact with some *differentia*, thereby producing a new concept. But it need not be like that at all. Thoughts familiar from the later Wittgenstein on family resemblance teach us that there may be many concepts—or ‘things’, understood very broadly—that go together and which, sometimes, can be seen as specific versions of some general thing by exhibiting it or by some other relation. Even if we can say, confidently, that all of these examples are examples of X, in doing so we need not be committed to saying that the way in which X is in each example is exactly the same way such that we can isolate and identify the X part, thus justifying us in separating it. Perhaps instead we can abstract from the various examples and get a sense of what X or the X is like, even if that sense is not to be found in each example in exactly the same way. Wittgenstein’s idea can be exemplified

literally: this is how things often work when it comes to the noses and cheekbones of certain family members. The same is true of certain concepts, I think.

This general sort of stance can unite specific concepts with general concepts. We can say that *this* group of specific concepts exhibit or are linked to a general concept, although *those other* specific concepts do not. We can also say that these specific concepts can exhibit more than one general concept; some specific evaluative concepts can even exhibit both GOOD and BAD, although they need not do it at the very same time with regards to the very same thing being categorized. We can say this sort of thing because there is no tie or recipe independent of and different from our exercise of evaluative judgement between concepts considered as general types. We have, instead, thoughts about judgement that allows for more flexibility in the nature of concepts and the relations they can form with other concepts. The justification for a specific concept being a member of a family of general concepts need not rely on an **(p. 58)** individual, isolatable, separable part that is held in common by both parent and child and which, in the extreme case, is wholly the parent concept itself.

This is a broadbrush treatment of judgement. Although I will return to this sort of stance (in Chapters Six and Eight), it will remain broadbrush throughout. For even when we return to it, much of my commentary will be negative, pointing out—as I have done in this chapter—the difficulties we get into when we divert from this general stance for evaluative concepts. Indeed, although this is clearly influenced by thoughts from the later Wittgenstein, I will not offer any Wittgensteinian exegesis in this book. One point I will return to in the next chapter is worth flagging. One might wonder whether the more general—that is, thin—sorts of evaluative concepts are only ever *mere* abstractions of the thicker ones, as was suggested just now. Some theorists have thought this but, despite what I have just written, I do not believe this to be the case; we can think of the thin differently while retaining the idea of a model of conceptual relations different from the two models that have preoccupied us in this chapter.

3.8 Conclusion

Understanding the *genus–species* and determinable–determinate models was important for understanding separationism, and giving us the start of some insight into nonseparationism. As part of this I have also got us thinking about evaluative flexibility.

As I mentioned, thinking in terms of the *genus–species* model will help us to understand how we can criticize separationism and the ways in which it is vulnerable. We now need to turn to think about the type of concept typically thought by separationists to be the *genus* concept, namely the thin.

Notes:

([1]) Some writers have suggested that we should apply the determinable–determinate model to thin and thick concepts. Graham Oddie in Oddie (2005), pp. 160–2 introduces the application of the model, albeit in a brief fashion with no discussion of the *genus–species* model. Christine Tappolet in Tappolet (2004) argues for its application primarily because she argues against applying its rival. Edward Harcourt and Alan Thomas in Harcourt and Thomas (2013) think that thin and thick concepts fulfil the minimal requirements for the determinable–determinate relation, and in doing so explicitly cite Tappolet as an inspiration, although they also criticize her.

([2]) It could be that two or more concepts can have the same *differentia*, but their *genus* would be different. This may be the case for thick concepts. So on this view—although I do not believe this at all—BRAVE and FOOLHARDY look like they have the same *differentia*, but one belongs to the *genus* GOOD or PRO, and the other belongs to BAD or CON. Although I sometimes talk of a unique *differentia* in the main text for simplicity's sake, I always have this clause in mind.

([3]) Sanford (2006), §3 points this out, citing among others Aristotle (1994), pp. 176–84.

([4]) Tappolet (2004), pp. 213–17 discusses this point. See also Hurley (1989), chapter 2.

([5]) Gibbard (1992).

([6]) For commentary see Prior (1949), and Searle (1959) and (1967), as well as the aforementioned Sanford (2006).

([7]) For ease of writing I stick to COLOUR and RED, but clearly we may wish to adjust our English.

([8]) Armstrong (1978), p. 112.

([9]) This short section adds nothing to my overall argumentative narrative, so readers who are uninterested in this question can skip ahead to §3.5.

([10]) Sanford notes that Johnson himself provides only equivocal support for the distinction.

([11]) I prefer something along the lines in the parentheses to explain what Aristotle is getting at in his doctrine of the mean, but I do not push it as this is not a book of Aristotelian scholarship.

([12]) What that general descriptive dimension might be I do not know. If one thinks of it purely descriptively, one might well call it 'elegant'.

([13]) This whole discussion of evaluative flexibility calls to mind the debate between particularists and generalists. The two best books on the subject are Dancy (2004) and McKeever and Ridge (2006). Particularists come in varieties, and discussion of what the dispute between the two camps amounts to is thorny. However, for simplicity's sake we can note that some particularists, including Dancy, argue that features (or reasons) can vary in their valency in a way that is influenced by context: sometimes a feature can be right-making and sometimes it can be wrong-making. This short claim can then be given a modal edge, and particularists can choose to say that it is not necessary for moral reasoning having a rational structure that it be based on codified principles in which features are deemed to be either always right-making or always wrong-making. This is not a book on the intricacies of the debate about particularism. Suffice it to say that one can be a particularist about thick concepts or thick features. My discussion in the main text is an expression of my acceptance of this sort of particularism. I have defended this view in more detail in Kirchin (2003b), which is a response to Crisp (2000) and McNaughton and Rawling (2000).

([14]) We can carve things differently by having the descriptive 'ELEGANT' part as the *genus*, and the evaluation as the *differentia*, but in our imagined scenario that will not result in many concepts. Given the prevalence of the number of pro- and con-concepts, and given that *genus* is supposed to be a general idea, then it is better to conceive things as I have done in the main text.

([15]) The 'typically' is designed to cope with analyses such as Gibbard's, which I discuss in Chapter Four.

([16]) I used to think that they should. I am grateful to Debbie Roberts for convincing me that I was wrong.