



Thick Evaluation

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The Thin

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter has two main topics. First, the notion of a thin concept is investigated as is the dividing line between thin and thick concepts, with the conclusion drawn that some thin concepts may be thicker than others. Further, through looking at Allan Gibbard's work it is argued that separationists are better off thinking of the thin as very thin: either pro or con. Second, what does it mean to say, as separationists have to say, that the thin is conceptually prior to the thick? 'Conceptual priority' is investigated, using work by Susan Hurley as a starting point, and three types of argument for the claim are considered; although all three arguments are weak, matters are left inconclusive and it is argued, overall, that nonseparationists should find better ground on which to fight.

Keywords: conceptual priority, dividing line, Allan Gibbard, Susan Hurley, pro and con, thin concepts

4.1 Introduction

One key attack on separationism is to argue that separationists' notion of the thin is wrong. More specifically it can be argued that it does not show enough appreciation of what it is for something to be a thin concept. Furthermore, separationists are committed to the idea that thin concepts enjoy some form of conceptual priority over thick ones: the latter are explicitly assumed to be constructed from the former plus some *differentia*. But what are the reasons for this view and how might one question it?

This chapter has two main topics. First, I investigate the notion of the thin and think about what notion of the thin is best employed by separationists. In order to do this I think about whether there is a dividing line between two broad types of evaluative concept. (I suggest there is.) This itself does not result in an argument, but it does resonate with the line of argument I pursue in Chapter Six: in brief, some so-called thin concepts may be thicker than others. Furthermore, through looking at the work of Allan Gibbard I argue that separationists are better off thinking of the thin as very thin. Having established that, I move to my second main topic: what does it mean to say, as separationists have to say, that the thin is conceptually prior to the thick? Not only do I think about what that means, I also ask whether such a conceptual priority is true. In my view the arguments for it are weak indeed, although crucially I think that much of what I say is inconclusive. My main conclusion is that nonseparationists need to find different ground on which to fight.

In §4.2 and §4.3 I argue for the idea that we can talk with confidence of there being two types of concept, although my end point is designed only to be strongly suggestive not conclusive. In §4.4 I reflect on the argumentative narrative that leads from the first two sections. In §4.5 I argue that separationists should assume that the evaluative element in their analyses has to be construed as very thin, and as mentioned I think about Gibbard's work here. I then consider conceptual priority in §4.6 and §4.7. Even if we assume—as I do—that there are thin concepts, why assume that they are conceptually prior to thick ones, as the *genus-species* model requires? In §4.8 I conclude.

4.2 Two Types of Concept?

It is routine to assume in discussions of thin and thick concepts that we have two broad types of concept: the thin and the thick. However, it is worth challenging that **(p.60)** assumption since we can learn a lot. I believe we can understand the thick only if we understand the thin. Indeed, in this and the next section I start to sow seeds that will unsettle the separationist view in later chapters. Despite my challenging the 'binary' assumption of thin and thick concepts, the reader should note that at the end of my discussion I suggest that we *should* keep to the view that there are two broad types of concept. My aim is to show what we can learn from thinking about the thin.

Writers normally introduce thin concepts and talk of GOOD and BAD, RIGHT and WRONG, and then move quickly onto the whole run of thick concepts. I did the same in my Introduction. It also often happens that these thin concepts are described as being evaluative only, and the thick ones are thought to be both evaluative and descriptive. But all of this is simply too quick. Compare two of our thin concepts, GOOD and RIGHT. That these concepts are different concepts is surely unarguable. For a start, philosophical and other writers normally namecheck both of them rather than use one to stand for the other. And, second, they do so because the vast majority of writers and ordinary people think there

is a difference, even if, in the end, some theorists might argue that the two come together in an interesting way. The whole of modern normative ethics—and much of our everyday thought that it is supposed to reflect—makes no sense unless we assume, at least at the start, that there is a difference between GOOD and RIGHT.

What is that difference? The following may not be exactly correct, but it is decent enough for our purposes. If something is good then it indicates that we both approve of the thing and that we are open to the possibility of other relevantly similar things being things that we can approve of, be that approval stronger, weaker, or the same.¹ If something is right, then we approve of the thing and we think that it is the only thing among all relevantly similar things that we can approve of or want to approve of. In short, we ordinarily think that in a given context or situation there can be many good things but only one right one.²

Two points flow from this. First, GOOD and RIGHT are both positive concepts, yet they differ. In what respect do they differ? If we have bought into the idea that evaluative and descriptive content are completely separate, and if we think that evaluative content is exhausted by mere likes and dislikes, then we will have to say that GOOD and RIGHT differ in terms of descriptive content. In which case, we straightaway threaten the thought that these traditionally cast thin concepts are evaluative only and ‘purely’, at least on our introductory understanding of thin and thick concepts. That idea is reinforced by a second point. We have another evaluative (**p.61**) concept in the mix now, namely PRO. GOOD and RIGHT differ from PRO. They are concepts which we employ to approve of things, but when we approve we do more than simply say ‘pro’. We approve of things in a certain way, with extra information.³ The way in which we approve of good things is different from the way in which we approve of right things.

That, again, should make us worry about how we classify thin concepts. Are they all ‘simply’ and ‘merely’ and ‘purely’ evaluative, with thick concepts being something else? Perhaps the evaluative way in which thin concepts are evaluative can differ. Or, in other words, perhaps thin concepts come in a range of ‘thicknesses’? After all, some seem slightly more specific than others; indeed, perhaps we should just drop the inverted commas around ‘thicknesses’.

I think that we *can* class thin concepts as being ‘simply’ and ‘purely’ evaluative but that is because I have a certain view of the evaluative that allows me to say that thick concepts are also ‘simply’ and ‘purely’ evaluative. We could really pursue this current line of thought in a way that becomes a full frontal attack on separationism, by questioning what separationists mean by and include in their notion of ‘the evaluative’ and from that argue that thick concepts can also be fundamentally and simply evaluative. I do that in Chapter Six and park the

argument just mentioned for the present. Right now I stress a *different* idea. We are concerned only with whether we should assume such a clear division between the thin and the thick.

I should point out that the discussion just now can be run for concepts other than just GOOD and RIGHT. Consider a range of concepts that pick out pro-concepts in any language and indicate strength of approval. In English we might have a run of concepts from OUTSTANDING to OKAY and ADEQUATE, that takes in EXCELLENT, FINE, DECENT, and ACCEPTABLE along the way, among other examples.⁴ Again, the key idea is that these are all pro-concepts, yet they do more than just indicate approval of something. If that is all they did, we would have the same concept, but we do not. Something else must be going on.

There is another point often missing from the literature. We would surely say that there is a difference between the concepts ETHICALLY GOOD, AESTHETICALLY GOOD, PRUDENTIALY GOOD, and the like.⁵ Yet clearly all of them differ from PRO and CON, and it would take a brave person to argue that they were not more specific versions of GOOD. Are we then committed to the idea that they are all thick concepts? Perhaps. But doing so is unnerving. It seems also possible and justifiable (**p.62**) to think that we have now added to our range of concepts that can be labelled thin, and that this group is growing as we continue to reflect.

Having thought a little about the thin and exposed the possibility of there being differences, let us do the same with the thick. Compare this family of concepts: KIND, CARING, COMPASSIONATE, EMPATHETIC, SYMPATHETIC, THOUGHTFUL, and CONSIDERATE. It is impossible to be precise here, but to my mind it seems obvious that KIND is thinner and more general than, say, EMPATHETIC and SYMPATHETIC. THOUGHTFUL, at least as meant as part of this family, seems to lie in the middle, it being a certain way in which one can exercise kindness, although I am prepared to be argued out of this claim. The main idea is that there is a host of different thicknesses among all those concepts classed as thick concepts.

In a review of Williams' *ELP*, Samuel Scheffler makes essentially the same point. He notes that Williams assumes that there are just two sorts of concept: the thick and the more abstract. *Contra* Williams, Scheffler gives a list of concepts that seem to fall under neither heading, grouped in families.⁶ For example, JUSTICE, FAIRNESS, and IMPARTIALITY form one little family; PRIVACY, SELF-RESPECT, and ENVY form another; and NEEDS, WELL-BEING, AND INTERESTS form a third. Scheffler notes that Williams' bifurcation of thick concepts as being both world-guided and action-guiding, and thin concepts as being action-guiding alone, appears unjustified. In fact, he calls this divide 'incoherent'. Williams, Scheffler claims, ties world-guidedness to agreement in application, but it appears that Williams is not so strict as to see widespread

agreement as either necessary or sufficient for a concept being world-guided. Indeed, given that strengths and types of agreement can vary depending on concept (and context), it seems as if we are in territory where it is unwise to think of strict conditions and of clear dividing lines between one type of thing and another. Scheffler explicitly talks of various relevant considerations here being 'matters of degree'.

These preceding comments can now be put together to define the challenge of this section. So far I have done two things. I have indicated that it may be less than obvious that all traditional thin concepts should be lumped together and assumed to be the same. In particular we saw that concepts that are traditionally labelled as thin might differ from PRO (or CON) and do so because some other conceptual content (or something) is added to PRO (or CON), and/or the strength of approval or disapproval changes. A concept traditionally classed as thin may well not be a simple or bare approval or disapproval. This first point can itself be used as a starting point to try to unseat the separationist view of the thin, but here I am using it simply to pursue the idea that the thin comes in a range of thicknesses. I have also, second, **(p.63)** indicated that thick concepts can come in a variety of thicknesses. It is very tempting at this stage to put these two ideas together and argue that the distinction between the thin and the thick is only a convenient starting point, an idea that we should look beyond.

This comes into view when we work away at the possible boundary of the thin and the thick. Consider OUGHT, DUTY, DECENT, ACCEPTABLE, and JUST. Are these thin? The first two are often classified in this way, the third and fourth appeared briefly in my discussion of the thin (but I noted that they could be thought to be thick), and the last was included in my brief discussion of thick concepts. The point is that it is not clear that there is any difference between them in terms of their thicknesses. Or, if there is it will take a lot of argumentation, and there may still remain disagreements at the end. Why not, then, just eschew the distinction between the thin and the thick, as Scheffler suggests? Instead of a difference in kind between two types, why not just embrace a difference of degree among our evaluative concepts? Why not just assume some sort of continuum in this matter? It seems likely that our evaluative concepts range from the barely thin at one end to the very thick at the other, taking in all manner of concepts along the way.

The conclusion is just that we have evaluative concepts and that some are more specific than others. (Or if you prefer, for emphasis, some are more general than others.) That is all that can be said. Placing a dividing line to indicate some difference in kind is simply unjustified and a result of sloppy, lazy thinking.

4.3 Back to the Distinction

But is this a product of sloppy, lazy thinking? There seems *something* to the idea that we have general and specific evaluative concepts and there is something

important about the difference between them, so much so that we can talk of a dividing line.

Think again about GOOD and RIGHT. When we apply these concepts we approve in both cases. The difference between them comes only in what attitude we take towards those other things that are classed as being relevantly similar to our target things. We do not say anything more about the target things themselves aside from indicating our approval of them. A similar point can be made about our range of concepts that indicate strengths of approval and disapproval, at least on one conception of such matters. One attractive view is that all such judgements are essentially comparative. We can understand the approval of *this* thing only in the light of our consideration of *that other* thing. In a case—an ‘odd universe’ sort of case—where we approve of only one thing, we cannot really say how strongly we approve of the thing, since we can reach such a view only in the light of approvals towards other things.⁷

(p.64) In contrast, think of standard thick concepts. When we say that someone is generous or obnoxious we are not only approving or disapproving of her, if that is what we are doing. We are also approving or disapproving of her in a certain way, where ‘that certain way’ is focused on her, the target thing. Crucially, unlike the story I have just told for GOOD and RIGHT, our application and understanding of standard thick concepts to one thing does not depend essentially on our view of other things. Note, that we might say, in general, that people can fully understand GENEROUS, say, only by applying it to many things. But that is a different point. The point I am making here is that, even if there has to be a background of many uses of a thick concept in order for understanding to be decent or mature, once that background is in place, any single use of a thick concept need involve reference only to the particular thing that is being characterized. In contrast, any single application of GOOD will involve essential reference to a person’s view of other things (or reference to how she might view other things, given the context, task, or question facing her). The way in which we view those other things will be crucial in distinguishing GOOD from RIGHT according to my starting definitions. In other words, with thick concepts we are indicating something more specific than approval and disapproval of the thing in question in a way that is clearly different from how we do so when applying concepts such as GOOD and RIGHT.

Let me summarize this in a different way, as this may be quite abstract. The distinction between the thin and the thick may be thus. Thick concepts pick out certain sorts of liking towards certain things and they carry or can be specific sorts of those likings where such likings are not dependent on us drawing comparisons with other things and their characterizations, or on other matters. On the other hand, when thin concepts pick out or are likings towards certain things, they may give us more information about the thing than a bare approval will, but if so this is achieved only through some comparison with other things

and their characterizations or some other matter not to do with the target things themselves. Or, in other words, thick concepts can be used to voice approvals and disapprovals towards things and can do so specifically with a focus, sometimes, only on the things themselves. Thin concepts are not like that. If they do go beyond PRO and CON, the extra information is conveyed through something else, such as a comparison with other objects.

As advertised, I do not believe that this distinction in kind is *definitively* correct. But I cannot help thinking that just as I imagined an opponent to the distinction between thick and thin saying that it is a product of lazy and sloppy thinking, we might also judge that it is too quick to move from the idea that there is a 'range of thicknesses' in our evaluative concepts to the idea that there can be no difference in kind between them. The idea of thin and thick, of being general and specific, has **(p.65)** some roots. We would do well to pause and think about the ways in which concepts work to see if we can uncover some general trends that help mark interesting differences. The one I have marked out above may be imperfect and is certainly not fully worked out. But it is a decent start that should stop us from blithely assuming only differences of degree between our evaluative concepts, even if we assume a range of thicknesses across them.

If my distinction is onto something, we should revisit other examples. ETHICALLY GOOD, AESTHETICALLY GOOD and the others may not be as thin as I first suggested they could be. When we pick out something as ethically good we *are* giving some information about the thing beyond the fact that we think it is good and which is not itself wholly comparative. I find it intuitive that we can pick out the ethical character of an ethical liking without comparison with other things, which may or may not be ethical. And the same is true of things deemed aesthetically good.

What of concepts such as JUST and DECENT? If we are to follow my distinction in some form, then it appears that these concepts turn out to be thick, albeit thinner than some others. Things get trickier when we talk of OUGHT and DUTY, APPROPRIATE and ADEQUATE. OUGHT seems really rather thin and could be as thin as RIGHT or at least close to it. Yet, if we follow most philosophers we can note that 'ought implies can'. We have, then, an additional element not standardly included in RIGHT. Some action ought to be pursued if it is positively endorsed, so long as it is the only thing that can be positively endorsed from a range of relevantly similar options *and* it can be pursued. We have thickened up RIGHT ever so slightly. Perhaps the invocation of what can be pursued is sufficient to push it into the camp of thick concepts as I have just drawn them, but perhaps it should stay on the thin side of things because we have an essential comparative judgement, albeit with an additional clause, which shows the connection of OUGHT to RIGHT. Similar comments could be made of the other concepts mentioned at the start of this paragraph.

The philosophical moral hereabouts is simply that if we wish to maintain some distinction in kind among evaluative concepts, and label the two camps ‘thin’ and ‘thick’, we need to think hard about a number of examples and decide where to place them. In doing so, we will bring into focus exactly what the basis is of the distinction between the thick and the thin. We will also see, I strongly think, that within both of the two broad camps there is a range of thicknesses. (Scheffler was absolutely correct to emphasize this range.) Assuming that what we define as being thin is not exhausted by the minimally thin concepts PRO and CON, this point applies to thin concepts and not just the thick.

4.4 A Pause

The argument of the previous chapter assumed that there was going to be a difference in kind between the thin and the thick. I hope that my previous section has at least provided enough inspiration to think that the distinction retains plausibility. It **(p.66)** matters somewhat for my discussion. I think that separationism is wrong, but not because separationists erroneously believe that there is a distinction in kind between the thin and the thick. They are wrong for other reasons.

However, if you do not think that the distinction is plausible, that should not stop the interest in this book. True, the structure of my discussion with its talk of the *genus-species* model and how I use that to introduce the arguments will seem beside the point. Yet, the topics that I discuss in what follows will not be. We still need to understand the *thinner* concepts and how they relate to more specific ones, and we need to understand how, if at all, one can disentangle the thinner sorts of approval from the information and connotations that *thicker* concepts convey and carry. Even those that believe in a difference only of degree believe in a difference, and so they should think hard about how the more and less specific evaluative concepts relate.

One thing we have learned from the previous discussion is that evaluative content is more varied than might at first appear; it may be more than just PRO and CON. As the reader is already aware, this is a key claim of this book. Even by focusing only on thin concepts—which are so often introduced and then quickly ignored in discussions of the thick—we can see that there is more to be said about evaluative content. The difference between GOOD and RIGHT, and the question of where DUTY, OUGHT, and AESTHETICALLY GOOD fit in to the thin/thick divide are questions that require serious thought.

Before we turn our attention to separationism explicitly, I engage with one of the most interesting moral philosophers of recent times. This is partly to position him in relation to the ideas of the previous chapter, but it is mainly to introduce a point of his analysis that is pertinent to how I am treating separationist uses of the thin.

4.5 Gibbard and L-censoriousness

Allan Gibbard, in a 1992 debate with Blackburn, introduces his analysis of thick concepts, which itself is an expansion of his brief discussion in Gibbard (1990). He rejects what he calls 'two component' analyses of thick concepts of the sort we investigated in Chapter Two when looking at conjunction and licensing. Among other reasons for rejection, he mentions that if such analyses were applied, then disputants could end up (incorrectly) characterized as talking past one another.⁸ In the end he draws up something like Elstein and Hurka's proposal, in so far as his analysis also has some looseness to the descriptive component. However, as we saw in Chapter Two Blackburn's favoured analysis now accommodates some looseness, so even though some difference between the two writers remains as we shall shortly see, there may not be as much of a difference between Gibbard in 1992 and Blackburn's more recent view as there was in the 1992 debate.

(p.67) I do not pursue all of the details of Gibbard's analysis here. Instead, I focus on one aspect of it. Here, for illustration, is Gibbard's analysis of his target example, LEWD.

So, 'Act *X* is lewd' means this: L-censoriousness toward the agent is warranted, for passing beyond those limits on sexual display such that (i) in general, passing beyond those limits warrants feelings of L-censoriousness toward the person doing so, and (ii) this holds either on no further grounds or on grounds that apply specially to sexual displays as sexual displays.⁹

What I focus on is Gibbard's 'feeling of L-censoriousness'.

Clearly what we have here is something explicitly different from the PRO and GOOD elements with which I have so far been working. I am not so bothered about the fact that Gibbard's analysis explicitly introduces the idea of a feeling; that is to be expected from someone who is working within the noncognitivist tradition. What is interesting is the fact that the noncognitive feeling cited is not as thin as we have been used to. Perhaps this fact exposes something wrong in my discussion thus far.

My discussion has saddled separationists with a view of the thin that is underdeveloped, both in the sense of there being not much thought about it, but also in the sense that there is an explicit assumption that there is not much to it. I began to poke and prod that idea in §4.2 by showing that there may be a range of thin concepts (or thin elements) that we might wish to work with. That is supposed to introduce us gently to the idea that evaluative content can come in a range of thicknesses, and that be a perfectly natural idea. But with Gibbard we see a separationist who has a very specific sort of noncognitive element explicitly encoded into his analysis. So perhaps I should not keep on working

with something really thin when criticizing separationism. Perhaps I am attacking a straw man.

I applaud Gibbard's analysis in that it does not work with PRO or some other very thin element. Although he makes hardly anything of this move, it is important to realize that separationists need not be committed, at least *prima facie*, to a very thin element in their analysis. As separationists, all that they are committed to is this familiar run of ideas: thick concepts are created from separable elements that themselves are not thick, typically some thin (or thinner) element (often conceptual content, often noncognitive feeling), plus some descriptive, nonevaluative conceptual content. Gibbard's analysis plumps for an element that is more specific than what we are used to, but—before criticism—that is itself not enough to stop his analysis from being separationist.

However, now I come to that criticism. I raise two general points, and then tie them to what Gibbard says. I assume for the moment that separationists will be noncognitivists of some sort, but what I say in relation to this will then allow for a criticism of cognitivist-separationists, one that ties to the first two sections of this chapter.

(p.68) First, a point about how concepts are supposed to work according to separationists. Recall that separationists are trying to provide an analysis of what is involved in a thick concept, and recall also that any ingredients that go to make the thick concept are, by definition, conceptually prior to their product. In which case, although we can talk, perhaps in an offhand manner, of the thin element in terms of the thick one, we need to be absolutely clear that in the final analysis this thin element cannot be identified and isolated by a theorist simply by their using the target thick concept or term. This is because the target thick concept is what we are trying to characterize in the first place.

This is strictly a point about the thin element and a particular, individual thick concept product. It could be that we identify a thin element using a *different* thick concept or term that has already been analysed. But, of course, the same stricture would apply when characterizing *that* concept. Unless we want to embrace a vicious regress, at some point there has to be some analysis of some thick concept where no thick concept or term is used, even if that thick concept is then used to help define further thick concepts.

My worry with regards to Gibbard is that his invocation of L-censoriousness falls obviously foul of this first point. We are picking out a feeling by explicitly using the thick concept, LEWD, that we are trying to analyse. This seems illegitimate. However, there may be a way out of this thought, for both Gibbard and other noncognitivist-separationists who wish to include in their analysis a 'thicker-than-bare-thin' evaluative element. This brings me to my second point.

The second point concerns psychology. The rescuing move for Gibbard and separationists like him is to say that we can pick out and have knowledge of a specific sort of element without first identifying it through use of any thick concept or term. Sure, we might label it by using some thick term, but that is only for convenience's sake and happens only after we have got used to isolating the feeling. Indeed, the thick concept gets formed because we are so used to the feeling. The key point is that certain sorts of feeling are psychologically real and are clearly felt things that we can isolate and identify in the right way. We can easily see them as prior to any thick concept.

This defence of this sort of separationism stands and falls on the plausibility of the claim about psychology. There is no doubt at all that humans, even just 'typical humans', have a wide range of experiences and feelings and that these could be used as the building blocks in the way envisaged by Gibbard. But—and this is a big 'but'—are we confident that we have a large variety of experiences sufficient to help build all of the thick concepts we wish to build?

Gibbard's own analysis is of an extreme form. It suggests that there is a one-to-one mapping from specific feeling to specific concept. There is no way that L-censoriousness will be involved in any other sort of thick concept. It is true that there is some descriptive content involved in Gibbard's analysis and that will help to define the thick concept. But, even then, if we changed the descriptive content it is **(p.69)** hard to imagine a different sort of thick concept emerging once we have plugged in L-censoriousness.¹⁰

In which case, it seems that we will need as many specific feelings that we can isolate as there are specific concepts to be analysed. This is the first worry we can raise against Gibbard's view. Is there a specific feeling associated with JUST, with ELEGANT, with ILLUMINATING, and with many, many more examples? I doubt this very strongly. Moreover and second, we will have to be confident that there is some fine degree of agreement in feeling across all people such that we can speak of there being common concepts of LEWD and all the rest. In advance of a huge psychological-cum-sociological research programme that investigates this philosophical issue, we should refrain from drawing any definitive conclusion. But I am highly doubtful that we have this range of feelings sufficient to justify this sort of analysis.

A third, connected worry is raised by Blackburn against Gibbard.¹¹ Blackburn thinks that there is a large variety of feelings (or 'attitudes') that attend to most sorts of thick concept; in short he accuses Gibbard of failing to take account of evaluative flexibility.¹² This familiar point indeed strikes home. We might rejoice in something being lewd, and it "comes from the same neck of the woods as provocative, fruity, naughty, salacious, racy...".¹³ Blackburn questions why lewdness should be portrayed in negative terms with talk of 'censoriousness'. As part of that, his examples support my first criticism: are we confident that we

can tightly isolate different sorts of fine-grained feeling such that we have the feeling associated only with lewdness, the feeling associated only with raciness, the feeling associated only with naughtiness (and the right sort of naughtiness at that), and so on? Again, I emphasize the point: Gibbard's analysis may work for some thick concept families; the family of KIND, SYMPATHETIC, EMPATHETIC comes to mind. There *are* families and individual concepts that are obviously based on certain sorts of common feeling and emotion. But I do not think it will work for other examples.

So there is a large question mark hanging over the thought that separationists can and should employ highly fine-grained feelings in their analyses of thick concepts.

(p.70) Yet, recall that I have characterized Gibbard's analysis as extreme. What if we had worked with feelings that were more coarse-grained than L-censoriousness, yet more fine-grained than some bare pro or con attitude? These feelings are envisaged as helping to isolate the thick concept we require, but are not themselves doing the whole job or even just most of it. In effect, such feelings do less than Gibbard envisages. We then allow the descriptive content to 'fill in' and, in effect, be the thing that helps to individuate every thick concept. This seems a more promising strategy, at least in so far as it is not obviously subject to the criticism I have been making of Gibbard's analysis.

However, this relies on that descriptive conceptual content being sufficient to cover or mimic the thick concept. In Chapter Five we will examine a powerful argument that suggests that it cannot do this job. To finish off this section, I switch to consider what we can say about cognitivist-separationists and this matter, and also reflect more generally.

What drives a lot of the criticism of this section is the idea that we do not have all of the fine-grained feelings sufficient to do the job required. But cognitivist-separationists are not interested in feelings. They prefer to say that we can employ some evaluative ideas, understood cognitivistically, in our analyses of thick concepts. However, they also have a tricky path to tread. They clearly do not wish such ideas of concepts to be themselves thick and components in some analysis, for that would make these components themselves nonseparable and basic. What if they assume that we can employ in our analyses some thin concepts (so-called) which are less than minimally or barely thin? That is, they eschew PRO and CON and work with OUGHT, DUTY, ACCEPTABLE, and other such ideas.

Certainly doing so avoids a worry that we may not have sufficient feelings to map onto the concepts we wish; no doubt we have a range of such *thinner* concepts. But a different worry arrives, one that lingered in the background of earlier comments. Why would we feel the need to provide an analysis of (so-

called) thick concepts and regard them as non-primitive, while also thinking that these thicker-than-bare-thin thin concepts *are* primitive and in no need of analysis? I may have argued across §4.2 and §4.3 that it would be unwise to jettison the idea of a difference in kind between the thin and the thick, but clearly my whole discussion raised the possibility of there being a lot in common between concepts traditionally classed using these two headings. Indeed, I showed that we could provide ways of distinguishing some of the thinner concepts from one another. They fall short of 'analyses', because detail was lacking, but we might very well suspect that analyses of the sort favoured by separationists could be forthcoming. At the very least, cognitivist-separationists who wish to employ in their analyses thin concepts that are thicker than PRO and CON owe us a great deal of discussion and defence as to why they use such concepts and why they are primitive.

It is time to draw some morals and a conclusion in this section. Separationists are committed to there being at least two elements that are to be included in their **(p.71)** analyses of thick concepts. These elements cannot be isolated and captured by using thick terms and concepts, at least before any analysis has been carried out. We can assume that any thin evaluative element that is employed can, without problem, be barely thin: noncognitivist analyses can assume that we have some form of pro or con attitude, while cognitivist analyses can assume a simple PRO or CON concept. This, however, means that when we analyse and individuate thick concepts, all of the work is done by the descriptive conceptual content that is included as part of the analysis. (We will look at this in Chapter Five.)

If separationists do not take this route, then they are subject to worries. Noncognitivists make the feeling or attitude associated with a concept more fine-grained than a simple pro- or con-attitude. The more fine-grained they make it then the more they run the risk of us querying whether we have a range of such feelings that can help to individuate our whole range of concepts. And they need to make sure they stop short of saying something as obviously viciously circular as 'the feeling that helps to isolate thick concept X is the X sort of feeling'. As part of this we may worry, with Blackburn, that there is not a single specific sort of feeling associated with any particular concept. There may be many such feelings, some of which may be positive and some of which may be negative.

Cognitivist-separationists who wish to 'thicken up' the thin element in their analysis are similarly in trouble. We may ask, quite simply, why the thicker-than-bare-thin thin concepts are treated by them as unanalysable and primitive, while thick concepts require analysis of a separationist kind. Such separationists owe us a detailed discussion which, with good reason, shows why it is that GOOD,

RIGHT, and OUGHT, say, are primitive, but DUTY, AESTHETICALLY GOOD, WISE, and GROTESQUE are not.

The overall conclusion, then, is that separationists are on far safer ground if they assume that the thin element in their analysis of thick concepts is barely thin, just as Blackburn, and Elstein and Hurka do. As I have mentioned, this puts stress on the descriptive part of any analysis, and I discuss that in Chapter Five. Furthermore, our earlier thoughts in this chapter about the various thicknesses of (supposed) thin concepts might cause a little disquiet: according to the train of thought thus far, separationists are better off working with very thin notions of evaluation, but this may mean that they have to give separationist analyses of so-called thin concepts into some positive or negative part plus some descriptive part. There is nothing inconsistent with this as it stands, but it is an interesting development that I pick up in Chapter Six.

But we cannot jump to these matters now. It is one thing to assume or claim that there are barely thin concepts; I have assumed that, after all, with my invocation of PRO and CON. It is quite another to assume and argue for the idea that such concepts are conceptually prior to thick concepts. Before we tackle the descriptive, we need to tackle this idea. After all, this is the reason why I introduced the *genus-species* model in the first place.

(p.72) 4.6 Susan Hurley and Centralism

As well as asking what reason there is to think that thin concepts are conceptually prior to thick concepts, we also need to ask what is meant by the phrase ‘conceptual priority’ first of all, at least as it pertains to the debate in which we are interested.¹⁴

My understanding of ‘conceptual priority’ is fairly simple and plain: if we say that one concept is prior to another (and assume there to be some link between them) it means that the former has been involved in the creation of the latter, with the latter cast as some type of product. This clearly reflects my discussion in Chapter Three. There may, of course, be reasons why we wish to say that one concept is prior to another. Invoking these may give us only a sense of a particular *type* or *example* of conceptual priority and not give us a better sense of what the whole idea of conceptual priority means. Remember that when separationists think of thin concepts being prior to thick ones, they appear to be making a *general* claim. Even if they favour a particular, specific understanding of conceptual priority, advanced through examples, perhaps, they need a further argument that establishes that that is the best way of understanding the *general* idea. In my discussion below I consider three different examples of conceptual priority: ‘social priority’, ‘learning priority’, and ‘justificatory priority’. These three illustrative examples do not get separationists close to justifying the priority of the thin over the thick in general, let alone give them conclusive victories.

Before we get to those examples, it is worth starting to think through these issues via someone who has already been here. Susan Hurley is to be credited with giving us some insights in this regard. In her *Natural Reasons* she identifies a position she calls 'centralism', which is the assertion that thin concepts are the central evaluative concepts, with thick concepts being derivative.¹⁵ She opposes this position with 'non-centralism'. I prefer to say that separationists are committed to 'thin prioritarianism'. It is an uglier term, certainly, but speaking in this way allows us to introduce explicitly two opposing positions in a way that Hurley's terminology does not. She recognizes the two opposing options, but her terminology blurs this point. 'Non-centralism' covers two ideas. One could be a 'thick prioritarian' and claim that thick concepts are conceptually prior to thin ones. Or one could hold to a 'no priority' position and argue that across the whole class of evaluative concepts it is wrong to say that either type of concept is prior to the other.¹⁶ There may be small family **(p.73)** groupings that, for whatever reason, exhibit this sort of priority relation. Yet, it is wrong to generalize across all evaluative concepts. So with my terminology we have a clear three-way fight.¹⁷ Below I discuss possible ways of arguing for thin prioritarianism. In doing so I argue against both this and thick prioritarianism, as I favour the no priority view.

Before that, a few comments on Hurley's discussion of the matter. Simply through her labelling she achieved a lot as she was able to identify a key and pervasive idea. However, she provides no knock-down argument against centralism, that is thin prioritarianism. Arguably, much of *Natural Reasons* is designed to show the attractions of the alternative view and the paucity of her opponents'. Despite the absence of a knock-down argument, she does have a promising argumentative strategy. Early on in her book she considers how centralism can and is applied in areas other than (explicit) the area of value and reason, and she tries to show the implausibility of centralism in the value and reason case; those other areas are the use of colour, mathematical, and legal concepts. Some of what she says amounts to the idea that 'we do not think as centralism says we should think in those other cases, so it is likely that we do not think in this way in the evaluative case either'. Put baldly like that, this point is unlikely to convince a neutral, let alone a thin prioritarian. This is partly because centralists may argue that we do think as they say we think, and also because many centralists try to abstract from practice and argue that we are trying to get some analysis of what is involved in the concepts themselves. We can talk of a concept being conceptually prior, in a philosophical analysis, while accepting that in practice ordinary users rely on both thin and thick concepts all the time. Hurley would probably have challenged this methodological guiding idea since her opposition to centralism is heavily informed by work from the later Wittgenstein who, as is well known, privileged the practice of concept use when understanding matters philosophically. That sort of tension in methodology

will crop up in the next section. For now, as an illustration, let me talk through Hurley's strategy against colour centralism and how it can be continued.

To my mind she begins by attributing a mistaken view to centralists by assuming that centralism analyses RED in terms of COLOUR plus something that picks out red things, for example wavelength of a certain sort.¹⁸ As mentioned, this is standardly not thought to be a serious option in discussions of the *genus-species* and determinable-determinate models. However, Hurley then usefully comments that we do not apply and understand COLOUR without applying and understanding RED, **(p.74)** BLUE, and the like. However, she does not consider how centralists might respond, and I think in doing so we can extend the discussion in an illuminating manner. I do this now and drop talk of 'centralism'.

It is key to bear in mind that we are interested in the concepts themselves. Clearly anyone familiar with what it is to be coloured, and the colours themselves, will realize that if an object is coloured it is coloured in a certain way, and vice versa. Similarly, if an action is good it is good in a certain way, and we might also say that if an action has some thick concept applicable to it, it entails that there will be some applicable thin concept. But, *contra* Hurley, thin prioritarians about colour might say that this is a slightly different point from having decent understanding of the concepts themselves. They might argue that when we focus just on the concept COLOUR (or COLOUREDNESS), we have some related ideas of 'objects being filled in visually'. We have enough understanding of what being coloured is apart from any understanding we have of the various colour concepts. Well, perhaps. But my example phrase of 'objects being filled in visually' seems to be simply a synonym for 'being coloured', and it is hard to come up with something that is not. Furthermore, it might be suggested that we cannot understand what it is for an object to be coloured unless we have some idea of exclusion and contrast: if something is coloured it has to be a particular colour that excludes other particular colours, and this seems to invite the idea that we can understand COLOUR only if we understand the concept of being a particular colour, which might then further invite the thought that we have to have some understanding of the familiar colour concepts RED, BLUE, and the rest.

Thin prioritarians about colour might counter this line of thought with further ideas. Whatever we say about this local debate, it seems more important that those who wish to challenge thin prioritarianism about colour focus on thin prioritarians' commitment to the *genus-species* model. As should be familiar by now, this model involves two points of interest: the *genus* and the *differentia*. Once we focus on the fact that some *differentia* needs to be produced for each of the various specific colour concepts, we see that none can be given. (We saw this in the previous chapter.) It is this, rather than attention to the thin *genus*, that

provides the killer blow to any two-component analysis of specific colour concepts such as RED.

Is the evaluative case analogous? No, but to the detriment of those that wish to oppose thin prioritarianism. Focusing on the *differentia* may also damage the *genus-species* case, but—again, boringly—this is the topic of Chapter Five. Our focus here is on the thin *genus*. Do we have decent understanding of GOOD and PRO prior to any understanding of specific thick concepts? Unlike the analogous questions about colour, where I have indicated that there may be something that thin prioritarians can say in their defence, our answer here is strongly in the affirmative. I have already discussed the ideas PRO and CON: we can certainly make sense of the idea of preferring one thing to another, of thinking of something as being on the positive (or negative) side of things, or thinking something better than another, and so on. Clearly such judgements strongly imply that a judge prefers something for some **(p.75)** reason, whether or not she can articulate it. But any reasons she might offer for preferring something, say, do not seem intimately bound up with, or are simply not part of, the idea of preferring something and of thinking of something positively. These notions certainly do not seem as intimately bound up with the reasons for the positive view or preference as the specific colours might be bound up with the general concept COLOUR.

So I think it fair to say that although an interesting strategy, undermining thin prioritarianism about value concepts by looking at what happens with colour concepts is not foolproof. I think that we can make sense of the idea of PRO and CON without reference to thick concepts. But, crucially, even if thin prioritarians can make out that we have decent enough understanding of thin evaluations aside from other considerations, it is a *further* thing to establish that the best analysis of thick concepts is a reductive, separationist one that has them *constructed*, in part, from the thin. That, after all, is the key part of thin concepts being *prior*. A defence of this idea is normally missing. What could be the argument for it?

What I now do is examine three illustrative exchanges between thin and thick prioritarians. Thin prioritarians will try to show how thin concepts are prior. In contrast, thick prioritarians have to show that thick concepts play certain roles and fulfil certain conceptual needs in their own right, such that we undercut the motivation for having separationist analyses in the first place. In doing so thick prioritarians say, indeed they *have* to say, that it is the thick that comes first. No prioritarians make an appearance at the end of each exchange, emerging on top. This will take us back to Hurley's centralism.

4.7 Are Thin Concepts Conceptually Prior?

Let us imagine how the debate might go between thin and thick prioritarians, by imagining three brief illustrative exchanges. Although I have focused on thin prioritarianism, I begin by thinking about how thick prioritarians might argue.

First, thick prioritarians might challenge thin prioritarians by developing some of Williams' thoughts in *ELP*.¹⁹ They might argue that although we use thin and thick concepts readily, thick concepts are tied more closely to our social and moral lives. Our justifications of action are more compelling if we use thick concepts rather than thin ones since we are better able to capture and describe various action types, as well as evaluate them, than if we used thin concepts alone. Our description of our social world is made brighter and clearer if we use thick (p.76) concepts. People get a better sense, a more detailed sense, of what it is to be an evaluating being if thick concepts are used. Although it is true that we can and do use thin concepts to justify actions, and to describe our social world and human agents, such uses are parasitic on our use of thick concepts, simply because of the (stipulated) merging of evaluatory and descriptive content in thick ones: they are conceptually closer to the (descriptive) world of which they are used when we evaluate.

Well, possibly. But I can imagine thin prioritarians, and neutrals, remaining unpersuaded. For a start, we need further justification that evaluative concepts are conceptually 'closer to' the nonevaluative world in a way that justifies them as being conceptually prior. An alternative picture, one amenable to thin prioritarians presumably, has it that we conceive of the nonevaluative world and our (thin) evaluations as quite separate things, and we then have to derive our thick concepts in order to bridge the gap. (This recalls the fact-value distinction.) And, further, thin prioritarians might put pressure on the more specific thoughts. Justifications can often be powerful if one uses no-nonsense thin concepts. Some actions are downright 'wrong' rather than the more vague and ambiguous 'beastly' or 'not on'. Thin concepts play an important role in working out the contours of our social world by marking clearly what is and what is not acceptable. They are direct, clear, simple, straightforward, and unambiguous. They give us a way of thinking that thick concepts do not offer; while thick concepts can be used of wrong actions, for example, and can imply the wrongness of those actions, they work in these ways while necessarily picking out or alighting on other aspects. There is little here to persuade thin prioritarians.

However, a neutral might think differently. In defending their position perhaps thin prioritarians are merely digging their heels into their entrenched view. Where is the justification to think that thin evaluative content and descriptive content are prior in the way assumed? Indeed, we can begin to see the attractions of no prioritarianism: why not think, instead, that our thin and thick evaluative concepts are as useful as each other, that justifications of actions, and

descriptions of our world and of agents, are best if we use both sorts of concept? Indeed, perhaps our judgements make sense only within a network of all sorts of evaluative concept, both thin and thick.²⁰

Consider a second challenge. Imagine we think of conceptual priority in terms of learned priority. Thick prioritarrians might argue that it makes sense to think that we start with certain fine-grained responses, certain ways in which we like things, or are disgusted by other things, and from that develop the more general concepts of preference, avoidance, and the like, which seem then to be translated into our developed concepts of GOOD and BAD.

But this is a difficult point to accept. For a start, if anything the psychological evidence points the other way. As babies and toddlers we begin with certain basic responses—yuks and joys—that seem to be coarse versions of thin concepts, and **(p.77)** then, as we move about the world and learn more about it, we refine these concepts and develop more fine-grained responses, often with the help of others. These fine-grained responses are our thick concepts. It makes sense to be a thin prioritarian.

If we have to choose one or the other, we can say that the evidence favours thin prioritarianism on this particular point. However, why think that a story about how mature users of evaluative concepts learn those concepts when they are immature should decide which type of concept is *conceptually* prior? The story might indicate only what it is set out to show, namely 'temporal, learnt priority'. It indicates what sort of concept it is easier for young humans to latch onto and understand, not which sort of concept, if any, should be assumed to be conceptually prior to the other. And anyway, the assumption of a two stage process—where we begin with some thin responses that are already fully formed or become so, and *then* we develop thicker ones—seems far too cut-and-dried an account of something as complex as developmental psychology. The first thought seems to cast doubt on the general argumentative strategy. The second, while accepting this strategy, suggests that even if there are local derivative relationships based on how people learn and develop concepts, it seems better, at least as a safety-first option, to adopt a no priority view as correct for thin and thick concepts generally.

What of our third illustrative debate? Imagine any item deemed good. Presumably it will be deemed good because of certain features it has: perhaps a person is good because she has opened the door for another; perhaps the foodstuff is good because it has a certain texture and taste. Mentioning such descriptive features clearly invites a marrying of evaluative and descriptive content: the person is kind, the foodstuff succulent. So, the thought might go, if one can apply thin concepts such as GOOD, one *has* to be able to apply thick

concepts. Perhaps this suggests, then, that thick concepts are prior in some fashion.

But this is clearly a poor challenge. For the challenge to be successful we need the phenomenon to show clearly that thick concepts are prior and thin ones derivative. Yet the phenomenon shows no such thing. These examples could equally well show the opposite, that thin ones are prior. After all, we might say that if one can apply a thick concept to something one *has* to be able to apply a thin one.²¹ If something is deemed to be a certain thick way then it must follow that it has to be judged to be a certain thin way. If the food is succulent then, *prima facie*, it is good. If the person is gracious, she will also typically be good.

So something has gone awry here. What either sort of theorist needs in order to cement their claim is the idea that a certain sort of evaluative concept applies to an object and the other sort of evaluative concept does not apply. I find it hard to imagine a case where a thing is deemed bad and where that thing has no features that could be used to 'thicken' the thin categorization. Similarly, I find it hard to imagine a **(p.78)** case whereby something can be judged in a thick way and a thin concept not apply, where this case justifies the overall conclusion that the thick is prior to the thin.

Again, the possibility of a no priority view comes into view here. We do not have much positive reason to prefer it, I think, from this little exchange, aside from the fact that wherever we can apply one or more thin concepts, we can apply one or more thick concepts, and vice versa. It seems that when it comes to justifications, we can have explanations going in both directions: this is a thin way because it is a thick way, and this is a thick way because it is a thin way. The two sorts of concept seem to work together and be as useful as one another.

This is, admittedly, a fairly thin and sketchy reason for preferring the no priority view, but there is nothing in this exchange to count against it either. Hence, in the absence of any reasons to the contrary, this at least shows the view as an important contender.

Where do these three illustrative examples leave us? At each stage in our exchanges we saw that it might make sense to think of thin and thick concepts being interdependent. Perhaps the idea of conceptual priority does not make sense, either thinking that the thin is prior to the thick, or that the thick is prior to the thin. And this is telling. We began on this path because we wanted to undercut the motivation for thin prioritarianism, that is centralism. Even if one could make a decent case for having some understanding of thin concepts as thin concepts alone, it is another thing to say that we then must reductively analyse thick concepts partly in terms of them. Such an analysis depends on being able to provide a descriptive *differentia* for each thick concept, a topic to come. But in association with that, we can ask why someone would try to analyse

thick concepts in a separationist manner in the first place. It seems curious to do so if they are used as much as thin concepts, grow interdependently with them in some evaluative network, and seem to have their own point and purpose.

Yet, notice that if we think that this idea has any merit, it is available only to no prioritarians. In saying that thin concepts are derived from the thick in some way, thick prioritarians deny the importance of the relations that thin concepts have with thick ones, that any role they play will be derived and based on thick concepts and so on. If we are to loosen the hold that thin prioritarianism might have over us, and if we do so by emphasizing the interdependence of evaluative concepts and the individual, genuine roles that they all play, we cannot do so by switching to a counter doctrine that denies just that for thin concepts. In short, the broad moral from Hurley's attack on centralism is that it is wrong to think that either sort of concept is prior to the other sort simply because such thinking is very curious and strange. The view that is forming is that thin and thick concepts are as important, useful, and illuminating as each other. Although it is tempting, trying to analyse (and partly reduce) the one in terms of the other is a chimerical and misguided aim.

After all of this, do we have a knock-down argument against separationism here, something that any reasonable thinker could accept as showing the view as **(p. 79)** implausible? I think the answer is negative. I have not exposed any sort of internal inconsistency, and I can imagine comebacks from separationists and worries about my sketched view. Some might think that there is no interconnected network of thin and thick concepts or, if there is, we should plunge deeper and show that there is this network only because the thin sits at the centre or the base. This is enough to motivate us to look for other anti-separationist arguments, even if we think that separationism is on the back foot, with its claims about the priority of the thin being exposed as weak.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have focused on the *genus* side of the *genus-species* relation. Along the way I have voiced support for a few views. I think that separationists are on safer ground if they assume the thin *genus* element in their analysis to be as thin as is possible rather than if they thicken this element up somewhat. As part of this I showed that one can thicken up thin concepts and still talk with some confidence of these concepts being thin. This itself should make us doubt that we can separate thick concepts, for then we are left with what to do with those thicker-than-bare-thin thin concepts. This doubt will be worked out in Chapter Six.

I have also shown that there is an onus on separationists to argue that thin concepts are conceptually prior to thick ones. My short discussion illustrated how difficult it will be to convince people that thin concepts are prior in the way needed.

So there is some reason already to be sceptical of separationism, but we need to think about the other side of the *genus-species* divide. As I have been promising, we now need to think about the *differentia*.

Notes:

(¹) We could frame all of this in terms of ‘should be approved of’, or similar. That does not make any difference to what I say.

(²) As I said, this is rough. I am sensitive to the idea that ‘right’ might be used in everyday speech as a synonym for ‘good’, where people are picking out something that they approve of and want to indicate that they approve of it strongly, not that it is the only approvable thing. However, I reckon that such use is either non-standard or easy to interpret as indicating GOOD. On reflection, my distinction, or something like it, holds.

(³) As mentioned in Chapter One, we can use all sorts of word in everyday language to indicate PRO and CON. I am thinking here of the many cases where we are doing something different from merely indicating bare approval or disapproval.

(⁴) I am well aware that these concepts might themselves be thicker and that some of them may be imperfect for this present point. The thought is simply that some words and concepts in everyday speech are used to indicate a pro-attitude, and some to indicate a con-attitude, where such concepts differ only in terms of strength.

(⁵) Some might not think there are clear differences in kind here. But surely most will think it plausible that there are at least differences of degree here that are philosophically significant.

(⁶) Scheffler (1987), pp. 417ff. One of Scheffler’s other main worries is that Williams charges modern professional moral philosophy with being interested only in thin concepts such as GOOD and RIGHT, whereas in fact many modern moral philosophers are interested in a whole host of concepts. A note from Chapter One bears repetition: Scheffler, unlike Williams in *ELP*, uses the label ‘thin concept’.

(⁷) One alternative is to say that comparisons between different sorts of approval, such as those indicated by OUTSTANDING and OKAY, can be understood fully without the need for comparison. This relies on us being able to understand ‘strong approval’ on its own, without any reference to, or experience of, say, ‘weak approval’. I am sceptical about this, but even if I am wrong, then my example of GOOD and RIGHT still works. Thinking in this way about thin concepts is, to my mind, all to the good and shows my worry that more thought about the thin is required.

(⁸) Gibbard (1992), p. 277.

(⁹) Gibbard (1992), pp. 280–1. The looseness, for example, comes with the “passing beyond those limits”, but it leaves it open as to what the limits are and the extent to which passing beyond them gives us something like a lewd action rather than something different and/or even worse.

(¹⁰) Perhaps a rewording while retaining L-censoriousness might give us some concept that maps onto the idea of sexual activity and display that *is* acceptable. ‘The feeling of L-censoriousness would be warranted if...but this is not one of those occasions and the feeling is not warranted and the sexual display is acceptable.’ I am not sure what concept this would be, exactly, in English, and the wording is not quite correct anyway, since I think that separationists should be wary of assuming that terms such as ‘warranted’ and ‘acceptable’ are nonevaluative. Putting these matters aside, if some feelings do lend themselves to being used by us to analyse two or even a few thick concepts, the spirit of the point in the main text still holds: there will have to be a very large number of individual feelings in order for us to analyse concepts in this way.

(¹¹) Blackburn (1992), pp. 291ff.

(¹²) Or, given what I said in Chapter Three, ‘a range of specific, positive and negative evaluations linked to highly similar concepts’.

(¹³) Blackburn (1992), p. 295.

(¹⁴) So I can talk of ‘conceptual priority’ for simplicity’s sake, I talk of thin concepts being prior in the rest of this chapter, while acknowledging that noncognitivists may prefer the more neutral ‘thin element’.

(¹⁵) Hurley (1989), pp. 13ff. See also Tappolet (2004). Tappolet also assumes that centralism about evaluative concepts fails.

(¹⁶) This position of ‘no priority’ is different from that labelled in the same way in McDowell (1987), p. 160 (cf. Wiggins (1998), pp. 195–6), although McDowell’s (and Wiggins’) idea is indicated in a different part of this study. The idea behind this other ‘no priority’ view is that one could see evaluative concepts as prior to feelings that one is identifying, or one could see the feelings as prior. This links with the ideas regarding Gibbard’s analysis earlier in this chapter. Another, very closely related idea often labelled as a ‘no priority’ view is that idea that *properties* and value judgements are fitted to one another, and that neither one is prior to the other: properties do not come before judgements (as a mind-independent realist might think), nor do judgement come before pseudo-properties, as certain noncognitivists are characterized as thinking. See Wiggins (1998), pp. 196ff.

(¹⁷) Hurley, when opposing centralism, seems to favour a ‘no priority’ approach, but this is not absolutely clear.

(¹⁸) Hurley (1989), p. 15.

(¹⁹) Williams is not explicitly concerned with the issue of conceptual priority in Williams (1985). I think, however, that this extension of Williams’ view is in keeping with his view of the thin and the thick. Recall that he thinks of thin concepts as more abstract concepts, where the suggestion is that they are abstracted from thick ones. I say more about this in Chapter Eight where I outline Williams’ views about evaluative knowledge.

(²⁰) Ronald Dworkin voices this view, albeit briefly and in the context where he thinks that there is some continuum between thick and thin. Dworkin (2011), p. 183.

(²¹) I examine this claim in Chapter Six, but only in a way that supports the overall suggestion that no prioritarianism is attractive.

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