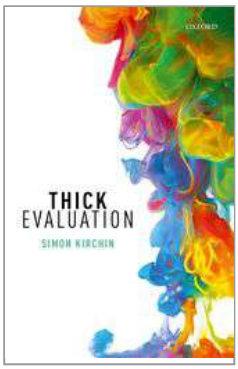

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Abstract and Keywords

Having dismissed two other anti-separationist strategies, this chapter presents the best way of attacking separationism and articulating nonseparationism. It is denied that thick concepts can be split into thin evaluation and nonevaluative descriptive content by showing that thick evaluation is itself a basic and fundamental response to the world. Evaluation cannot be reduced to stances that are merely pro or con, as separationists do, because doing so results in a strange view of the world. This idea is elaborated in many ways: the proposal's radical nature is revealed since the notion of the evaluative is shown to stretch further than one might think; it is suggested that there is no obvious clear dividing line between evaluative and nonevaluative concepts; there is a final discussion of evaluative flexibility; and two worries from Chapter Two are met. Work by Jonathan Dancy, Philippa Foot, Gilbert Ryle, and Bernard Williams is discussed.

Keywords: Jonathan Dancy, Philippa Foot, evaluative flexibility, nonseparationism, pro and con, Gilbert Ryle, Bernard Williams

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I get to the heart of the debate about thin and thick concepts and, in so doing, reveal two very different pictures about them. The positive nonseparationist picture I draw understands evaluation in a way different from how evaluation is understood by separationists. My overall argumentative stance against separationism and for nonseparationism should therefore be understood in this light. Recall from Chapter One my argumentative aim. I do not show to devastating effect some fatal incoherence in separationism, or similar. Indeed, I

believe that there is no such flaw. Instead, I aim to show that nonseparationism understands and casts thin and thick evaluative concepts in a better light than separationism and, further, that in the end separationism emerges as strange and curious. Recall also my hope that neutrals will be persuaded to side with me; it may be that some separationists will question their allegiance also, but I do not expect many to do so.

There a number of ideas at work in this chapter and I now list them. Most are repeated from earlier adverts in the book.

(a) In this chapter one aim is at the forefront: to persuade people that there is a notion of the evaluative at work in everyday thought and language that goes beyond notions of positive and negative stance (pro and con, and even pro-in-a-way and con-in-a-way), even if it also encompasses them. Further, such thick concepts cannot be separated into component parts. We may cast this position in various ways, using terms such as ‘entangled’, or describing thick concepts as ‘unitary’ and perhaps as ‘basic’, ‘non-derivative’ and the like. Whichever terms we use to flag up particular ideas, the central notion I expressed in the first sentence of this paragraph is clear. And it can be amplified by another central idea mentioned in Chapter One also: thick evaluative concepts are as wholly or purely evaluative as thin concepts are, even if some evaluative concepts are more specific than others. This claim then invites us to reflect in detail on what our conception of the evaluative is.

(b) Following on, then, and to hark back to labels introduced in Chapter One, in this chapter I am motivating the liberal view of evaluation, and showing the conservative view to be unattractive. *Liberals* think that some concepts can be categorized as evaluative even if some instances of their use have no positive or negative view conveyed, no pro or con stance to them. *Conservatives* think that there must be such **(p.112)** a stance in each and every instance for a concept to be an evaluative concept. (I provide more detail of each position later.) So according to liberals we can apply a concept such as MACABRE legitimately on some occasion where its use does not convey any positive or negative stance or view (the judge may not intend any, the audience does not infer any), and yet the concept overall can still be called an evaluative concept and it can be taken to be used evaluatively in this instance. I aim to defend the possibility of this position through reflection on many examples of how we use concepts, and make it obvious that we assume such a position in the first place.

A quick note. How does the liberal–conservative disagreement intersect with the separationist–nonseparationist disagreement? They are different, after all. Clearly I am a liberal-nonseparationist: I believe that our everyday notion of evaluation is not exhausted by notions of pro and con, and I believe that thick concepts cannot be separated into component parts. The special nature of my position, I suppose, is that I think the best version of nonseparationism has the

liberal notion of evaluation at its heart. As I have said before, to say that thick concepts unite (thin) evaluation and descriptive content is to give away too much to separationists already. We need a notion of evaluation that they simply do not typically presume is on the table. This then takes me to the next possible position. All of the separationists we have met are conservatives, since they implicitly assume all the time that evaluation just is positive or negative, pro or con, although they typically use the language of good and bad. What about other possibilities? A conservative-nonseparationism is certainly coherent, but I believe it is vulnerable to attack by separationists. One thinks of thick concepts as unitary concepts, yet what is united is evaluation and descriptive content as separationists conceive them. (This was my worry expressed at the end of Chapter Five, and noting the vulnerability of this position leads to the liberal outlook I defend.) Liberal-separationism appears to be a very strange position, verging on the incoherent. A person occupying this position assumes that we should characterize evaluation as being something that is not exhausted by pro and con stances, something that appears to be (as I take it to be) neither descriptive nor pro-or-con-only, yet is also something that can be separated into component parts. Perhaps someone could make this work, but I would want to know what one would be separating this evaluation into: what *are* the component parts? For reasons of brevity, in what is going to be a lengthy chapter anyway, I will ignore this fourth position from now on.

(c) Having sorted out some positions in logical space, I should make clear a different aspect of my view that will occupy much of my time in this chapter, and again I have raised it before. I argue that although there may be clear examples of descriptive, nonevaluative concepts, and also clear examples of evaluative concepts—that is, evaluative concepts *as separationists understand them*—I also argue that there are many examples of concepts that do not fit neatly into these two camps. Furthermore, I argue that such concepts deserve to be thought of as evaluative concepts by theorists and, from what I can tell, are routinely thought of in this way in everyday thought and activity.

(p.113) Let me pause so that we can take this in, for it may seem confusing. The phrase in italics in the previous paragraph is key. I think that there are many examples of evaluative concepts, and that many concepts can be classed as evaluative, probably more than separationists think. That is because I have a more liberal view of evaluation, something that is not exhausted by the conveyance of either pro or con stance on any and every instance of the concept’s use. So, I do not think there will be much dispute between myself and most or all separationists that KIND is an evaluative concept. (The analysis of it will be different, but that is another matter.) However, there is very likely to be different reasons for our view that it is evaluative. Whereas separationists will think it evaluative only because it is normally used to convey pro views, I think that while such a concept can and is used in this way, it is used to do other

things as well. That extra thought leads me to think about many other concepts also, and mount the case for them being classified as evaluative.

There is a further part to my view that may well muddy the waters even more. In this chapter and book I do *not* provide conditions, let alone necessary and sufficient conditions, at some exacting level of detail that any and every concept has to satisfy in order to be evaluative.[1] This is because I think there is strong reason to believe there is a grey area between those concepts that are obviously evaluative and those concepts that are obviously nonevaluative. Or, in other words, I think that there is strong reason to think that there is no hard and fast dividing line between the evaluative and the nonevaluative. I believe this is shown by many examples. This view may seem counterintuitive and indeed downright gnomic, if only for reasons of logic and English: we have two clear categories—evaluation and nonevaluation/descriptive—that are clear negations of each other, so surely any concept must be one or the other. We cannot have any third category, grey area, or anything else. I aim to show, instead, that when we reflect on a range of examples, we can see the possibility of this grey area and, therefore, what we might well wish to give up is an adherence to the strict, unbending idea that we have two mutually exclusive categories which exhaust the field.[2]

So my focus on various examples will attempt to press two main, interrelated ideas. First, that an evaluative concept can be evaluative (overall, and in any particular instance) and not convey a positive or negative view in every instance of its use. Second, even if there are clear examples of descriptive concepts and clear examples of evaluative concepts by separationists' lights (perhaps concepts that are exclusively used to convey positive or negative view)—and, to stress, I do believe there are clear **(p.114)** examples of each type—there are many concepts 'in between'. Their character is such that we at the very least may wish to extend the notion of what an evaluative concept is, simply because we are stretching our notion of the evaluative (in effect, the first point just mentioned). We may also wish to call into doubt whether there is a clear and fast dividing line between the evaluative and the nonevaluative in the first place, strange as that may initially sound.

(d) Recall another important part of my view, namely that I think of thick concepts as being essentially evaluative. By this phrase I mean that a thick concept has the ability to convey evaluation because such evaluation is a central, necessary—that is, essential—part of its nature. Indeed, talk only of conveyance of evaluation misses something. These concepts *just are* evaluative, and this is partly expressed because they can convey evaluation, such as pro and con views. The opposing view says that such concepts, while they may be able to convey evaluation at times, do so only accidentally or contingently, because of one's

tone of voice, linguistic context, or other matters external to the nature of the concept itself.

In this chapter I am motivating the liberal view. So much of that view, in fact, relies on the notion of evaluation I am suggesting being an essential part of the concept. It is not just that pro and con views are conveyed, but that the concept's very nature is to have a variety of functions and to be a certain way. (Hence my 'just are' qualifier in the previous paragraph.) These various functions and aspects may be influenced by situation and tone of voice, certainly. But all of this malleability is something that is also part of what the concept is; anything that changes should not automatically be thought to be only accidental to the concept and a contingent feature of context.

So, although this chapter motivates the liberal view, my defence of my position continues into Chapter Seven where I consider an important, recent challenge due to Pekka Väyrynen. Recall my brief summary from Chapter One. In essence Väyrynen questions whether many of our concepts that are seen as evaluative and used in evaluative ways are essentially evaluative, rather than having evaluative uses that are only accidental. (He phrases the question by asking whether concepts classed as thick are 'inherently evaluative'; I comment on this terminological difference in Chapter Seven.) MACABRE is one of many examples that Väyrynen will have in mind, but he also worries about pretty much all the concepts routinely accepted as thick and evaluative. He holds a conservative view of what it is to be an evaluative concept. Considering his position is important. If we assume that this present chapter is successful and that I can persuade people that what evaluative concepts have is not exhausted by pro and con stances, then this may still leave a doubt in people's minds that evaluation could be different from how conservatives think, and yet still be accidental to thick concepts. Reflecting on Väyrynen's arguments and attempting to rebut them reveals more of what my view entails.

(e) Here are a couple more ideas, and the chapter structure, before we begin. First, I have used a number of examples in this book thus far. I have used KIND, **(p.115)** ELEGANT, and JUST plenty of times, along with infrequent uses of other concepts such as INTEGRITY and WISE. I have used other concepts as well, but perhaps there have been too few exciting examples. Concepts I have in mind include MACABRE, as well as MUNDANE, JEALOUS, DULL-WITTED, HUMANE, JEJUNE, DEFIANT, TANTALIZING, STIMULATING, KITSCH, CONTORTED, DISARMING, SCINTILLATING, SINISTER, HONOURABLE, RIDICULOUS, GENTLE, PICARESQUE, SLOB, ANTAGONISTIC, TANGLED, TRANSCENDENT, STRAIGHTFORWARD, BOLD, MARVELLOUS, TASTY, DIABOLICAL, and many more examples that this list suggests.[3] As mentioned, by working through examples such as these, I am to show the plausibility of my views. I am aware that someone could easily question whether some of the concepts above are evaluative or thick. They might accept GOOD and RIGHT as

evaluative, and perhaps JUST and BEAUTIFUL, but draw the line at STIMULATING and TANGLED. They might certainly baulk if we focus on the qualifiers in phrases such as essentially or inherently evaluative: 'Is TANGLED really *essentially* evaluative?' Such a worry is understandable, but I think it is wrong, and that is the point of this chapter.

Second, this chapter is somewhat complex. In service of the main themes mentioned above, it gathers together a number of ideas, some of which have been mentioned before and some of which are new. I hope that the structure I have chosen helps to relate those points to each other and builds a clean narrative rather than adds to the confusion.

In §6.2 I carry on from the last chapter by diagnosing why the disentangling argument fails to convince. I then begin the main story. I do not dive straight into discussion of the liberal view but instead build to it slowly. I think it important to put the reader in a mood to be receptive to it. First of all, then, in §§6.3–6.5 I encourage us to see how thick concepts have a number of different functions. I focus on Williams' characterization of thick and thin concepts in order to do this, and go quite deeply into it. I think Williams goes wrong in an interesting way in his account of thick and thin concepts or, as I think it more accurate to say, a slogan associated with his view misguides us. I illuminate why this is by thinking about Ryle's account of thick description.[4] In discussing Ryle I outline his view of concepts generally. All of this will be important background and motivation for my view.

Having discussed Williams and Ryle, I put forward my view across various sub-sections of §6.6 by thinking about a number of examples and drawing morals from them. I round off the discussion with thoughts from Foot. In §6.7 I return to separationism and compare its picture of thick and thin concepts with mine. In §6.8 I lay out some possible challenges to my view which set the agenda for the final chapters. In §6.9 I conclude.

(p.116) 6.2 Previous Arguments

The disentangling argument and the employment of the shapelessness hypothesis are not downright hopeless. Any nonseparationists should agree with the spirit of the overall claim: the evaluative is shapeless with respect to the descriptive, and one cannot disentangle thick concepts into component parts. But writers seem to fixate on the idea of shapelessness and they typically give scant regard to asking in a deep way why it is true, assuming it is. This is wrong, to my mind: it is absolutely imperative that we ask why shapelessness is true and use this result as the opportunity to think about the nature of the evaluative. In the absence of the sort of questioning that I think is necessary we end up by saying—or at least I did—that the best version of the argument is an 'epistemic' version. This can cause discomfort for separationists but it does not seem fatal.

There is therefore important motivation to consider the ideas of this chapter. Furthermore, if nonseparationists are not careful, they will be open to a fatal attack. The point is to argue that evaluative concepts cannot be separated into component parts, and that they are essentially evaluative. In arguing for this claim, supposedly, anti-separationists will point to the shapeless nature of evaluative concepts. But what happens if the supposed shapelessness nature of evaluative concepts does not show them to be essentially evaluative and, by implication, distinctly different from other concepts? Indeed, the reasons why they are shapeless may have nothing to do with the fact that they are evaluative, essential or otherwise. Väyrynen puts forward this challenge and articulates it nicely.[5] He argues that the shapelessness hypothesis cuts no ice against his view that thick concepts are not essentially or inherently evaluative. Consider OLD. This is a context-sensitive concept: an object can be considered to be old in one context (or in comparison with a range of other objects) and yet considered young in a different context. There is both a strong suspicion that there is no way of capturing OLD in 'non-OLD terms', and that the context-sensitivity of OLD is what explains its shapelessness with respect to the non-OLD.[6] (A listing of examples in non-OLD terms of the object-groups to which items considered OLD are compared may very well fail to capture OLDNESS fully and definitively.) In addition, it seems plausible to think of OLD as a descriptive concept. We can use it to convey pro or con evaluations, such as when we insult someone by calling them old with a certain tone of voice. But mature users of English know this evaluation is not core to the concept. (Think of FAT and CHAIR from Chapter Two.) We can use OLD and many other examples to then cast doubt on thick concepts. Many thick concepts seem to be context-sensitive, and perhaps it is this that explains their shapelessness. Or perhaps there is some **(p.117)** other reason than context-sensitivity that explains the shapelessness. What does not explain it is something special about the evaluative, that these concepts are essentially evaluative in a way that other concepts, such as OLD, are not.

Here is a quick link back. In §5.6 of Chapter Five we encountered claim (B) which talked of evaluative concepts being essentially 'human-laden' (in a special way) since they reflect our interests. But this is bluster, for many concepts, not just thick ones, can be described in these terms. Väyrynen thinks that nonseparationists who use the shapelessness hypothesis have to articulate the crucial difference between the evaluative and the descriptive, so as to show why the evaluative—or the shapelessness of the thickly evaluative—is different such that it justifies the evaluative and thick concepts as being treated as fundamental to our thought. He is sceptical that this can be done.

I return to address this in Chapter Seven. For now we can agree that Väyrynen's is a good worry. In addition we can contrast his challenge with the challenge I set myself. Instead of assuming that there is some dividing line between the evaluative and the descriptive, and then being caught trying to articulate what

that difference is, I prefer to cast doubt on there being a dividing line in the first place.

What of the first argumentative strategy I built to in Chapter Four? The quick debates at the end of that chapter were concerned with whether thin or thick concepts were conceptually prior to the other. These may be instructive, although we saw through my illustrative exchanges that pretty soon the debate may run out of steam. I bring out a different point now in relation to this present chapter with a simple question: why think that the thin is conceptually prior when you have not given thought at the start to what the evaluative is? The assumption running though the first few chapters is that the thin just is the evaluative, and the thick is evaluative-*plus-something-else*, with the debate about priority being presumed (either implicitly or explicitly) on those terms: do we add something to evaluation that exists prior, or do we take something away from the more complicated concept to reach simple evaluation for all thin and thick concepts? What I am doing now is explicitly thinking about the terms upon which this debate is built.

I pursue that task now and start by thinking about the work of Williams and Ryle.

6.3 Williams' Distinction

The aim in this section and the next is to introduce the idea that standard thick concepts have a number of functions and roles, and that we should not narrowly pigeon-hole such concepts in the way that people sometimes do. As mentioned, this will, I hope, warm us up for later thoughts to come later on.

Recall that Williams, in *ELP*, draws the distinction between thin and thick concepts differently from how I and others draw it. He thinks of thin concepts as being wholly action-guiding, and thick concepts as being both action-guiding and **(p.118)** world-guided. This *summarizing slogan*, as I refer to it, is used by both Williams and others to capture his views.[7] Yet, his views are more subtle than this as I show. However, even accepting that there is more detail to his view than the slogan captures, I believe both that the slogan is a good way of capturing the foundational point of ethical concepts, but also that this slogan is a bad way of capturing thin and thick concepts in general, across many domains, and that even in the case of ethics it hides important points.[8] Williams may have been led to say what he says because of his focus on ethical concepts, but even with that acknowledged we need to correct the view that the slogan strongly implies. In doing so we begin to see what is going on with the evaluative generally.

Let us consider the three main passages in *ELP* where Williams defines what he means by a thick concept. In a first passage he discusses the fact–value distinction, where he is arguing against Hare and other prescriptivists.

> What has happened is that the theorists [i.e. prescriptivists] have brought the fact–value distinction to language rather than finding it revealed there. What they have found are a lot of those 'thicker' or more specific ethical notions I have already referred to, such as *treachery* and *promise* and *brutality* and *courage*, which seem to express a union of fact and value. The way these notions are applied is determined by what the world is like (for instance, by how someone has behaved), and yet, at the same time, their application usually involves a certain valuation of the situation, of persons or actions. Moreover, they usually (though not necessarily directly) provide reasons for action.[9]

Later he says:

> Many exotic examples of these [thick concepts] can be drawn from other cultures, but there are enough left in our own: *coward, lie, brutality, gratitude*, and so forth. They are characteristically related to reasons for action. If a concept of this kind applies, this often provides someone with a reason for action, though that reason need not be a decisive one and may be outweighed by other reasons…Of course, exactly what reason for action is provided, and to whom, depends on the situation, in ways that may well be governed by this and by other ethical concepts, but some general connection with action is clear enough. We may say, summarily, that such concepts are 'action-guiding'.
>
> At the same time, their application is guided by the world.[10]

Lastly he contrasts thick with thin concepts.

> This brings us back to the question whether the reflective level might generate its own ethical knowledge….[I see] no hope of extending to this level the kind of world-guidedness we have been considering in the case of the thick ethical concepts. Discussions at the reflective level, if **(p.119)** they have the ambition of considering all ethical experience and arriving at the truth about the ethical, will necessarily use the most general and abstract ethical concepts, such as 'right', and those concepts do not display world-guidedness (which is why they were selected by prescriptivism in its attempt to find a pure evaluative element from which it could detach world-guidedness).[11]

Certainly the summarizing slogan is not a wholly incorrect way of characterizing Williams' view. He considers thick and thin concepts to be different, and the latter to be wholly action-guiding and to display no world-guidedness. Yet, there is more to say.

Here are three brief points that indicate the detail. First, we might have to think hard, in a way that Williams' writing often invites us to, about how and when concept-application will provide us with reasons to act. Williams seems to accept, in the second passage, that because concepts 'often' provide people with reasons to act, then they sometimes do not despite his insistence on the characteristic point of them. Following on from this we can, second, think about Williams' first passage. How is it that concepts offer or embody reasons 'directly', there and then in a situation, and how and when do they guide action only indirectly? Perhaps indirect guidance is provided when a type of action is described in a steady drip-drip sort of a way, and action occurs only when the context is right. Third, and relatedly, we will also have to think hard about the nature and character of the reasons that the application of ethical concepts creates or embodies. This links in an obvious way to Williams' much-discussed distinction between internal and external reasons.[12]

Even if the summarizing slogan is a decent summary of Williams' views, we can see already that, as is often the case with summaries, it leaves much that is interesting unsaid. That takes me to the next section.

6.4 Where the Slogan Goes Wrong

Williams clearly thinks of 'action-guidingness' as the central and foundational characteristic or point of both thin and thick concepts. But his summarizing slogan is misleading because it hides one qualifier he explicitly makes: thick concepts *often* provide reasons for action, not that they *always* do so. The slogan would lead someone to think that Williams thinks the latter, but clearly it is the former he advocates, and he is surely sensible to do so.

Indeed, we can see that as regards other sorts of evaluative concept, not only do they sometimes not provide reasons for action, Williams thinks it is unwise to see **(p.120)** them as being characteristically related to action. Elsewhere in *ELP*, earlier than the passages quoted above, he criticizes Hare for characterizing all evaluative concepts along prescriptivist lines.

> In saying that anything is good or bad, admirable or low, outstanding or inferior of its kind, we are in effect telling others or ourselves to do something—as the explanation typically goes, to choose something. All evaluation has to be linked to action.
>
> This result is not easy to believe. It seems false to the spirit of many aesthetic evaluations, for instance: it seems to require our basic perspective on the worth of pictures to be roughly that of potential collectors. Even within the realm of the ethical, it is surely taking too narrow a view of human merits to suppose that people recognized as good are people that we are being told to imitate.[13]

The worry Williams has is that if all evaluation is linked to action then it reduces the idea of evaluation to choosing, or promoting, or recommending, or *doing something* beyond (or as part of) the act of categorization.[14] When it comes to aesthetic concepts, are we to assume that if we praise an outfit as glamorous, say, we are expressing our desire and intention to wear it, or telling people to wear it, or anything else similar? Clearly we do use aesthetic concepts in this way, but we do not always do so.

Let me continue in this vein by detailing my previous sentence. First, no one should doubt that we do use aesthetic concepts to guide action. It is not as if aesthetic concepts exist in some 'pure realm' devoid of any connection to what we do. We make choices and act on the basis of aesthetic categorization all the time. I choose to wear an outfit because it is eye-catchingly beautiful, while you decline because you think it is garish. We can also disagree about which people are attractive and swop various evaluative concepts in our discussion. (Recall Betty and Frank from Chapter Two.) Despite our disagreements about clothes and people, we may both decide not to buy a certain novel because we have read a review of it that describes it as naive and clunky. And so on.

These are contexts where a direct, unmediated choice is forced upon us, but action-guidance can occur indirectly as well, even in the aesthetic realm. There may be no intention in my mind at the time I categorize something using an aesthetic concept, but there is no reason to think that a reason to act may not come later. My evaluation of a book can lead you in future, when a direct choice faces you, to spend your money in one direction and not another.

Yet, Williams is right in the passage to draw attention to the fact that we often do not use aesthetic concepts in this way. We can pass judgement on outfits, novels, and many other things with no intention at all to express our desires about them, or get **(p.121)** people to do things in relation to them. We simply wish to categorize them in a certain way. Further, we use certain aesthetic concepts to explore what we think about them and, indeed, to reveal their nature better. 'Well, why is it naive? Mainly because the set-pieces, though probably decent in the abstract, were too clunky and came too thick and fast to allow the characters room to breathe.' We also use aesthetic concepts to contrast one thing with another. Action-guidance might come, but it might not. The link between concept-application and reason-giving might be so weak and tenuous that it is misguided to speak of there being any link at all, even something indirect.

An advocate for the literal application of Williams' slogan for all evaluative concepts could counter by claiming that action-guidance will come at *some* point, no matter how indirect. I am not so sure that it will. But even if it does, this objection takes us down the wrong argumentative track. The present discussion is *not* concerned with whether we can find counter-examples to show

that an evaluative concept can be applied with no consequence at all for the guidance of action. The debate is whether talk of ‘action-guidingness’ should be seen as the best way of characterizing the *fundamental* nature of aesthetic concepts and, more broadly, all evaluative concepts. On that point, just imagine that when reading *ELP* you had come across this summarizing slogan: ‘thin aesthetic concepts are action-guiding, while thick aesthetic concepts are both action-guiding and world-guided’. I suspect any reader would have been a little unnerved. This surprise would have remained even after digging beyond the slogan and acknowledging the qualifiers about the frequency and directness of the action-guidance provided. It just seems wrong to think that aesthetic concepts are primarily concerned with the guidance of action and that casting them in this way reveals something fundamental about their nature. Williams himself saw this.

That is enough for us to stop and say that Williams, or at least his slogan, was wrong to characterize *all* thin and thick concepts in terms of the guidance of action. As I have already said, perhaps his focus on ethical concepts led Williams to say what he says about all evaluative concepts. But, beyond this, might we worry also about ethical concepts? Notice that in the fourth passage quoted, although the focus is on aesthetic concepts, Williams mentions ethical concepts at the end in the same regard.

I think there is a difference of degree between typical ethical and aesthetic concepts. (The qualifier ‘typical’ indicates the fact that I do not think we can be too precise here.) Ethical concepts are more frequently and pointedly related to action than aesthetic concepts are. Ethics seems to have at its core how we interact with other people: how we treat them and how we respond to what they do. It seems to involve the giving of guidance, the organization of our lives, and decisions about what to do. It also covers the area of our lives where we categorize and decide what we do for ourselves. (The overlap here with prudential concepts is obvious.) This is why Williams’ summarizing slogan in a book about ethics does not surprise in the way I imagined an ‘aesthetic version’ surprising us. There is nothing bad about saying that ethical concepts are characteristically related to action, assuming that in doing this **(p.122)** we are drawing a contrast with those evaluative concepts that are not characteristically like this.

Yet, I stress that even in the case of ethics we should not think that any sort of problem is solved and that we can carry on blithely using the summarizing slogan. The slogan hides Williams’ qualifier about reasons for action only often being provided. If there are cases where no reasons are provided, then those concepts must have some other function or functions, at least on those occasions. And, probably, they have this other function or functions on occasions where reasons for action *are* provided. Indeed, it is obvious that ethical concepts can be used to categorize and shape our view of things in a way that is unrelated

to any attempt to influence action. We just want to understand better in an ethical way what the thing is like, and what our view of the thing is like. How does it compare with those other things and how complex is it? Evaluative concepts allow us to do all of this, and ethical concepts are no exception.

To drive the point home we can think about evaluative epistemic concepts such as WISE, KNOWLEDGEABLE, DULL-WITTED, IGNORANT, GULLIBLE, CLEVER, SHREWD, and NAIVE. Just as in the case of ethics we can describe these concepts as related to the guidance of action. We choose one dictionary rather than another because we believe it is more comprehensive, and we listen to the views of one person rather than another because she understands better what is going on. But talking of action-guidance is too broadbrush here, for it is obvious that there is a certain class of actions—if we call them that—that epistemic concepts typically apply to. These concepts are characteristically related to the formation of beliefs and the development of understanding. So if we were to form a summarizing slogan for epistemic concepts, we might talk of 'belief-formation' or (the ugly) 'understanding-enabling', say, rather than 'action-guidance'.

However, as should be clear, I think we should try to resist the temptation to form any such summarizing slogans. As in the case of ethics and aesthetics, epistemic concepts do more than merely give guidance as to what beliefs we should form. We also use them to categorize things in ways related to this aspect of our lives. Someone may be described as knowledgeable without there being any intention that we should go to her when we want to ask a question. And a scientific method may be described as reliable merely so that we can distinguish it from its rivals. The moral here is that it is a mistake to think that all evaluative concepts should be thought to be wholly about the guidance of action or wholly about something else. Evaluative concepts have a number of different roles, even those from within areas such as ethics or aesthetics. If we *are* tempted to use summarizing slogans, we need to make clear that they are just starting ideas from which we can extend our knowledge and which need to be rethought in the light of further reflection.

Having said all of this, a reader might worry about my tendency throughout this book to speak of thick concepts as being both evaluative and descriptive. I happen to think these two labels are broader than Williams'. But the spirit of the charge may **(p.123)** still stick: being wedded to these two labels rules out certain sorts of function that are important when it comes to thick concepts. Indeed that is true. Ironically, the idea of action-guidance is not obvious from talking of 'the evaluative'. But to deflect this charge the reader should realize that this whole book is an extended reflection on what is meant by 'the evaluative' and 'the descriptive' in this context, and as I hope is clear, I am

happy to be generous and open-minded about what sorts of action or function are encompassed by ‘the evaluative’.[15]

What of the other part of Williams’ slogan? Thick concepts are world-guided, while thin concepts are not. This seems odd, at face value. Imagine the everyday application of concepts and terms to the world. (Even separationists will be able to entertain the idea that, at first glance, evaluative concepts can be and are legitimately applied to things.) At this level it seems obvious that people can be honest and horrible, and that actions can be good and bad. The use of these concepts and terms seems guided by how things are in the world, for there are many things in the world to which these concepts and terms apply.

So the slogan has to be implying more than what it says simply on the surface, that thick concepts are world-guided while thin concepts are not. As mentioned in Chapter One, Williams thinks of thick concepts being more important than thin ones. (He is the best example of a thick prioritarian.) The clue is in the fact, mentioned in Chapter One, note 11, that Williams does not refer to ‘thin concepts’ by this label in *ELP*, but instead talks of the “most general and abstract concepts”, as in the third passage above. Extrapolating, but only a little, we can form Williams’ view. Thick concepts give us a way of categorizing things. (Indeed, we might say that the *stuff* of the world becomes isolatable and understandable as separate *things* partly in virtue of our categorizations.) They are specific and relate to, and help to pick out, aspects of individual things to which our attention is drawn. We note that some things bear great similarities to each other, and when we apply a concept to one thing we apply that same concept to another thing. And, in fact, concepts develop partly on the basis that similarities are noticed by us. Crucially, for Williams’ view, some evaluative concepts are very specific. Some less so. The really specific ones relate, we can imagine, to only a few examples. The less specific the concept, the more likely it is that it will apply to more things.[16] We form less specific concepts often by abstracting from the really specific concepts and the things to which they apply.

(p.124) So, to take a family of examples I have already used, we can distinguish actions by marking them with concepts such as SYMPATHETIC, EMPATHETIC, COMPASSIONATE, and THOUGHTFUL. Despite the differences between these concepts and the examples they apply to, most or all actions categorized with these concepts can be categorized using KIND. Williams’ guiding thought is that thin concepts, such as GOOD and RIGHT, sit at the top of our ‘abstraction tree’.[17] They are the end point of many abstractions and, as such, have little or no important connection with any of the things they are used to categorize. They do not generate or ground the sort of evaluative knowledge that can be used by a community to ward off any threat of relativism. They provide little understanding of the world because they are so abstract and

removed from what the world is like. In short, they are not world-guided, but are merely thin content formed from other, more specific concepts.

In conclusion, Williams' detailed prose is, as one might well imagine, nuanced and reflective. His slogan does not do his thoughts justice. I have no criticism to offer of the slogan's use of 'world-guided' in the way in which I criticized 'action-guidance'. I say more in Chapter Eight about evaluative knowledge picking up on my comments just now about the 'abstraction tree'. I think that Williams is too pessimistic about thin concepts and sees them only through the prism of thick concepts. The reason for me talking about world-guidance now is so that I can introduce Ryle's work on the idea of thick description. This allows me to reinforce my criticism of the slogan: concepts, both individual concepts and concepts of a certain particular type, have a variety of functions. Conveying this idea has been the main task of this section and the one previous. Looking at Ryle will help us to broaden our understanding of what is going on. This is all with a view to understanding the evaluative better.

6.5 Ryle on Thick Descriptions

I have three aims in this section. First, to understand Williams in the light of Ryle. Second, to introduce the suggestion that thick concepts are a type of thick description, that is that they are a simple subset of the larger group. While this idea is partly correct, matters are not as straightforward as they seem. Third, to set out Ryle's view of concepts. This takes us to §6.6 where I lay out my view of the evaluative and defend it.

We can think about the idea of a thick description by starting with one of Ryle's examples from Ryle (1968). He thinks about how we distinguish different sorts of wink. He imagines a succession of boys who wink in different ways and for **(p.125)** different reasons.[18] The first boy has an involuntary twitch. The second winks conspiratorially to an accomplice. Yet he does so in a slow, contorted, and conspicuous manner. The third boy parodies the second in order to give malicious amusement to his cronies. He acts clumsily, just as the second did, but he is not himself clumsy. This third boy is later imagined in a different setting, and so becomes a fourth example: he practises his parody and so rehearses for a (hoped-for) public performance. This boy is later imagined in another setting, thereby creating a fifth example. When winking he had not been trying to parody the second boy, but had been "trying to gull the grown-ups into the false belief that he was trying to do so".[19]

Ryle asks what is common to these examples. The obvious answer is the thinnest description, such as 'the boy contracted his eyelids'. Ryle thinks this applies to every case, and we can say of each that there is a physical movement. However, he presses two points. First, in order to distinguish the boys' actions—note, not just their physical movements—we need to employ thick descriptions. This need (which is my word) is not just a matter of ease of language, that thick

descriptions act merely as summations of various (separable) elements that could be expressed without them if only we had the time and patience. We need particular descriptions rather than others because some actions are so complex that they cannot be separated into parts that can be described separately. We can see this through a second point. Ryle argues that the boy who winks conspiratorially does not do, say, five things that should be treated as separate from one another: (i) winks deliberately, (ii) to someone in particular, (ii) in order to impart a certain message, (iv) according to an understood code, (v) without the cognizance of the rest of the company. For Ryle it is better to describe the boy as doing one complex thing, something with a number of aspects, rather than saying that the boy is doing five separate things at one and the same time. In some cases of a particular action described in a particular way one can be successful (or fail) in one aspect only if one is successful (or fail) in other aspects. Ryle refers to clauses such as those just expressed as embodying 'success-and-failure' conditions, and this is a key point for him. Actions such as winks and conspiratorial winks are to be distinguished from physical movements, such as involuntary twitches, because the former have success-and-failure conditions, which in turn guide us in our descriptions or, better, are embodied in our descriptions.

We can elaborate. Imagine an example one step on from Ryle's list. A boy is both parodying a fellow pupil, with the complexity familiar from above, *and* is trying to win a girl's heart. On some understandings of this description we can have a case where not all aspects of the action stand or fall together: the success-and-failure conditions are separate. The boy can parody the other pupil without trying to impress the girl and he can impress the girl in all manner of ways. In the sort of understanding I have in mind of this case it seems right to say that our winker is **(p.126)** trying to do two things. In this case one part—'trying to win a girl's heart'—can be dropped. That would change the action as described previously, but it seems as if we have two actions that were conjoined anyway, all along, and dropping the one aspect will leave the other intact and unchanged.

We could have had a different description—one that some readers may have in mind—where aspects of the action might well stand or fall together: the boy is trying to win the girls' heart *by* parodying his fellow pupil. Perhaps someone corrects the previous description: 'No, Eric isn't parodying Ernie *and* trying to win Vanessa's heart. He's trying to impress her *by* impersonating his friend.' Here I think it plausible to say that the winker is doing only one complex thing.[20]

This shows how and why the description is paramount for Ryle. As we might term it, there is the physical movement, which in this case is the contraction of the eyelids, and there are the various actions. Each individual physical movement can be picked out with the same thin description: 'the boy's eyelid contracted'. But for Ryle there seems to be no one core thing that is the action in his examples which then gets added to separable aspects, or to which separable

aspects are added in order to create more complex actions. So, to finish with my two cases just given, while in the first case (the one that employs '*and*') dropping the part whereby Eric is imagined to be winning the girl's heart will not change the part or action where Eric is imagined to be parodying Ernie, in the second case ('*by*') it is not obvious at all that a subtraction of the former aspect will leave the latter aspect intact and unchanged.

We can generalize. If there is a range of similar actions such as Ryle's range of winks, described using related but different thick descriptions, then for Ryle there need be no core that all has in exactly the same way. This is true even if we imagine that the core is 'the boy winked'. For a start, it will not cover our first case, of the involuntary twitcher. But also the ways in which people wink are different and embody different success-and-failure conditions. There is no reason to think that we have one thing, winking, which is exactly the same thing at the core of each action to which we simply add separable aspects that do not change it in any way as we move from case to case. This is why I talk of Ryle in this book. It is clear to me that this idea of his is nonseparationist in outlook, even though we must grant that it is not developed using or applied to evaluative concepts.

These points can be hard to see when it comes to winking simply because 'wink' is often used colloquially to describe the physical act of contracting the eyelid. It is easier to see the thought with the activity that is Ryle's prime focus in his (1968), namely thinking, for thinking is not colloquially thought of as a physical activity. There are many types of thinking: pondering, meditating, coming to understand, **(p.127)** and so on. These examples are exemplified in many ways: mental arithmetic, writing on a piece of paper, chatting with others, arguing with others, manipulating some wood, playing notes on a piano, picking food from a shelf, and so on.[21] Are we confident that there is one separable core activity called 'thinking' common to all these examples that we could isolate and that stands revealed as the very same thing in each instance? Can we also, therefore, imagine that we would then be left with one or more separable element for each action that would be our remainder? The answer is surely not an obvious yes, and, I think, we would and should be inclined to say no. For Ryle, when we describe an action with a thick description, we are labelling something that is a unitary thing.

Of course, in one sense all the examples of winking and thinking have something in common, namely the former are all cases of winking and the latter are all cases of thinking. But this simple, innocent point can lead us astray. It would be wrong to move from this thought to think that there was a core, narrowly construed action of winking or thinking that was divorced from all its instances and which was conjoined with all the various aspects to create those individual instances. Instead, those aspects of acts of winking and thinking help to us appreciate what winking and thinking are, in a fuller way. This is why there is no

simple subtraction from actions of certain aspects that leaves the act of winking or thinking intact as before. From this we can generalize, again.

In short Ryle thinks that we understand a concept only through its applications and uses.[22] Furthermore, we can make a point not just about us understanding concepts, but a point about what concepts are. A concept is the abstraction from words and phrases used in all manner of ways in various contexts.[23] The various inflections of meaning and the (sometimes) subtle differences in meaning across context are such as to affect our appreciation of what a concept is and what an associated term means, and all of this appreciation reveals to us what the concept is. Think again about THINKING. For Ryle we appreciate what it is to think only if we understand the various exemplifications of the concept, which things count as thinking and which do not. Someone playing on a piano fiddling around to find a tune can very well be thinking, and this sort of thinking differs from the thinking we **(p.128)** typically experience in a philosophy seminar between two disputants trying out an idea on one another or arguing with all guns blazing. It will also differ from idle fiddling around on a piano when someone is not thinking about anything even a tune, but is just, well, fiddling. Appreciating the similarities and differences of these and other examples is simply to appreciate the contours of THINKING and how it can be applied and withheld correctly and incorrectly, creatively and foolishly. Of course, once we do that we will appreciate what THINKING stands for. So just on this basis it would be wrong to say that there is no fixed meaning for THINKING. THINKING means whatever our investigation of its uses reveals. However, once we accept that there can be all manner of different things that can be categorized as THINKING, with no core element that THINKING stands for, we should appreciate that new uses will appear, present uses will disappear and, therefore, that the concept itself, and not just applications of it, can change.

Of course, one could say that thinking just means any sort of general mental activity. But that seems only to give a definition by (trivial) synonymy. What we are after is something deeper than that, something that allows us to apply and withhold properly, something that allows us to connect it in meaningful, plausible ways to other concepts. In order to do so, we have to get a handle of some of the uses familiar to us and understand all aspects of acts of thinking.

Despite the claim that we can understand concepts only if we understand the many and various contexts in which the concept is used, this is not to say that we have wild and frequent changes in concepts' meanings across such uses, at least for every concept. (In the case of a supposed single concept, that might well point to us having different concepts to cope with.) Instead, we can talk of there being a common root, and rock-solid commonality, and other such things. Philosophers are important because they can point out this fact and map the

ways in which different concepts work and their implications, as well as pointing out mistakes that fellow philosophers have made.

All of the foregoing is no straightforward argument for Ryle's view. But it is central in the picture I am building for thick concepts. In brief, I think Ryle's view about how concepts and language work is right, and it will be key as we go through other ideas. In short, I think that thick concepts are such that (i) we understand them only through understanding how they are used, and (ii) the content of thick concepts, and the meaning of thick terms, is given by how they are used. For now, two topics are left for this section.

First, what of Williams in relation to Ryle? Quite simply, despite the suggestive and interesting nature of his qualifiers, in my view Williams does not pay enough attention to the ways in which various evaluative concepts are used, and from that the various trends that become apparent. While many ethical concepts have success-and-failure conditions that guide action, they often have conditions that do not provide reasons to act at all. Williams I think is guilty of paying too much attention to how some ethical concepts work on some occasions and not enough to the **(p.129)** success-and-failure conditions that they and other evaluative concepts have. (This is ironic given how much Williams bemoans modern philosophers' fixation on the narrowly moral concepts associated with duty and obligation.)

So, for example, a concept such as HONEST can be used to guide action directly.[24] But it can also be used to guide actions indirectly, and it can be used to evaluate with no thought of the influence of action, and action to be guided in the future. It can be used to compare. It can be used to voice hope, express relief and joy, and many more things. It can be used of people, of actions, of institutions. It can indicate a narrow judgement about a particular piece of language. It can be used of a document and what is said between the lines. It can also be used of the intentions of speakers and writers, and of their wider spirit of personality. Despite all of these various uses, we typically are able to get a handle on the concept through some process of abstraction, even if people will have different conceptions of that concept.

Discussion of Williams and Ryle is therefore instructive. We have talked through the idea that evaluative concepts can have a variety of functions and roles. We have also seen suggested that many concepts, not just those regarded as straightforwardly evaluative, can be understood through their uses. Such uses reveal that there is no narrowly construed idea of a concept that, when it is applied, is applied in separation from other aspects of the action that it is describing. Those other aspects enable us to capture a mature understanding of the concept in question.

A second thought ends this section and sets up the next. A tempting idea moves into view. Are thick concepts a type of thick description? It seems straightforward to answer in the affirmative. Thick descriptions are specific descriptions or, as we can say with a little licence, specific concepts. Thick concepts are a type of specific concept, namely specific evaluative concepts. Therefore thick concepts are a type of thick description.

Now, it is not as if this is a terrible idea. But as with Williams' summarizing slogan, it requires pause for thought since it may hide important points. Talk of thick evaluative concepts that are a type of thick description implies, strongly or weakly, that there is a type (or there are types) of thick description that is (or are) not evaluative. This talk of types may imply, strongly or weakly, that we can easily divide the evaluative from the descriptive or nonevaluative along a neat line. It is this implication that worries me and which we need to uncover and reflect upon. How confident are we that we can divide in this way? In the next section I suggest that we should be highly wary of being able to do so. We may not wish to commit to any division at all or, if we do, we should be wary of thinking that it lies where some writers think it does and wary that we can pinpoint its location with confidence.

(p.130) 6.6 Evaluative Concepts

We now examine some ideas that move beyond the appreciation that concepts can have a variety of functions. In the discussion of ethical, aesthetic, and epistemic concepts we assumed that some function or functions other than the guidance of action would still involve some explicit pro or con stance within the evaluation, be it implied or just inferred. Yet, if we can now see that evaluative concepts can do a few things, why think that the giving of, and the embodiment of, pro and con stances and views is exhaustive of their nature?

I begin this section with some examples and then draw some morals.

(a) *Some examples*. Chapter Four saw us run through various concepts accepted as thin which we saw come in a range of thicknesses. Even if we might accept that all of these concepts are always used in pro or con ways—although I will come to that in a little while—it is clear that the labels of the 'simply' or the 'purely' evaluative cover more complexity than is acknowledged by separationists. And if we are comfortable with that idea, we should consider if other concepts can be called evaluative, even if they differ from each other and differ from the traditional diet of thin concepts. So we need to motivate the idea that various concepts (not just thick ones) function in the ways that those concepts routinely labelled as thick function. We then need to think about the character of these concepts.

No one doubts that JUST and KIND, BEAUTIFUL, and WISE are thick concepts. Separationists may offer an analysis of them that I think is wrong, but that is a different matter. They are not treated as descriptive concepts first of all.[25] We

can move on a little. Many theorists also routinely accept that KNOWLEDGEABLE and ELEGANT are thick evaluative concepts. They clearly pick our specific features of people and objects in the way that thick concepts routinely do. They are also often used in straightforward pro (and con) ways.

Is a concept such as ELEGANT so different from concepts such as GROTESQUE and MACABRE? We can certainly apply MACABRE in a way that indicates positive or negative appraisals. We can praise a story for the macabre atmosphere that it creates, given that we want something to spook us; Hallowe'en is no time for sugary fairy tales. But we can also damn by calling something macabre: its sinister nature chills us when we require something to soothe and comfort. We can also apply this concept and be offering no obvious pro or con evaluation. We may call a thing macabre and be trying to articulate its nature, either to others or to ourselves. We may also be using this word to compare and contrast it with other things: 'No, that is not fun, it is macabre' or 'What fun! How macabre!' Furthermore, we might be explaining things: 'It is terrifying because it is macabre.' Calling something macabre seems to **(p.131)** pinpoint the nature of something in a way that is more specific than calling it terrifying, for example. This is also what we do with ELEGANT, I suggest. Although we can praise the elegant, and often damn because something is elegant, we can apply this concept simply to categorize, to compare, and to give conceptual shape to the thing we are trying to understand.

Although I am often wary of looking at dictionary definitions in philosophical contexts, the *OED* entry for 'macabre' mainly lists synonyms such as grim, horrific, and repulsive, all of which are suggestive of something negative. But, as we know from LEWD and from human psychology, sometimes we can revel in the grim and some people are drawn to things they conceive of as being repulsive.[26]

Similarly, consider GOSSIP. We can talk in a variety of ways and gossiping is one of them. It is certainly more specific than COMMUNICATION, say, and something more than and different from the idea of 'sharing information'. Furthermore, we can damn a piece of information as gossip, or revel in the loveliness of gossip, as well as enjoying the piece of gossip we have just heard. The *OED* has: "…idle talk; trifling or groundless rumour; tittle-tattle. Also, in a more favourable sense: Easy, unrestrained talk or writing, esp. about persons or social incidents." We see here, as with MACABRE, the reliance on synonyms, and also the switch from negative to positive. There is no clear 'good' or 'bad', let alone 'pro' or 'con' mentioned, but no competent speaker of English could fail to latch on to the positive and negative associations that occur in general with the concept when it is used. And, similarly, we can classify and categorize some conversation as GOSSIP, with no explicit pro or con point, in order to categorize it in a particular way.

The same is true of CAJOLE: it is a way of asking someone to do something and is, to my ear, a little more specific than persuasion. We can persuade in many ways: with threats, with explicit incentives. And cajoling, while it may use implied threats and incentives, is something different. Importantly, we can praise a piece of persuasion by calling it an instance of cajoling, and damn it as well. We can also, plainly, use it as a way of indicating what the action was.

The *OED* has this, as a verb, “To prevail upon or get one’s way with (a person) by delusive flattery, specious promises, or any false means of persuasion.” Later, however, it also defines it in a more neutral way: one can persuade by flattery, with the ‘delusive’ dropped.

I am building up the case that the difference in function and nature between the routine diet of thick concepts name-checked by writers and these others concepts is slight; indeed it might be non-existent. It is so slight, if it exists at all, that it does not offend to call MACABRE, GOSSIP, and CAJOLE thick. Indeed, I reckon that before my discussion we would have called them thick anyway.

(p.132) Consider two more examples mentioned above. If we work only with concepts such as JUST and KIND then it would be understandable to class an adjective such as CONTORTED and a noun such as MEDITATION as nonevaluative, descriptive concepts. However, we do use such concepts with explicit pro and con views in mind, even if we do so in fewer cases than we do with JUST and KIND. Poems and dancers can be damned for being contorted, but they can also be admired for the same reason. Some academic can praise another for work that has come out of some serious meditation on a problem, and praise the activity of this special sort of thought itself. We can also bemoan the meditation and endless thinking going on when what we really want is action.

Again, the *OED*’s definitions are interesting here. For ‘meditation’ we first of all have “to consider thoughtfully”, and “to consider deeply”, and later on “serious continuous contemplation”. It is not obvious to me that these ideas are wholly nonevaluative. We can say similar things about CONTORTION: the idea here is of something that is uncomfortable, strenuous, and unusual. These words are not neutral: they have strong negative associations. But they have positive ones also: sometimes it is good to make ourselves uncomfortable, both physically and mentally.

Yet more concepts are worth mentioning. Gibbard’s analysis of LEWD employs what, to my mind, is an example ripe for the same treatment, namely WARRANTED. (I mentioned this niggle in passing in Chapter Five, §5.4(c).) When we categorize a piece of behaviour or a belief as warranted we are saying that it is the sort of thing that is allowed and authorized. By implication we are saying that the thing is good in a certain sort of way. So it is not just good

simpliciter.[27] Similarly, when we say that something, for example a belief, is justified, we say that there is some special link between it and some piece of evidence that shows the belief to be a good one to hold in some way.

Yet more. Earlier in this study I said that someone who was wise had sufficient understanding and relevant knowledge. Words such as ‘sufficient’ and ‘relevant’ are in the same boat as ‘warranted’. We are marking out a certain sort of understanding as sufficient, just the right amount (of understanding) to allow us to categorize something in a certain way (a person as wise, say). When we call something relevant we are saying that it is linked to the thing in which we are interested in the right sort of way. And, we can further specify ‘right way’ depending on the things in question: something can be linked to something else such that it is relevant because it illuminates the thing, or is useful for the thing, or something else. Importantly, it is not just right *simpliciter*, but is right in a particular way, for a particular reason, a reason that may be explained only using other concepts that (I suspect) are evaluative. Knowing when something is relevant will involve the exercise of judgement.

(p.133) It seems we can talk in this way at will. We can say that if something is relevant to something else we think it is good in a way, a way that may be illuminating and useful. Similarly, if something is useful, it allows us to do something that we want to do. Also, if something allows something else, it permits or eases the path of that something where before there may have been barriers of a kind. And so on.

In all of these cases, and many more, we have concepts and ideas that are sometimes used in overtly pro and con ways and sometimes not. There may be some variation between these concepts as to how frequently they are used in pro and con ways, or the significance of those occasions when they do so, and what types of instance of concept application are considered canonical and exemplary.

One last line of examples. Let us go back to those concepts thought to be thin or fairly thin: DUTY (or DUTIFUL), OUGHT, ACCEPTABLE, APPROPRIATE, and the like, concepts that easily shade into JUST and FAIR. We will often use such words to praise and to indicate something positive, and their antonyms are used negatively. But often we just report that something is someone’s duty or that someone is being dutiful, or that something because it is appropriate fits well in the situation or with other things. Such uses have the potential to lead to praise or to negative judgement, but they need not be used in this manner directly and immediately. They operate in similar ways to the other examples of this section.

(b) *Some morals*. There was a lot going on with these examples. Let us draw matters out slowly over the next few sub-sections. I start with our big themes.

(i) *The liberal view of evaluation*. One more reminder. The *conservative* view of evaluation categorizes concepts as evaluative concepts only if those concepts are used routinely in an obviously pro or con way. The *liberal* view of evaluation views evaluation as encompassing pro and con, but it does not confine the nature of evaluation to such matters. It allows that a concept can be an evaluative concept and yet, on certain instances when it is used (sincerely and straightforwardly), there be no positive or negative stance as part of its use and this not threaten the fact that it is an evaluative concept, either overall or in that particular instance of its use.

In cases where we have a term being used with no obvious positive or negative view at all, conservatives are likely to say one of two things: either that we have the same word, but a different concept in play; or that we have a single concept across these different uses, but that the concept is not evaluative, and when it is used evaluatively such pro and con evaluations are accidental to the concept, contingent add-ons conveyed through tone of voice for example, and implied and inferred through conventional means.

Note that I am not arguing that any concept used in an evaluative way in an instance can be, or even that it has to be, an evaluative concept. I am interested only in negating the conservative view. I think that concepts can be evaluative even if at times they do not convey some pro or con view at all. Note also two more extreme views that I do not favour. The *radical* view says that a concept can be an **(p.134)** evaluative concept and there be no instance of its use that has a simple, obvious, pro or con stance to it. The *crazy* view says that an evaluative concept must not have any instances that have any pro or con stances to them. I use these as contrasts to underline the fact that I think that there must be some clear instances of pro and/or con use for a concept to count as an evaluative concept. I explain why later.

So why hold the liberal view? To motivate it, consider those two options conservatives have to take when it comes to our examples above. The first says that all of these examples are not evaluative. This does not hold water. Not only can we see that these examples are routinely used to indicate pro and con views (even if they are not used in this way every single time), we can also see that those fairly thin concepts such as DUTY and OUGHT are used in this way too. Does it seem useful or plausible to restrict our notion of what an evaluative concept is simply to GOOD and RIGHT, or just PRO and CON?[28] I suggest that it is not, and that we do not treat examples from above in this way.

Second, conservatives could say that words can cover a range of concepts, given with different tones of voice or similar—our familiar MACABRE-PRO, MACABRE-CON, and MACABRE-NEUTRAL—and that only some of these concepts are

evaluative, those with the –PRO and –CON suffixes. (The same can be said for DUTY-PRO and DUTY-CON, of course.) Does this stance hold water?

We saw when discussing Williams and Ryle that concepts may do many things: predominantly guide action and judgement, categorize objects, and express positive and negative stances. Further, I outlined Ryle's view that the nature or content of concepts is constructed from the ways in which we use and apply them. We get a sense of what the limits of acceptability are and what things are relevant to what other things only through understanding the types of example which fall under the concept and the ways in which the concept and associated term are employed across many instances. The mastery of a concept comes when we appreciate the point of the concept, how it can be used and what various parts of the concept really stand for. I agree that we should take a holistic approach to such understanding. When I say of a novel that it was macabre, and do not intend praise or blame or anything else positive or negative, I am still offering evaluation of it (that is, there is still evaluative content), because my categorization of it in this instance relies on, or is an expression of, an understanding that encompasses times and instances when there are explicit types of praise and blame or other positive and negative reactions. The content of macabre—what this means and how it applies—relies on all sorts of instances. If I cannot understand when to offer and withhold the concept, when it can be used creatively and foolishly, when it can be used positively or negatively, and *why*, then I do not understand what it is for something to be macabre. Aside from this instance, I might be asked to explain what MACABRE is and doing so will require my drawing on an appreciation from a number of different examples.

(p.135) I think that all of this tells strongly against the conservative option that we should restrict 'the evaluative' to a very small number of concepts such as GOOD and BAD, and for all the rest multiply concepts in the manner indicated. It seems far better to start with the view that some or many concepts will have a variety of functions, even if not every single use is exemplified in every instance. Given how important it often is for some concepts, such as MACABRE or SHREWD, to convey pro and con stances, then this is enough to call them evaluative overall.

Furthermore, this idea leads to the following crucial point. All the foregoing tells in favour of there being some special evaluative content that is not exhausted by pro and con views. One's understanding of what it is for anything to be MACABRE, and the meaning of 'macabre' and what 'macabre-ness' *is*, seem to be based on a variety of uses, and one's understanding synthesizes and encapsulates them (or at least those uses we think of as significant, core, and exemplary). When nonseparationists talk, perhaps too loosely, of there being intermingling that offers us nonreductive, nonseparable conceptual content, perhaps it is this idea to which they point. Partly through those uses of

MACABRE that convey pro and con stances, the whole of the concept exemplifies or is something evaluative. Likewise, partly through the particular uses that have no obvious pro or con stances we can appreciate the special nature of why and how something MACABRE can be thought of in a positive or negative way. Sure, this concept is more specific than GOOD, but it is evaluative all the same.

One further note. This explains why I do not favour the crazy and radical views, mentioned earlier. I think that one has to have some instances of clear positive and negative usage for a concept to count as evaluative because of my reliance on one's use of the concept across many instances.[29]

(p.136) Of course, one obvious challenge leaps out from this. How can we tell when a concept is evaluative and when it is not? Is it because of the number of times in which it is used with pro and con point? Perhaps. Is it because of the significance of those uses to how we understand the concept? Probably. Despite my comments, can we really think of CONTORTED or SIMILAR as evaluative? I think we should. But my point here is that such classifications will be matters of judgement, debate, and reasoning across a community of mature concept users.

All of this discussion—in this sub-section and perhaps the whole book—may be frustrating for some readers. They may acknowledge that I am arguing against a particular view of evaluation that is characterized in terms of pro and con stances, and they may understand my claim that the evaluative is more than that. They may even agree to a greater or lesser extent. However, the frustrated cry may still go up, 'But what *is* your view of evaluation? If it isn't pro or con, of exhausted by these stances, then what is it?' I can appreciate that there may be some frustration, but such a worry starts from a wrong assumption. The worry is predicated on the idea that in articulating a different view of evaluation, my task is (and has to be) to replace one definition—'to be evaluative a concept must express a pro or con stance'—with another, where that replacement gives a definition in terms of a similarly grained term or set of terms. Or in other words, one may think that the task of this whole study is (and has to be) to fill in the schema 'evaluation is or equals *x*' where *x* is at the same conceptual or terminological level as 'pro or con stance'. However, this is not the task in this study at all. I do not believe that this is the only way to articulate a positive view in general, nor is it what I do here. Positive accounts of ideas can be cast in these ways. But sometimes—and certainly here—a view can make a positive advance both by showing that a way of casting some central term or idea is not the full picture, and by showing people what else is part of that picture, even if what is then put forward as the replacement is not a definite thing or term. Furthermore, I strongly believe that evaluation cannot be articulated as a specific thing or things (such as pro and con stance) that can be treated as different from itself such that a meaningful characterization is produced. My whole, positive view of what it is for a concept to be evaluative is that such

concepts have multi-various functions: they **(p.137)** encompass the ability to praise and blame, and express positive and negative stances, certainly (and with that they can motivate and provide reasons for action), but they can also simply offer specific understandings of how the world is that do not have to cast the world in obviously positive and negative ways. When we call a concept 'evaluative' we have in mind a looser sense than separationists, say, typically give. Separationists, among others, are guilty of fastening onto one aspect, albeit an important one, which evaluative concepts have. Evaluation and evaluative concepts are fundamental sorts of understandings or characterizations of the world and its parts, characterizations which I do not believe it is helpful to pin down exclusively to an expression of clear positive or negative stance. So, if put on the spot and asked what I think evaluative concepts are, I would say that they are fundamentally evaluative concepts. What links all of the examples I have been discussing in this chapter and elsewhere is the fact that we treat and use them as evaluative because they help to articulate particular ways of viewing the world. To get a better sense of what 'evaluative' means here one has to see how the terms and concepts typically treated as evaluative are used in many different situations, rather than trying to offer a definite term with defines evaluation. There is no magic *x* here with which I wish to replace 'pro and con stance'.

It is time to move to a different related discussion. Much of the above leads us to think about whether there is a supposed dividing line between the evaluative and the rest. After all, there are many ways of specifically understanding the world. Surely not all of them can be evaluative?

(ii) *The evaluative and the descriptive*. I repeat again that I think there are some concepts that are clearly and essentially evaluative by separationist lights; presumably this camp includes GOOD and BAD. Some separationists may now wonder if DUTY and OUGHT and APPROPRIATE should be included. Imagine they do. They may also think of JUST and FAIR as being initially evaluative concepts, but they will not treat such concepts as essentially evaluative since they can be separated into component parts. And on the other side of matters, there are many, many concepts that seem ripe to be classed as descriptive, nonevaluative concepts. CHAIR has been my favourite example in this study, and such an example suggests many, many more. Nouns such as AEROPLANE, PEN, COMMITTEE, BOOK, HEAD, ENTROPY, and ELEPHANT; verbs such as CHARGE, SHAKE, JUMP, EAT, and SPEND; and adjectives such as BROWN, METALLIC, and LARGE. I just want to make the case that there are some concepts that can be seen as evaluative, and by their nature call into question the idea that we have a sharp dividing line between evaluative concepts and others.

This raises a few questions. First of all, we can call into question a (deliberate) identification I have made through this study. I think that when focusing on other matters it is perfectly fine and philosophically innocent to treat as synonymous ‘the descriptive’ and ‘the nonevaluative’. But right now we are considering the categories as a whole and thinking what, if anything, stands opposed to, or at least is different **(p.138)** from, ‘the evaluative’. To treat as central the label of ‘the nonevaluative’ in this regard invites the accusation that my thinking is muddled, for I am labelling the different camp of ‘the evaluative’ with a label that indicates a polar opposite and which assumes a difference in kind. I have turned my back on this type of clear division.

Let me make something clear. I *do* think it is philosophically fine and innocent to begin by treating as synonymous ‘the nonevaluative’ and ‘the descriptive’, if only to get us into the right frame of mind to realize that there is an interesting question to be considered about how these categories relate to the evaluative and what the character of thick concepts is. But an innocent labelling should not be enough to stop the position I articulate here. The real action concerns what lies behind the labels, namely the character of the examples we consider. We should not confuse labelling for argument, either an argument against my view or an argument for views I oppose. Indeed, it is clear that one should use these labels only after one has thought about the character of the concepts that one is putting into each camp, and thought through whether one wants to support or oppose a clear and exact division between the camps.

And this brings me to the examples I laid out above. Moving from RIGHT to JUST to ELEGANT to MACABRE to TWISTED to SIMILAR to ALLOW should invite us to question whether we have such a clear and exact division between the camps of the evaluative and the descriptive, even if, as I keep on repeating, we think there are obvious examples of both sorts. I want to call into question, through my reflection on the examples above and many other points made in this study, whether the difference between them is so clear and exacting. I doubt that it is. The only sound basis for there being such a clear and exact division, it seems to me, is to take some very conservative line that only a concept that is used in a clear pro or con way in every instance deserves the label of being an evaluative concept. That has the philosophical virtue of being simple and clear. Yet, I think my examples throw doubt on this view for we simply do not treat concepts in this way.

This idea that we have some difference but no clear and exact difference or division (or whatever it is one calls it) may seem strange. But I am not the only one to think it to be perfectly acceptable. Hilary Putnam casts doubt on what he calls the fact–value ‘dichotomy’ (which is what I am doing, in effect) in part by drawing the historical threads that led to its adoption, from classical empiricism, through Kant’s discussion of the analytic and the synthetic, and to logical positivism.[30] For Putnam, to adopt a dichotomy is to do something far from

philosophically innocent. It is to make a metaphysical and/or conceptual decision that the two items that one marks as different are polar opposites and that they, therefore, exclude one another, with no relevant example being able to occupy both camps. His recurring phrase is that the fact–value dichotomy assumes an "omnipresent and all-important gulf", and he reaches the same conclusions as I do, that there is no real argument for this gulf, **(p.139)** and that our practices do not bear it out anyway. At one stage he concludes, when thinking about how we should classify the principles of mathematics and how they seem unlike both paradigm examples of analytic truths and descriptive truths, "This illustrates one difference between an ordinary distinction and a metaphysical dichotomy: ordinary distinctions have ranges of application, and we are not surprised if they do not always apply."[31] We might distinguish the evaluative from the descriptive, but there will be many examples where a (sharp) distinction does not apply and where our categories may fail us, if we assume that they have to be sharp.

To make clear, in the above discussion I have assumed not just that there is a grey area, but that there is enough in our examples to justify us calling many examples evaluative. If arguments from authority hold any weight, then it worth noting that although he does not go into detail about many examples, when thinking about scientific practices and concepts Putnam does assume that COHERENCE and SIMPLICITY are evaluative concepts.[32]

This takes me to some more examples. Think about the examples named as obvious cases of descriptive concepts at the start of this sub-section. Now recall OLD. At the start of this chapter I used as OLD as an example of a descriptive concept in order to make a point about context-sensitivity. But we might ask whether it is so different from RELEVANT. Both seem to be applicable because of the context in which they are used, both enable us to compare one item with another or more. Both can be used to convey pro and con points. So are these descriptive, evaluative, or what? Perhaps annoyingly I am not going to be drawn into making a definitive pronouncement, although my hunch is that RELEVANT sits more towards standard evaluative concepts than OLD does. I think we need to look at how people use these concepts, how often and how significant clear pro and con points are conveyed, how often they are used alongside evaluative concepts to help reinforce a judgement overall, and so on. In short, whether something is an evaluative concept is a matter of communal judgement. There are no necessary conditions that can be articulated to decide definitively that something is evaluative.

(iii) *Evaluation all the way down*. Notice that when giving those *OED* definitions we saw other thick terms making appearances. That has happened every so often through this study. This takes us to an important idea. Some people think that evaluative concepts go 'all the way down'.[33]

A standard model of thought might be that we have thin evaluative concepts at the top, with thick concepts coming next. Perhaps the former, plus some descriptive content, help to form the latter. Perhaps thin concepts are simply abstracted from the latter. Whatever story we adopt, it is tempting to think that there is a level below the **(p.140)** thick. In this level are wholly descriptive, nonevaluative concepts. This account can be challenged, however. Is it so obvious that we can eventually get to some rock-bottom regarding our concepts, where this final level is understood as a place where there are no evaluative concepts whatsoever? It may be possible to exorcise all reference to PRO and CON, but that may be a different matter.

Consider yet another example. In Chapter Five §5.5 I gave the example of a kind action in which someone gave up a seat on the bus because an old lady needed it. What is it to need something? In the example it does not stretch a point to imagine that in everyday speech we would say that an old lady might need a seat on a bus, particularly if we give more detail to picture her as somewhat frail and carrying heavy shopping bags. But it is not as if she will die if she does not sit down, in my example at least. She would just have to endure some discomfort for a fifteen-minute bus ride. Clearly NEED is a context-sensitive concept: while it may be true in one context, or compared to one standard, that the old lady needs to sit down, when compared to another standard and set of concerns, she does not *need* to sit down even though it may be nice if she does so. Despite our recognition that the concept works contextually, that does not stop us from thinking that NEED here is in an evaluative fashion. The general meaning is clear and unambiguous, no matter what the standard: if we need something then that something has to happen otherwise something serious (or relatively serious) will occur, and that serious thing is typically unwanted. But SERIOUS looks as if it is a qualifier that works in a way similar to RELEVANT and SUFFICIENT.

To take us back to the main track, in our explicit definition of NEED we are highly likely to have to refer to other concepts that can be considered to be evaluative in the same sort of way and for the reasons outlined previously. If we try to redefine SERIOUS, say, then we will encounter exactly the same situation, and we will find that the evaluative goes all the way down or, what amounts to the same thing, that it is inescapable.

When I previously discussed this example in the context of the shapelessness hypothesis, I said that we can easily separate a one-off instance into evaluative and descriptive elements; the debate is whether we can do so for the concept as a whole. But that assumption is now being questioned. When we take away the bare approval of the individual action, we are left with elements of a situation that themselves, or the concepts use to categorize them, seem evaluative.

We can refer back to make an important point. I find Elstein and Hurka's take on DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE from Chapter Two to be a bit of a cheat. They have 'blank' placeholders for the supposed descriptive conceptual content that Rawls or Nozick (and their supporters) will use to fill out their definitions. But what would Rawls and Nozick plug in for X, Y, and Z? Rawls might have: is a distribution 'chosen under conditions of fairness'. Yet, that introduces an obviously thick term. What about 'chosen under conditions of ignorance of one's place after the resources are distributed'? Well, that is better, but it is not as if a person has to be ignorant of everything about themselves according to Rawls, nor would that be a good idea, I think. It is only **(p.141)** relevant and significant pieces of information that someone has to be ignorant of. And that introduces two concepts that I am suggesting can be conceived to be evaluative. Also, for that matter, what sorts of resource are going to count? The relevance of the knowledge is intimately related to the resources to be distributed in Rawls' system, and perhaps any liberal system such as his. Similar thoughts affect the choice facing Nozick and his supporters. What counts as an acquisition? As Nozick's comments about labour-mixing show, for him it has to be something obtained by someone in the right sort of way for the correct reason in the appropriate circumstances.[34] Specifying the right sort of way and the appropriate circumstances can be done only with reference to other suspiciously evaluative concepts such as RELEVANT, IMPROVEMENT, and ENOUGH.

All of this highlights a contrast. I have been talking of the right sort of way, or good for a particular reason. The contention behind this is that there is no way of characterizing what is going on unless we employ a thick concept: the rightness of the way and the reason for it are united and, in fact, a single unitary item with two aspects. In Chapter Two Elstein and Hurka's proposals were characterized as indicating that we could pick out some (separable) descriptive content to include in our analysis of a concept if we approved of it, that is if there was approval *simpliciter*. But talk of approval *simpliciter* is a fiction in this debate. We need to be able to specify the reason why, and we either think we can (be certain that we can) specify this completely in descriptive terms—which I have argued is not straightforward by any means—or do so in obvious thick terms.

We need to pause here to highlight the point of all this discussion. My overall aim in this book is to argue that thick concepts are unitary concepts, and that we can speak justifiably of there being nonseparable thick evaluative conceptual content. I have suggested that the domain of the evaluative seems to stretch further than one might initially think and, moreover, that the evaluative-descriptive boundary is a grey one. In order to undercut all of this, my separationist opponents need to be able to analyse concepts as products of distinct elements. But at each turn we have seen doubt cast on the idea that we can analyse thick concepts in terms of some thin or (supposedly) pure evaluation plus some nonevaluative conceptual content. It is not clear at all, and indeed

very doubtful, whether we have the sorts of nonevaluative conceptual content to do the job, content that allows one to map fully the large variety of evaluative concepts that we use. CHAIR and the like will not be sufficient in the slightest. We need concepts such as ALLOW, SUFFICIENT, NEED, and TWISTED. If they operate, as they seem to, like ELEGANT, MACABRE, BENEVOLENT, and SHREWD then it is highly unlikely that we can separate thick concepts in the manner envisaged by my opponents.

Alongside this it seems right, to my mind, to make the extra leap of categorization and classify thick concepts, and their content, as evaluative, that is as purely, wholly **(p.142)** evaluative. We saw an inkling of this in Chapter Four. The range of thin concepts—which may differ slightly in their thick–thin specificity—are all routinely thought of by philosophers as purely and wholly evaluative. Why not say the same about the thick concepts in this chapter? The fact that these concepts also alight on and help to pick out features of the world should not blind us. We should move away from the thought that to be purely evaluative is something that is exhausted by an expression of positive and negative view. An appreciation of such views and when and why to express them is something that is core to what it is to appreciate and use an evaluative concept. (This was part of the moral from Ryle.) Furthermore, collecting together certain features and viewing them *as* a collection is part of what it is to express an evaluative view of the world. It is not just any set of concepts that can be joined together, and joined together with a certain positive or negative view. (We saw this just now when discussing Elstein and Hurka.[35]) There is, of course, the extra point that at some level of description we may be alighting on features that themselves may well be evaluative, features such as the fact that someone needs something, or that if I do something it will allow someone to do something else.

In short, when one scratches the phenomena surrounding thick concepts and their use, there is little to persuade one to adopt a separationist stance. In contrast, there is much to persuade one of the merits of nonseparationism, and a particular version at that, one that takes seriously the idea that it is worth calling such concepts purely and wholly evaluative. It is just that this occasions serious thought about what ‘the evaluative’ is or could be.

(iv) *Evaluative flexibility*. In Chapter Three I indicated some initial reason for adopting evaluative flexibility. Now I indicate final support for this view by showing how it knits with other ideas I have put forward.

The link is a clear one. I believe that the best strategy that nonseparationists can adopt is one that questions what the evaluative and the descriptive are in the first place, rather than simply agreeing with the separationist terms of the debate that these two sorts of content intermingle in some way. If they do that, then we have to think about what the evaluative is and they have to motivate the

case that thick evaluative content is nonseparable. I think that the best way to do that is to think hard about the various uses that concepts can occupy and to show that there are various uses. In which case, embracing evaluative flexibility helps and strengthens the overall case, for all that this view says is that a single concept can have pro, con, and neutral uses across a range of instances, just the sort of thing that nonseparationists need to employ to motivate the best version of their view.

This view is to be found in Dancy (1995). In this Dancy considers Blackburn's claim (from Blackburn (1992)), that separationists (that is, noncognitivists) have an advantage: they can accommodate the idea that a concept can be employed in **(p.143)** different situations with different evaluative points—variations on PRO and CON—whereas nonseparationists cannot do this because they are stuck with the idea that each concept has *an* evaluative point, which has to be an essential part of the concept and so must remain fixed. We have already seen, earlier in this book, that strictly separationists cannot deal with the evaluative flexibility of a single concept, for the evaluative element floats free of the descriptive.

In brief Dancy's reply is that it has never been part of nonseparationism (for Dancy, cognitivism) that there be a narrowly defined and conceived evaluation. All that matters to the nonseparationist is that, in some way, evaluation is mixed with description. (And, Dancy further hammers home the idea I have expressed that we can question if we have separate evaluative and descriptive elements to mix in the first place.) There is no reason to suppose that the evaluative part of a thick concept has to be conceived to be a single attitude. Instead, Dancy thinks, competence with a thick concept can involve competence with a range of attitudes associated with a concept, in a way I have also discussed.[36]

(v) *Conceptual change*. Although not central to my case, I think it worth considering the phenomenon of conceptual change, in part because I mentioned that Ryle thinks concepts, or the terms that express them, can change their meaning and in part because it links to other points I have made.

Thick concepts can clearly change. Blackburn approvingly quotes a nice example due to Quentin Skinner. At the end of the sixteenth century in England, words such as 'vocation' and 'calling', which had previously been applied only to religious positions, began to be applied to other jobs and roles partly to justify certain economic activities.[37] A number of other ethico-religious concepts suggest themselves as good examples: SANCTUARY, CHASTE, SINFUL, and NAUGHTY.[38]

Why does this happen? Let us think about some examples. Gibbard's account of LEWD employs two things that catch the eye. First, there is the vague idea of an activity 'passing beyond certain limits'. Exactly what the limits are and what it

takes to pass beyond them is open to dispute. The number and type of cases that might be categorized by such a concept will differ from person to person and across time **(p.144)** periods. The vagueness involved in the concept invites a range of cases; the 'elasticity' of the concept is set up for this. Over time the range and numbers of case to which the term is applied might change so much that the concept itself changes. (Or, in other words, the extension of the concept might change over time so much that this leads to a change in the associated term's intension.) People see *this* case as falling under the concept description, and *that* case as being similar to the first case, and *this third* case as being similar to the second and…And, before you know it, you have an *nth* case that bears similarities to the cases that have gone before and is not wholly miscategorized, but which also is not quite in tune with the first case or the original idea of the overall concept.[39] The vagueness that is built into the concept is not enough to allow for the range of cases that people end up grouping under the same banner. So, for example, what once would have been categorized as naughty, because it is truly terrible, heinous behaviour going beyond certain acceptable limits, is now thought not to be naughty, simply because this categorization is now typically reserved for a lower-level type of bad behaviour. NAUGHTY occupies some of the same conceptual region as CHEEKY, MISCHIEVOUS, and DISOBEDIENT, and is now not as associated as it once was with WICKED and EVIL.

We can underline this first point by returning to THINKING. Eschewing simple synonyms, such as 'mental life', we can imagine change happening. Earlier eras may have defined THINKING by relying on what went on in the (literal) head and that which controlled action and emotion. But given what beliefs, moods, calculations, and other things might be prompted by and exemplified in thought, we may see a change in such a definition. Earlier in this chapter I talked of people thinking while fiddling on pianos or when choosing ingredients for a meal. Similarly, the 'extended mind' hypothesis, whereby the mind is seen to extend beyond the physical brain and be inhabited in all sorts of tools that we use to store information and knowledge, gives credence to the idea that THINKING is open for revision.[40] What counts as thought can change, and this might cause change in the concept itself.

(c) *Foot*. Consideration of Foot's work helps to summarizing many of the previous ideas as well as helping me to underline others.

In Foot (1958) and (1958–9) she, like Williams, takes Hare's prescriptivism, and noncognitivist theories of the day generally, as her targets. In both papers she is worried that there is a lack of appreciation by noncognitivists about how arguments work and what reasoning looks like. (I believe her arguments apply to separationism generally.) Foot accuses noncognitivists of assuming that moral argument works thus: a person accepts certain premises and from them reaches a conclusion. There is a noncognitivist assumption that there is a strict and

unbridgeable divide between **(p.145)** facts and values. So some of the premises will be factual, while some will be evaluations of the facts. At the end of the argument, in which a moral conclusion is reached, an opponent to our original protagonist can *simply* reject some or all of the various evaluations given and so the argument—if that is what we call it—between them breaks down.

Foot complains that this is too coarse a way of understanding argument and is based on faulty theory. How is the opponent imagined to be rejecting the idea? What reasons have they themselves given? She worries, in Foot (1958), about a situation she takes to be analogous. Imagine a man being shown all that could be shown about the roundness of the Earth, and then asking (simply) why he should believe it was round. "We should want, in such a case, to know how he met the case put to him; and it is remarkable that in ethics this question is thought not to be in place."[41]

This sets the scene for her article. Foot wishes to understand how it is that people understand others and the shape of how they reason in ethics: what do they count as evidence for their beliefs and why? Foot worries that in the noncognitivist account of reasoning there is no link between statements of fact and statements of value. Because of this, each disputant makes his own decision as to which things count as evidence and which do not, and nothing can be said by others against him if they disagree.

Foot seeks to undermine noncognitivism and uses RUDE to do so. Calling some behaviour rude can be a way of condemning it and trying to stop it happening. It is clearly an evaluative word. But she notes it can be used only when certain types of features are in place. It cannot be used of just any action, or used on just any occasion. Foot says that it can be used only when a certain kind of behaviour "causes offence by indicating a lack of respect".[42]

How does this help? Foot thinks that once we use a word such as rude to categorize an action or thing, we open up other categorizations, such as 'offence' in this case. If a disputant says that a man has caused offence (or someone thinks that offence has been caused), yet our disputant denies that the man has been rude, we need to know why it is that the behaviour is not rude. What reasons for exemptions are forthcoming? What sorts of thing does our disputant consider rude? Foot considers certain answers—'a man is rude when he behaves conventionally', or 'a man is rude when he walks slowly up to a front door'—and thinks that in such a case our disputant has left behind the concept RUDE, assuming that no further explanation is forthcoming.[43]

Foot assumes, perfectly reasonably, that everyday ethical disagreements are awash with thick concepts. When such concepts are used, there are fairly well-accepted criteria of application and definition. Because of this, we cannot apply

concepts willy-nilly. But, when applied, and when seen to be applied, certain sorts of evaluative point follow.

There are points on which to challenge Foot. For example, a disputant might refrain from agreeing that a piece of behaviour was rude simply because she does not **(p.146)** wish to condemn it. (Think again about Betty and Frank from Chapter Two, and the various concepts they employ to describe people who are bigger than the average.) But, in response, although that is an issue, Foot says towards the end of her piece that disputants have to work within an accepted tradition and, by implication, a conceptual environment. We cannot choose to apply and withhold concepts as we wish for we must respect certain traditions and norms. If someone has explicitly insulted someone to their face and made them cry, say, it would have to be a surprising piece of reasoning to conclude that the behaviour was not rude. And that is Foot's point. Evaluative concepts shape our argumentative landscape and there is not the freedom to attach and detach evaluative point from descriptive content as noncognitivists might think.

Foot repeats her argument, more or less, in Foot (1958–9). However, in this paper she labels and makes explicit an important idea, namely that of an 'internal relation' between object and evaluation. Evaluation cannot apply to just anything. And, further, specific sorts of evaluation cannot apply to just any sort of object. Or, again, if someone does do something creative when judging, we require further explanation, and if this explanation is accepted we can classify the use *as* creative, rather than as bizarre or downright wrong. In Foot (1958–9) she uses the feeling of pride as her main example. We do not see just anything as worthy of pride. It would be odd to look at the sky and feel a sense of pride, as if one had stopped the sky from falling, or if one had laid one hand on another.[44] Again, we can make sense of this if there is some special background. Perhaps someone's arms are injured, and so it is rational to take pride in his 'finally managing' to put his hands together. Foot continues in this vein. It is simply strange to think that just anything can be pride-worthy or dangerous or any such thing, at least rationally.

This shows the importance of Ryle. My use of 'finally managed' just now is meant to be significant. It is with these sorts of description that we can fill out the background in the right sort of a way in order to make sense of how it is that the movement of hands can be considered to be worthy of pride. If we do not bother about which description we use, then we cannot make sense of what is happening.

Further to this, I want to underline a key point that is riddled throughout all of my discussion. What is absolutely central is the idea that mature users of concepts use evaluative concepts while appreciating the point of their use: why they are used in a certain way, and why certain sorts of activity and object are linked together (and occasion positive and negative views, reasons for action,

and the like). That may be accepted by many, even some separationists on some understanding of the claim. (We saw in Chapter Two that even simple separationists can claim that the thin evaluation helps to determine the extension of the concept.) But the importance here is that appreciation of such matters is part of the concept itself, and that goes **(p.147)** especially for those occasions when we use concepts with positive and negative view. As we use concepts and language, we know that not just any evaluation, in general and on some particular occasion, can help with the application. Certain features of the world go with certain sorts of evaluations, according to a certain reason and logic that is socially special, and that is something that any account of the evaluative and the thick must accommodate. In Foot's view, which I share, it also must be central to any account.

So ends my tying of a number of related points. But what of our overarching accounts?

6.7 Separationism and Nonseparationism

Separationists restrict the idea of evaluation to PRO and CON. (When they try to extend it, as Gibbard does, we see problems.) Doing so seems curious. The types of definition or analysis that are then given for individual thick concepts rely on a clear and obvious separation between the evaluative and the descriptive that seems, after exploration, to be fictitious. What are we to say about ideas such as WARRANTED, USEFUL, and ALLOW, as well as all of those important qualifiers such as RELEVANT and APPROPRIATE? Are we just to think of them as some descriptive material—completely value-free—with some pro or con evaluation added? This is worrying on two counts. First, it ignores the complaint that we do not simply approve of something, but do so for a reason. This seems inevitably to invite thick concepts back in, as I indicated with some examples. Second, it denies flat out that there is anything to Foot's insight that certain internal relations have to hold if the norms of our everyday conceptual use are to be respected. It is only in respecting such relations that we give structure and reason to our evaluative practices.

We saw, in Chapter Four, the first inklings of what was wrong with separationism. Separationists wish to separate thick concepts into something descriptive and, typically something thin. But as we saw, there are a number of different sorts of thin concept and there seems to be a range of thicknesses among them, albeit a smaller diet than is found across thick concepts. Yet, we see no harm in calling these concepts thin, whether we wish to indicate a difference in kind or degree from thick(er) concepts. And, further, we saw that separationists probably need this diet of concepts to express different ideas. In this chapter we have simply expanded this suspicion. Separationists find it hard to justify their assumption that the thin is one thing and the thick a divisible other, simply because the thin does not seem to be a unified single sort of thing. It is certainly true that thin concepts typically carry (or essentially carry) a pro

or a con evaluation in a way that typical thick concepts do not. But the fact that thin concepts come in a range of specificities should open our eyes to the possibilities of thick concepts. It should also open our eyes to the idea that just as thin concepts might still be thought to be ‘simply’ or ‘wholly’ evaluative, so we might think of thick concepts **(p.148)** in the same way, once we have thought about what conceptions of the evaluative are available.

In short, separationism seems curious because it has a limited view of the phenomena it is trying to account for. Separationists attempt to divide, isolate, and sharply categorize that which cannot be treated in this way. It may go nicely with some distinction between facts and values, but the phenomenon of thick concepts calls into question that very assumption. That was what Foot and Murdoch were doing all those years ago, and the moral still holds.

6.8 Some Objections

(a) *Essentially evaluative*? As advertised, there could be a fatal weakness in what I have said in this chapter. I have laid out the positive view that concepts can be essentially evaluative and yet, on occasion, not be used with an obvious pro or con point. However, it is possible to draw a different conclusion from the phenomena: that any concept that is used on occasion without a pro or con point is not essentially evaluative. Those uses where it is used with pro or con point are the odd ones, even if they statistically predominate, for such pro or con uses are accidental to the concept and not an essential part of it. In brief, MACABRE and CAJOLE are a lot more like CHAIR than they are like GOOD. They are descriptive concepts with accidental evaluative uses, rather than essentially evaluative concepts. In short, the conservative view of evaluation is still correct.

Chapter Seven sees me examine and attempt to rebut an argument for this line by Väyrynen.

(b) *Understanding others*? Part of my position, and a traditional part of noneparationism, has it that people master a concept only once they understand its point and how it can be used. Some seem to think that this implies that people have to share the evaluations that are the point of the concept in order to understand it. This raises an interesting issue, which seems as if it could prove fatal to the whole position. We routinely think that anthropologists, for example, can understand other people and their culture. Indeed, we routinely think that they can understand the concepts, including the evaluative concepts, that these people have. Sometimes this may take a while and much effort, but we certainly think it is possible. But how is this possible? Do anthropologists sincerely have to share the concept that they are investigating? This challenge threatens not just the possibility of anthropology, but of understanding anyone who is different. The challenge then is to articulate what is involved in understanding a concept that allows us to master it and yet not share it sincerely.

In Chapter Eight I articulate a way of setting up and thinking about this problem that indicates what nonseparationists should say. As advertised, I also tie this to **(p.149)** Williams' pessimism about the possibility of evaluative knowledge. I have left hanging the status of thin concepts: I think of them as separately understandable but not conceptually prior to the thick. I comment more on this also.

(c) *Evaluative realism*? In Chapter Five, §5.3, I mentioned the idea that if we are committed to there being unitary evaluative concepts, then it implies that these concepts refer to something. And if they refer, it looks as if we are committed to evaluative realism. I have made some progress in addressing this issue already, but in Chapter Nine I review where we have got to and articulate, briefly, what it would be to be a nonseparationist and not be committed to an outlandish realism. Furthermore, we have to be confident that there is some way in which we can distinguish legitimate, decent, genuine thick concepts from illegitimate ones.

I use this as a way of offering a conclusion for the whole book. Every so often, including §6.7 just now, I have mentioned the fact–value distinction. I suspect that it is a fear in losing this that motivates some people to worry about evaluative realism. I briefly address this idea in my final chapter.

6.9 Concluding Thoughts

I began this chapter by diagnosing the failures of the disentangling argument. I then moved on to the failures of Williams' slogan and how it disguised much of his thought. The moral of the story is that evaluative concepts seem to do more than Williams' famous slogan has them do, something that even he acknowledges. I then isolated what had gone wrong by thinking about Ryle's thoughts about thick description. This opened up the thought that not only can evaluative concepts do more than guide action, they may do more than categorize in an explicitly pro or con manner. I worked through that idea in a number of ways and in so doing elaborated a view of how concepts work. This took me on to articulate and defend my particular version of nonseparationism. Along the way I hope to have shaken up and cast doubt on assumptions that separationists make.

Having sketched the positive view, I now work my way through the three objections just mentioned.

Notes:

([1]) There is another reason related to that in the main text. Recall also the cute but important thought expressed in note 1 in Chapter Two. It may be difficult, to say the very least, to try to describe necessary and sufficient conditions for a concept being descriptive or nonevaluative in language that does not beg the

question as to what it is for concepts and terms to be evaluative and nonevaluative.

([2]) To avoid confusion, some clarification. I phrase the last idea as ‘I believe there is strong reason to believe that…’. I do not think I have any clear-cut, knockdown argument for my view. But I believe the examples and reflections I offer make the view highly attractive and there are strong reasons to believe my suggestion.

([3]) And why stop at adjectives? We can also talk of nouns such as PEST, WIT, POSEUR, ADVOCATE, PRAT, CURMUDGEON, and ZEALOT. Later on in the main text I discuss the verbs CAJOLE and GOSSIP.

([4]) The sections on Williams and Ryle are a rewritten version of Kirchin (2013). I also compare and contrast ethical, aesthetic and epistemic concepts more in Kirchin (ms).

([5]) Väyrynen (2013), pp. 186–202.

([6]) Presumably we can capture OLD using synonyms and other related concepts, such as AGED, NOT YOUNG, and LONG-LIVED. What precisely is meant by ‘non-OLD terms’ need not hold us up; I take it that we have enough sense of this in order for the point to go through.

([7]) For example, see also Tappolet (2004) which casts Williams’ work in this way. Williams himself indicates this slogan in the second quotation we are about to consider in the main text.

([8]) I admire Williams’ work a lot. Even if I differ in some respects, I agree with much of the spirit of his writing. I leave to others to decide whether he would have agreed with some of the points I make here.

([9]) Williams (1985), pp. 129–30.

([10]) Williams (1985), pp. 140–1.

([11]) Williams (1985), pp. 151–2.

([12]) Williams (1981). For commentary on the tension between his work on thick concepts and his work on internal reasons see Heuer (2013) and Wiland (2013).

([13]) Williams (1985), p. 124.

([14]) The types of action I give are all positive. I could easily have listed refraining and dismissing as well, for example.

([15]) A small note about my argumentative strategy. Someone might be suspicious that in pushing this generous account of what evaluative concepts are, I am simply helping myself to the liberal notion. Clearly if this is what I was doing, then it would be suspect. However, what I take myself to be doing is to show that it is good to be generous and open-minded about what thick evaluative concepts are since, later on, we will see that it helps us make better sense of what they are like.

([16]) Note the qualifiers. There are possible worlds where there are few good things but many wicked things, but that need not mean that GOOD is more specific than WICKED. Despite such examples, I think the general identification I make in the main text holds in this world, by and large.

([17]) I would go further if I were Williams and say ‘PRO and CON’, but that is a small point. Aside from which concepts sit at the top of the tree, Williams was also interested in criticizing fellow philosophers’ obsession with thin concepts, mainly GOOD, RIGHT, DUTY and the like. More in this day than in the mid-1980s, PRO and CON seem appropriate focuses of this criticism, at least of some parts of our philosophical community.

([18]) The examples are introduced in various ways across pp. 494–6 of Ryle (1968).

([19]) Ryle (1968), p. 496.

([20]) The final remark of Ryle (1968) shows this perfectly. “A statesman signing his surname to a peace-treaty is doing much more than inscribe the seven letters of his surname, but he is not doing many or any more things. He is bringing the war to a close by inscribing the seven letters of his surname.” The word ‘things’ at the end of the first sentence is key to understanding Ryle’s point.

([21]) Some of these examples are from Tanney (2009), p. xviii. I categorically do not wish to suggest that every instance of, say, playing notes on a piano is a type of thinking, just that some are. To elaborate these examples: the physical activity is not something separate from the thinking. It is how the thinking is exemplified and how an idea, some inspiration or frustration, say, is worked through.

([22]) The resemblance to the later Wittgenstein on this point is striking, but I do not detail it here.

([23]) This applies also to technical words for Ryle. To take a much-used example, we might say that it is discovered and *stipulated* that water is H_2O. Fine. But non-scientists rarely encounter H_2O. What most people typically encounter is H_2O with impurities of various sorts. Does that mean we should not call the stuff in the bottles on our desks ‘water’? Do we have to say that it is just a shorthand? Do we have to say that we have one word ‘water’ that, strictly, stands for two

related concepts: the technical one and the everyday one? These are options. Another option is to say that, despite first appearances, WATER can legitimately be applied to more than just pure H_2O.

([24]) I owe this example to Sophie-Grace Chappell.

([25]) At the very least, they are treated as descriptive concepts that often or always carry some pro or con element with them.

([26]) That last comment takes us into deep waters, where we have to think about people being attracted to the bad. I do not wish to wade too far in. I do not know about being attracted to the bad (rather than attracted to things that one thinks others think are bad), but I do think that people can be (counterintuitively) attracted to the repulsive and not just attracted to that which they acknowledge repulses others.

([27]) Dancy (1995), §VIII mentions this point and discusses and extends it in a way similar to how I do: introducing the notion of the good or right sort of way immediately takes us back to the evaluative and the thick.

([28]) It is at this point in the argument that my consideration of Vayrynen's argument in Chapter Seven is relevant.

([29]) This is probably the best place for me to discuss Debbie Roberts' view. In Roberts (2013) she outlines a very similar view to mine, where she makes the case for the 'Inclusive View'. The Inclusive View is the view that thick concepts have or just embody completely (in my terms), nonseparable evaluative content. Roberts and I are in broad and deep agreement. However, there are some details that *may* indicate disagreement, although in the end they do not. Two notable ones are worth drawing attention to. (Note that Väyrynen (2013), p. 210, note 51, highlights the first point as a potential difference, although this is because he does not go into detail and sharply distinguish the views I have called 'conservative', 'liberal', 'radical', and 'crazy'.) (a) I am happy to say that on some if not many occasions thick concepts can be used to convey some pro or con stance. Furthermore, I think that the possibility of them being used in this way is something essential to how it is that they are evaluative concepts. And, relatedly, I use this idea to motivate why they can be thought to be evaluative concepts and why this content is special. This is all consistent with thinking that thick concepts' evaluative content is not to be exhausted by PRO and CON. But I do wish to turn my back on the crazy and radical views, as indicated in the main text. What of Roberts? In Roberts (2013) she sets out a view that thick concepts have content that one can call evaluative and where "a plausible case can be made that they do not encode particular thin evaluations in their content" (p. 79). Is this a clear difference between us, particularly with her talk of 'encoding' and my extended discussion that stresses the appreciation of concepts across many instances? On paper this difference may be only a matter of emphasis

rather than clear opposition anyway, but in personal correspondence Roberts said that she found my position attractive and hoped that what she said in Roberts (2013) did not count against my position. (b) She focuses on the question of what it takes for a concept to be evaluative. For example, she considers essential contestability. This could be, and has been, misinterpreted. For a start, many of the conditions she picks out may not work. (Väyrynen, (2014) is a pretty good examination and attack on the condition of essential contestability being a necessary condition of the evaluative, and there is a general discussion of such marks in Väyrynen (2013), pp. 208–13.) But, more importantly, use of 'marks' may suggest that Roberts is interested in providing necessary and sufficient conditions that help to fix what it is for a concept to be evaluative. I have explicitly set my face against this strategy, and in personal correspondence Roberts has said that she is also not interested in doing this. That is why she chose the term 'marks'. Unfortunately, Väyrynen clearly thinks of these 'marks' *as* necessary and sufficient conditions. Terminology is always difficult here. If I had to pick any one term to try to summarize some of the aspects that evaluative concepts typically have and which nonevaluative concepts may not have, I would use the word 'trend', or even the phrase 'broad trend'. Whatever term we pick, Roberts and I agree that it is essential for the sort of position we defend that it is stated explicitly that one should be wary of being sucked into a philosophical game of trying to define that which cannot be defined at a particular level of detail in an exact and specific manner.

([30]) Putnam (2002), especially chapters 1 and 2. I also referred to this in Chapter One.

([31]) Putnam (2002), p. 11.

([32]) Putnam (2002), p. 31.

([33]) Jonathan Dancy has shared this view with me in conversation. See also Griffin (1996), chapter III, although he focuses on properties and supervenience.

([34]) Nozick (1974), pp. 174–8.

([35]) Below I underline this point with thoughts from Foot.

([36]) Dancy (1995), p. 270.

([37]) Blackburn (2013), pp. 124–5, quoting Skinner (2002), chapter 8.

([38]) In Williams (1996), pp. 29–30, Williams thinks about CHASTE (strictly, CHASTITY) and makes a related but different point, namely that a concept can be lost as time moves on, even if the word remains. In addition, concepts change as well as being lost. 'Sanctuary' as both noun and verb now straightforwardly means a safe refuge and to take safe refuge (as well as being part of a church), but in early times it referred specifically to taking refuge in a holy place and,

even more specifically, doing so if one was a debtor or a fugitive from justice. Shakespeare straightforwardly uses ‘naughty’ to mean ‘wicked’ in *Macbeth*, Act III scene ii. Many religious and ethico-religious concepts have changed since medieval times in the West, for obvious reasons. In order to deal with other issues, I leave in the background the question ‘At what point does the change of a concept introduce a brand new concept, rather than a new version of the same concept?’ I am assuming that we are dealing here with the case of the same concept changing, and we need to understand why this happens. It is clearly relevant to my discussion to decide when a new concept emerges, but I put it aside here. That issue is a whole other book.

([39]) That was brief, but I hope the idea is clear enough. Other things can pull at the contours of a concept, such as one-off momentous events.

([40]) See Chalmers and Clark (1998).

([41]) Foot (1958), p. 503.

([42]) Foot (1958), p. 507.

([43]) Foot (1958), p. 508.

([44]) Foot (1958–9), pp. 86 and 87.