



## Thick Evaluation

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Print publication date: 2017

Print ISBN-13: 9780198803430

Published to Oxford Scholarship Online: December 2017

DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198803430.001.0001

## Essentially Evaluative?

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DOI:10.1093/oso/9780198803430.003.0007

### Abstract and Keywords

This chapter continues the account of thick concepts defended in Chapter Six by arguing that such concepts are essentially evaluative. This is opposed to the view that thick concepts are merely nonevaluative concepts that happen, every so often, to convey evaluation through linguistic and other contingent conventions. This opposing view has been best articulated by Pekka Väyrynen. This chapter presents and considers Väyrynen's arguments for his claim, and the assumptions that lie behind both his own account of thin and thick concepts, and his overall view of evaluation. This chapter ventures that his arguments against nonseparationism do not work and that, in addition, his own position is suspect.

*Keywords:* essentially evaluative, inherently evaluative, linguistic conventions, nonseparationism, Pekka Väyrynen

### 7.1 Introduction

In his *The Lewd, the Rude and the Nasty* Väyrynen puts centre stage a very important question:

Evaluation Question (EQ): How are thick terms and concepts related to the evaluations they may be used to convey?<sup>1</sup>

Väyrynen is to be applauded for concentrating our minds on EQ. As indicated in the previous chapter, his view is that while thin concepts can be and should be understood as inherently evaluative (his phrase), thick concepts need not be at all, and indeed we should assume that they are not. The assumption that thick concepts are essentially or inherently evaluative is absolutely key in the whole debate about thick concepts, and Väyrynen is right to focus on it. Not only does

this assumption affect the particular concerns of the last chapter, it affects other matters too. For example, if thick concepts carry evaluations only ‘accidentally’, as I have labelled the idea, then they are quite different types of thing from thin concepts, and the whole question of whether conceptual models such as the *genus-species* model are applicable to their relation falls away.

Straightaway we need to appreciate something about Väyrynen’s position. He is asking a question before we even get to the debate between separationists and nonseparationists, the debate that has occupied us thus far. He agrees with separationists that thick concepts are not inherently evaluative, but while most separationists think that this is because they can be disentangled into evaluative and descriptive aspects, Väyrynen thinks it because he denies they are evaluative in the first place, at least inherently so. His key positive contribution is to argue that the evaluative aspect of thick concepts is something pragmatically given, by tone of voice and context, and is not part of the semantics of the concept. (So one could be a separationist and think the evaluation is part of the semantics of (some complex) concept, even if it is something that can be separated from the descriptive parts.) Emphasis on the pragmatics of evaluation is something he shares with Blackburn, although it is fair **(p.151)** to say that Väyrynen in his work has given the most meticulous and careful treatment of this idea to date, hardening it into a thoroughly worked-out position.<sup>2,3</sup>

There are some things Väyrynen and I agree about. For example, although in the end I am inclined, unlike him, to think we can make out some difference between the thin and the thick, we both agree that more attention should be paid to the assumption that some binary distinction exists. We also think there is a deep and misguided assumption in the literature that all thick concepts work in the same way. I also agree with him that we understand a lot about thick concepts by putting EQ under the spotlight. However, we disagree about the answer we give to EQ, and this disagreement is significant.

I start in §7.2 by commenting on our different phrases: Väyrynen’s ‘inherently evaluative’ and my ‘essentially evaluative’. This sets the scene for my argument. In §7.3 I summarize Väyrynen’s view and the main arguments for it. (This is condensed as his answer to EQ occupies his entire book.) In §7.4 I counter his arguments. In §7.5 I conclude.

### 7.2 Inherently or Essentially Evaluative?

Looking at philosophers’ labels can sometimes be a blind alley. It can appear that much hangs on some term or phrase, but sometimes less is revealed than is predicted. I am not sure how much Väyrynen’s language reveals about his intentions. But I can say, confidently, that it reveals something about *my* thinking.

There is a difference in English between ‘inherent’ and ‘essential’ even though it is small. The idea of inherence is that there is some quality or some attribute or some something that exists quite inseparably and essentially in another thing. That seems to capture nicely a lot of nonseparationist talk about thick concepts. We have the idea of something being inseparable and essential, and we can remain quite neutral on how to characterize the thing credited with these qualities. It might be an element or it might be an aspect, and this echoes my discussion early on in this book about these two terms.

Yet, even though Väyrynen’s language is not completely misleading, it does still assume, however implicitly, that evaluation is thought to be a quality or aspect of the whole of the thick concept. We have one thing—the evaluation—in the thick concept. This phrasing, however well-intentioned, still buys into and underscores the idea that evaluation is something that is apart from the concept as a whole. For evidence, see his use of phrases of thick terms and concepts ‘containing’ evaluation and of (p.152) evaluation ‘being built’ into the meaning of such terms and concepts.<sup>4</sup> By use of this word, then, perhaps Väyrynen shows his assumption about what evaluation is.

My use of ‘essential’ is supposed to bypass this worry. The key thing about thick concepts is that they are evaluative and are so essentially. That is all. I leave it open, at the beginning, whether the evaluation is an essential part or aspect of thick concepts, or something else, such as the idea that the thick concept *just is* something that is evaluative. Of course, I argued for this latter view in the previous chapter: our familiar thick concepts simply are forms of evaluation. ‘Inherent’ shuts out this important option.

I did speak of ‘aspects’ early on in this book, and I have run everything in terms of evaluative and descriptive content, thus implicitly emphasizing some clear difference of kind. But I turned the spotlight on this in the previous chapter and questioned this type of talk. This is not to say that I disown all of my set up and see it merely as a vehicle for ideas before we get here; a necessary journey before Nirvana. We can still talk of thick concepts having descriptive and evaluative aspects. But that sort of talk should invite questions and reflection into what is meant by ‘aspect’ and whether the evaluation should, in the end, be seen in such-and-such a way. It should not indicate a settled matter as we move onto other questions. Talk of thick concepts being essentially evaluative is supposed to make us question how close talk of ‘evaluative and descriptive aspects’ is to talk of ‘evaluative and descriptive elements’. For me there is a world of difference. Further, I think we are better off characterizing the best sort of nonseparationist position in terms of ‘essential’ and not ‘inherent’ evaluation.

From now on I switch between ‘essential’ and ‘inherent’ as necessary, in order to stay faithful to Väyrynen’s expression of his view.

### 7.3 Väyrynen's View and the Arguments for it

Väyrynen uses linguistic evidence and theory to discuss how thick terms are used in everyday contexts. He claims, correctly, that not enough attention has been paid to language in the debate about thick concepts and, further, that we can draw interesting conclusions about concepts from what happens to their associated terms.

As mentioned, Väyrynen's answer to EQ is that thick concepts do not convey or carry evaluation inherently, and he criticizes those that think it does. He further specifies this idea by saying that to think of a thick term, and concept, as inherently evaluative is to think that it has evaluation or evaluative content as part of the literal meaning of the term (and associated concept), as used in a normal context. In contrast, he thinks that evaluation is best understood as something that speakers imply or suggest in using thick terms and what hearers typically from their uses, in normal context, and such implications and suggestions are conveyed by the context, **(p.153)** by the tone of voice, and the like. According to him, pro and con evaluations are not very reliable constraints on literal uses of terms in normal contexts, since such evaluations do not behave as a semantic entailment is supposed to behave once we consider many different linguistic phenomena. This is true even if we assume, as he does, that the relationship between evaluations and thick terms is fairly robust across different contexts. It is just that he prefers that this should be explained pragmatically rather than by assuming that the evaluation is secured as part of the semantics of the terms. He assumes a fairly clear and strict division between pragmatics and semantics.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast, thin terms and concepts are understood by him to be *the* paradigmatic type of evaluative term and concept; throughout the first two chapters the question of whether evaluation is inherent in thick terms and concepts is run in terms of whether and how they convey good and bad evaluations.<sup>6</sup> The following establishes his view of what he means by 'evaluation':

My suggestion for characterizing evaluation without reference to *pro tanto* value is to understand it as information that is somehow positive or negative in favour. This needn't mean the sort of bare 'pro' or 'con' assessment exemplified by the proto-emotivist understanding of evaluative judgement as an expression of a 'boo' or a 'hurrah'. Evaluation might rather be understood as information to the effect that something has positive or negative standing—merit or demerit, worth or unworth—relative to a certain kind of standard. If we say further that the relevant kind of standard must be of the kind that is capable of grounding claims of merit or worth, this would explain why claims of merit and worth are often expressible by the sorts of attitudes that we associate with evaluation, such as praise, admiration and criticism. (A standard may be *of a kind* to ground

claims of merit or worth without actually succeeding in grounding them. Even if calling something lustful, for instance, implies a negative standing relative to a standard that the speaker regards as grounding a claim of demerit, it is a further question whether counting as lustful is in fact a demerit...)<sup>7</sup>

He goes on:

The characterization I offer is ecumenical in nature. It can allow the relevant kind of standard to be vague, indeterminate or controversial. For instance, what counts as morally good, or even as a good philosopher, is controversial and may be vague. The characterization is also flexible regarding the strength of the relevant kind of standard. The relevant kind of standard can concern *pro tanto* value, the characterization allows also standards that ground evaluations as **(p.154)** good (or bad) in some other sort of way. To say of someone that she is a good assassin, or a good football player, or good at cooking, is to say that she is good in some particular way or respect. In this sense such claims are no less evaluative than claims to the effect that something is morally good, or admirable, or just. On this view of evaluation, information that someone is a good assassin counts as evaluative because it is information to the effect that she is good in a particular way. Of course, some things will be bad in certain ways, such as morally, if they are good in certain other ways, such as assassinating. But this is perfectly coherent if standards may be relativized in ways that this view of evaluation allows.<sup>8</sup>

Standard thin terms may be employed in larger expressions, for example, 'good assassin', and those expressions can end up having evaluative points different from those that are usually associated with the terms on their own. This is to be explained by the standards that apply to certain terms or phrases in those different contexts. Similarly, a certain sarcastic tone of voice might alter 'good' to mean 'bad', but that is easy to understand and ubiquitous. (Indeed, it seems right to say that the term 'good' said sarcastically is used to convey BAD or CON.) We can imagine that someone could agree with Väyrynen and take this phenomenon on one step, and argue that concepts such as JUST and WISE are inherently evaluative. Sure they can be transformed by tone of voice and be used to convey con evaluations, but such instances are comparatively rare. We could infer, following further investigation, that because of the character and frequency of the transformations, such concepts are inherently (positively) evaluative. That would make sense of the idea that such concepts are fairly close to standard thin concepts and may even be classed under this heading. However, despite this possibility, it is clear that Väyrynen accepts only a few examples into the group of inherently evaluative concepts.<sup>9</sup>

More insight into Väyrynen's views on evaluation comes from a view he sets aside as extreme.<sup>10</sup> This view states that a term or concept is evaluative if it has *any* evaluative connotations. (Again, by 'evaluative' he means pro and con evaluations.) He acknowledges that some linguists do think this, citing Adrienne Lehrer.<sup>11</sup> In her discussion of wine, she counts terms such as 'buttery', 'sweet', and 'woody' as evaluative. Väyrynen rejects this view since it is obvious that a term can be used in this way and yet not be inherently evaluative. Just think back, again, to my example of CHAIR in Chapter Two, or to OLD from Chapter Six; we might feel uncomfortable in saying that CHAIR or OLD were evaluative concepts even if on occasion we use them to convey some positive or negative view or attitude. Just because there are a few examples of contexts where a term or concept carries evaluative connotations, this does not mean such a term or concept is inherently evaluative.

**(p.155)** That, then, is his view. He has three main arguments for it: (i) thick terms can be objected to, in a way I set out momentarily, and the evaluations supposedly inherent in them project to other contexts in a way that other semantic parts do not; (ii) thick terms' evaluations are far too defeasible in a way that semantic entailments are not; and (iii) other features that supposedly support the view that thick terms are evaluative are better accounted for in ways that show these evaluations to be given pragmatically.<sup>12</sup>

(i) It is routinely assumed in linguistics that if parts of a term or phrase are to be considered part of its semantics, then they should not 'project' when that term or phrase is embedded in certain contexts. We can use one of Väyrynen's favourite examples to introduce the idea. Imagine people saying these:

- (1) Madonna's show is expensive
- (2) Nah, Madonna's show is not expensive.<sup>13</sup>

When we say (2) the embedding means that we unambiguously say that Madonna's show is not expensive. The core meaning of the term 'expensive' is that something costs a relatively large amount of money and by saying (2) someone clearly rejects the view that it does. Or, in other words, embeddings such as (2) easily and unambiguously cancel core semantic entailments. When we say that some part of the term or phrase, some implication, 'projects' then we are saying that it survives such embeddings and remains uncanceled in some way.

What about thick terms? Väyrynen introduces the notion of an 'objectionable' term (or concept). This is any term that one could take objection to because, one thinks, the pointed evaluation that is most closely connected with the term does not fit those items that are typically classified using the term. Väyrynen uses

'lewd' as his main example and I construct the following scenario to illustrate his point.<sup>14</sup>

Imagine that Huey thinks Madonna's show is lewd. Dewey disagrees. He thinks the show is within appropriate boundaries. But the key point about them is that they are both prudes: they typically go around saying that things are lewd, and praise certain non-lewd things for their decency, and do so sincerely. They think that categorizing things as lewd is important, illuminating, appropriate, and the like. So in that broader sense they are in agreement, despite their disagreement about Madonna's show. In contrast, a third person, Louie, objects to the term 'lewd'. He objects to it being employed pretty much anywhere and everywhere, in part because it classifies certain sorts of activity as bad that he does not think should be classified as bad. He thinks that using 'lewd' is itself a bad or unjustified or silly (or...) thing **(p.156)** to do.<sup>15</sup> So Louie disagrees with Huey because he does not think the show is lewd. But he also lacks the broad agreement that Huey and Dewey share.

To understand what is happening, consider:

- (3) Madonna's show is lewd.
- (4) Nah, Madonna's show is not lewd.

Huey says (3). Dewey says (4), but that might be a little unsatisfactory if we are capturing real life. We can imagine that Dewey could and would offer some reasons for asserting it. He might say something such as:

- (5) Madonna's show is sexually insinuating alright, but it's not lewd because no private parts are exposed.<sup>16</sup>

From this Väyrynen says:

What the speaker of (4) [i.e. Dewey] isn't naturally heard as denying are some such evaluations as the generic claim in (6) or the singular conditional in (7):

- (6) Overt displays of sexuality that transgress conventional boundaries are bad in a certain way. (Read as meaning: bad in a distinctive way that typical *lewd*-users regard them as bad.)

- (7) If Madonna's show involves overt displays of sexuality that transgresses conventional boundaries, then it is bad in a certain way.

So it is reasonable in the context primed above the speakers of (4) [i.e. Dewey] accepts something like (6) or (7).<sup>17</sup>

Or, in other words, (6) and (7) are plausibly construed as implications that Dewey accepts.

So what? Imagine a normal conversational context. Väyrynen imagines that Dewey could happily say (4) while Louie cannot, at least without offering further explanation of his view. Louie is liable to be misunderstood and there will be some ambiguity in the situation. So he may be reluctant to assert (4) straightforwardly, even if he can do so meaningfully.<sup>18</sup> How come? It is because, says Väyrynen, that Louie does not accept (6) and (7), or similar ideas, and people such as him typically do not succeed in denying (6) and (7) by uttering (4). (Indeed, Louie's reluctance might be because he knows that this is how everyday communication and arguments work.)

This then gives us Väyrynen's proposal, which is to treat evaluations such as (6) and (7) as implications of utterances of (3) and to see them as implications that **(p.157)** project. They should be treated in this way because they are not cancelled simply by uttering (4). (Remember, even if he is reluctant to say (4) in many conversational contexts, Louie can still meaningfully say it.) And so if (6) and (7) are not cancelled simply by being embedded in a context such as (4), then we should not treat them as part of the semantic core of the term.

We need to realize that this generalizes. Any thick term (or concept) can be an objectionable thick term (or concept), for there may be someone who rejects its presuppositions and implications. An objector objects to a certain collection of features being grouped in a certain way with either some pro or con evaluation conjoined to it. 'Lewd' shows this well, and many people do not wish to be prudes. Derogatory racial and sexual epithets show the phenomenon even better, since many people object to and reject such terms. But we should realize that any thick term or concept can be challenged: ELEGANT, WISE, and all the rest.

(ii) Väyrynen's point about defeasibility is easier to state.<sup>19</sup> Consider this:

(8) Whether or not Madonna's show is lewd, it's not bad in any way distinctive of explicit sexual display.<sup>20</sup>

In short, if the con evaluation of 'lewd' were part of the semantic core of the term, then we would find (8) to be semantically improper. But we do not, says Väyrynen, for (8) seems reasonable to say. So it is better if we do not treat the con evaluation as part of the semantic core of the term, but instead assume that evaluations can come and go more freely, and be offered and understood pragmatically.

(iii) In addition to these two arguments, Väyrynen considers a range of considerations that have been given to support the view that thick terms are inherently evaluative. These considerations include: evaluations help to drive the



extensions of thick terms and that one cannot understand the extensions without understanding the evaluations; that thick terms are supposedly shapeless with respect to nonevaluative terms; and the idea that evaluative and descriptive aspects are inseparable. He argues, instead, that his preferred pragmatic view can easily explain these phenomena. He then wields (a generalization of) Grice's razor, that other things being equal it is better to adopt the pragmatic view because it assumes fewer semantic properties.

#### 7.4 Responses

(i) I use a suggestion from Debbie Roberts to help meet Väyrynen's first argument.<sup>21</sup> The first question—a revealing one—to be asked is whether a thin term or concept (**p.158**) such as 'good'/GOOD can be objectionable in the same way. That may seem a startling question. After all, who could possibly imagine that 'good' could be objected to? But, as Roberts notes, Väyrynen himself opens this avenue even if he does not pursue it with as much vigour as she and I would want. Specifically he considers whether JUST can be objected to and rejected in the same fashion as above, and references Thrasymachus and Marxism.<sup>22</sup> Alongside these people, we can think about Milton's Satan, at least on some readings. One may find it difficult to imagine these as serious, real-life cases; and even if one accepts it for JUST one may find it hard to imagine if for GOOD. (Väyrynen himself notes this worry but mentions the phenomenon of imaginative resistance in support of us being open-minded about objection.) And, further, we have to remember that GOOD can and is objected to by people, certainly if by this we mean MORALLY GOOD (and if we recall from Chapter Four that we can distinguish between GOOD and PRO). We do not even have to think about Marxists and Nietzscheans, but more philosophically mainstream people such as moral error theorists, and artists and political agitators of various stripes through the years.

So let us assume that there is enough motivation for GOOD and similar thin concepts to work in the same way as LEWD and thick concepts. Louie, or someone like him, may feel reluctant to enter a discussion in which others are debating whether something is morally good, simply because he rejects the whole notion. In which case, we then have to conclude that the pro or con evaluation that is seemingly part of 'good' and GOOD is also detachable, and that thin terms and concepts such as these are not essentially evaluative either. That seems like a crazy conclusion. If you worry that running the worry in terms of GOOD is too far-fetched, then even running this in terms of the slightly more specific MORALLY GOOD seems to result in a crazy conclusion. Are GOOD and MORALLY GOOD really not going to count as inherently evaluative? Are the only inherently evaluative concepts PRO and CON? Too much has been proved and the situation or phenomena are more complex than Väyrynen makes out.<sup>23</sup>

Roberts argues that we need to make a key distinction between conceptual evaluations and substantive evaluations. The former concerns the evaluation or evaluations that are part of the concept, the latter concerns the evaluations that one can make of the concept, its evaluative point, and how it is used. In the cases of GOOD and MORALLY GOOD, the conceptual evaluation is clearly something pro. Most people will then also have a positive, substantive evaluation of these concepts, but a few people will not. They may reject them for many different reasons but at the core will be a rejection of some positive assessment of ways of acting in some moral fashion, where 'moral' is understood along some social or psychological lines that **(p.159)** they think should not be viewed positively. Whatever the reasons for the rejection, critics will have to understand the point of the concept and how it is used in order to reject it.<sup>24</sup> In all of this, if they reject, then this rejection does not show that the evaluation is not an essential part of the concept. Indeed, the rejection may occur because of the evaluative point of the concept, not just how it happens to be being used on a particular occasion by some people.

We can repeat the point by making sense of Louie's situation. He has to understand what is going on when Huey and Dewey are talking. He has to appreciate that they are using an evaluative concept and what the dialogue is about; if he does not, then there is no meaningful rejection but just misfiring communication. Louie chooses not to use and apply 'lewd' and LEWD and refuses to enter into a detailed and sincere discussion in the same way as the two of them, because he rejects the evaluative point of the term and concept. (He may be rejecting the con evaluation specifically because he enjoys displays of a sexual nature. Or, alternatively, he may reject LEWD in a more holistic fashion: whether the pointed evaluation is pro, con, or neutral, he dislikes a concept that groups together certain sorts of sexual activity and then presents them positively or negatively.) He does so for reasons to do with how it picks out actions and gives them evaluative sheen. All of this does not cast doubt on the fact that LEWD is not an essentially evaluative concept. It shows only that Louie has made an evaluation of some (evaluative) concept, and has chosen to reject it. Similarly, we can presume that Huey and Dewey (if they are reflective) have evaluated the concept and decided to use it sincerely. The fact that Louie judges and rejects the concept after reflecting on its evaluative point and potential for use in a discussion seems to strengthen the claim that it is to be treated as an evaluative concept.

We can even go further than Roberts' line, if we need to. We could take any concept, it need not be evaluative. Perhaps for some reason I object to the idea of and application of BACHELOR or CHAIR or, for reasons of imaginative realism, some concept used by some group alien to me involving how one should count objects or classify actions. I might refuse to engage in meaningful, first-order discussion using the concept, just as Louie does in the case above. But would my rejection cast any serious doubt on any aspect of the concept being

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essential to the concept? I do not see that it would, at least without there being additional details provided for the rejection. In which case, it would then probably be those details that would be the deciding factor, not the overall nature of the concept itself.<sup>25</sup>

(ii) One can take three broad lines in response to Väyrynen's second argument. First, one can agree with Väyrynen: we have utterances such as (8) which do not **(p.160)** admit of any semantic impropriety, think that the evaluations that are part of the concept cannot constrain one's literal use of the thick term or concept, and hence conclude that such evaluations therefore cannot be part of the semantic core of the term. Second, one can disagree with Väyrynen and argue that utterances such as (8) are semantically improper.<sup>26</sup> Third, one can question Väyrynen's set-up. Throughout his discussion of 'lewd' and other terms, he presumes a single specific evaluation, a pro or a con, and then the sort of tension in (8) arises because we seem to be negating it. What if we assume, instead, that a thick term and associated concept can embrace a range of different specific evaluations—pro, con, neither—in the way I have discussed earlier in this study under the heading of 'evaluative flexibility'? I take this third approach.

Väyrynen does consider this option, but what he says is not very convincing to my mind.<sup>27</sup> He notes that this position will make concepts and their mastery complex affairs. I agree. Unfortunately, he does not provide any discussion to show that this is implausible. (To my mind, it is a very plausible claim, given what we know about humans, their thought process, and their communication abilities.) However, he does say that even if concepts are complex, it is better to explain their evaluative complexity in other ways, "on the basis of various pieces of world knowledge, substantive evaluative beliefs and general-purpose abilities which aren't specifically conceptual".<sup>28</sup> I do not know what it would be to separate such matters from our use of evaluative concepts (or concepts that *prima facie* appear evaluative), especially 'substantive evaluative beliefs'. This may reflect and continue the difference between the two of us I expressed in §7.2 between essential and inherent evaluation.

The main point Väyrynen makes is to imagine that a proponent of the view will claim that "many words are correctly interpreted in different contexts". To illustrate the contention he considers the use of 'cut' and CUT via considerations from John Searle, who provides different examples of how 'cut' is used and what it implies: cutting a cake with a lawnmower and cutting the grass with a knife both seem wrong.<sup>29</sup> (We can add 'cut the cloth', 'cut to the chase', 'she cut me up' (re. driving), 'they cut in' (re. queuing), and 'he is all cut up' (re. being devastated); we can talk of the noun as well as the verb; we can distinguish piercing, slicing, separating, shaping; and so on.) Väyrynen simply casts doubt on whether there is a single concept CUT that the word refers to in all of its uses. But he does allow that there can be 'free enrichment' whereby an

expression or word is given a pragmatically derived interpretation that is more specific than what the expression literally encodes. (So I take it that by this he imagines that the literally encoding may be very general, and is given different specific senses pragmatically.)

**(p.161)** My response to this move is twofold. First, the conclusions Väyrynen draws might be true for 'cut' and the (clearly) different uses of the word in different contexts. The question that Väyrynen does not discuss head on is whether the same is true of concepts such as MACABRE, and even SIMILAR, which seem to have far fewer specific meanings and uses. The proposal is only that there will be a little variety of specific evaluation given, pro, con, or neither. Drawing doubt on the more varied 'cut' may do nothing to shift the nonseparationist proposal of evaluative flexibility that I favour.

Second, Väyrynen is happy to treat thin concepts as evaluative but not thick concepts. Yet the phenomena that I have discussed in this book put pressure on that clean division. DUTY for a start may convey different specific evaluations. In that case, Väyrynen may not treat it and concepts like it as inherently evaluative. Fine. So perhaps only those concepts that have a single specific evaluation whenever sincerely used (with no sarcasm, etc.) have a chance of being classed as inherently evaluative. But, even in that case, we saw that MORALLY GOOD, for example, may not fit the needed profile, for it could be objected to (it can be sincerely used by some to criticize others, and some nihilists may reject the concept altogether). In which case, it would be better to read the evaluation it conveyed as pragmatically given. But now we are getting fewer and fewer concepts counted as inherently evaluative. The whole picture building up is one where Väyrynen has very tightly conceived notions both of what evaluation is and of what inherently/essentially evaluative concepts are, and these may be applied to very few concepts.

This is reflected in the fact that he has quite a different view of concepts and conceptual understanding from that which I have offered. This takes me to my response to his third set of considerations.

(iii) The details of the considerations Väyrynen offers (shapelessness, etc.) need not hold us up. The key point to focus on is whether Grice's razor can be invoked and whether other things *are* equal. In his use of this philosophical principle, Väyrynen is raising the question of whether thick concepts are somehow special in how they relate to the evaluation that they carry and convey. He is, relatedly, questioning whether such concepts are any different from those obviously nonevaluative concepts such as CHAIR and OLD that can convey evaluation but which we would not want to classify as evaluative. He thinks that there is no difference in kind, at least in respect of the evaluation being inherent, and that any of the phenomena standardly invoked in the literature do not justify the classification of thick concepts as special. What difference or differences there

are are differences of degree: certain concepts convey evaluative points more often than others (and far more often in some cases) and in certain ways that others do not, but the way in which they carry such points should be explained pragmatically, just as it is for OLD and CHAIR.<sup>30</sup>

**(p.162)** There are three sorts of response to this challenge. The first is to show that Väyrynen is wrong in what he says about the various phenomena such as shapelessness. I do not take this route here, in part because I think that Väyrynen says some interesting and plausible things about the phenomena he discusses along the way. The second is to choose a different phenomenon that Väyrynen has not discussed in order to prove the special nature. I do not take this route because I think that sucks me into a position that I do not wish to defend, namely that the evaluative and the descriptive are starkly different. I prefer a third strategy, namely to question and undermine some of Väyrynen's assumptions; I have already begun to raise these at the end of the previous subsection.<sup>31</sup>

He assumes that there has to be some division between evaluative and nonevaluative concepts or, better, some division between those concepts that are inherently evaluative and those that are not and which convey evaluation accidentally. As shown in the previous chapter, I think that the examples do not show this at all, even if we may wish to mark out some concepts as clearly and unquestionably evaluative, and mark others as nonevaluative even if they can be used to convey evaluative point every so often, such as CHAIR.

This links to how we regard differences among concepts. I think that there are differences, but I argue that we can determine what those differences are and where they lie through judgement, perhaps on a case-by-case basis, and indeed presumably we can spot trends. Inevitably there will be disagreements and, indeed, some grey area as to which concepts are evaluative and why. This, I very strongly suspect, will not satisfy Väyrynen (and others). He wants us to be able to say clearly, using a set of conditions (which may well be necessary and sufficient conditions in some form), what it is for a concept to be evaluative. Indeed, putting matters like this is one way of framing the narrative of his entire book. But imposing this sort of injunction on the phenomena creates problems, as we have seen in this chapter. He stresses at various points in his book that if we have a mass of concepts all treated as evaluative, then we will not be able to mark as we should important differences between concepts.<sup>32</sup> I agree that we should spot trends and differences. But I deny that all of these differences have to be so distinct as Väyrynen makes out, and one has to nail them with conditions that apparently have to be so clear-cut and final.

**(p.163)** All of this reflects the different view of concepts we have, and a difference between us when it comes to semantics and pragmatics. I am not about to try to undermine this important linguistic distinction completely, but it

is instructive to question the supposed clarity and strictness of it, and as Väyrynen's example of Lehrer shows, some linguists query how clear the divide is.<sup>33</sup>

Once we start to focus on terms exclusively, and assume that what goes for terms has implications for concepts, we can get sucked into the assumption that there is a clear difference between semantics and pragmatics: a clear difference between the literal meanings of terms and what they can be used to convey (and how they do so). We get sucked into thinking that, on the one hand, there are the terms in 'the page and the air', and what they standardly mean in the abstract, and, on the other, the meanings that are conveyed beyond this. Once this move is made and accepted, Väyrynen is able to identify his target. To say that a thick term (or concept) has inherent evaluation is to say that this is part of the meaning of the concept, which means that, because it is inherent, it is part of the literal meaning of the concept. But, as Väyrynen can show, when we think about how terms (and concepts) are used, we can see that the evaluations seemingly do not act as standard semantic entailments are supposed to act. So it is seemingly natural to infer that they are accidental to the thick terms (and concepts), and not inherent in them.

My counter-move from above, in (i), can be made to this. But we can also unpick the background assumptions. I prefer to focus on concepts rather than terms, even if I agree that we should pay attention to how terms are used. Terms and concepts are different, and not just because—very crudely—terms are 'speech-things' and concepts are 'idea-things'. It is not as if there is no link at all between the terms we use and the concepts that are employed, nor no link at all between the semantics of a term and the content of a concept. However, I am more liberal than Väyrynen.<sup>34</sup> The ways in which we use a concept build from a range of uses of a term in various contexts. To reuse previous thoughts, we understand what the concept THINKING means only by considering the various contexts in which it is used and how it is used. Aside from some simple and trivially correct synonym such as 'mental life', we develop and understand characterizations of 'thinking' (and 'mental life') only by appreciating various examples, their similarities and differences. And, yes, sometimes a term can be used in a wide variety of ways, and we may wish to resist the idea that all of those ways are part of the 'core' of the term or concept. 'Cut' and CUT show this phenomenon well. But just because some examples are like this, it does not mean that we then have to restrict the core meaning of every term and concept example in some very narrow fashion. I think that our use of concepts (and terms), and the variety of **(p.164)** uses that there may be, feeds into the meaning of the concept. It is clear that Väyrynen is far more resistant to this idea than I am.

That is why Väyrynen's citing of Lehrer's discussion of wine is interesting, and it also indicates the worry that he focuses too much on terms. Off the top of my head the term 'sweet' can be used to indicate at least three different concepts: the nonevaluative concept pertaining to a flavour, such as the flavour of normal cane-sugar; to indicate PRO, as in 'Look at my sweet set of wheels, man!'; and, third, the evaluative concept that typically indicates something pro, but which need not always.<sup>35</sup> Now, all three concepts may be at work in wine conversation, although the first is most likely to be used literally when thinking about something such as dessert wines. I presume that the concept Lehrer focuses on in wine conversation is something evaluative that can often be used to convey pro and con ideas. Is any evaluation of pro and con that comes forth in such wine conversations accidental to the concept as understood in this way? No. It is an important part of the concept that it has the potential to be used in these pointed ways, and the fact that it can be used in such ways, and that it is pregnant with these ideas itself all of the time, makes any use of it evaluative. We get specific ideas and it helps to build a certain context and picture of the wine. This leads into my final point in this sub-section.

All of this reflects the different views of how concepts can carry or convey evaluation that Väyrynen and I have. Evaluation is not a separate thing conveyed by concepts. I regard evaluation as something that is both conceptually basic and also a complex aspect of our lives that, in turn, is given life only by the concepts which are considered by mature users as evaluative. Although appealing, thinking of evaluation as something exhausted by PRO and CON and hived off from the concepts, even if such notions live in a few of them inherently, seems to me to be too narrow a view of evaluation and our evaluative lives. In this way Väyrynen shares a great deal with all separationists. And it is a view I have sought to challenge in this study.

### 7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined some arguments against the idea that thick concepts are inherently or essentially evaluative. We have seen that these arguments can be questioned and found wanting. Their failure helps to cement my view. By saying that thick concepts are essentially evaluative we are indicating that certain concepts have certain roles and jobs to do, and we have a certain need for concepts that have as their prime and essential role the conveyance of evaluation. Even if we allow that such concepts can, even individually, carry a whole host of evaluations and be used in many ways, that does not detract from their essential role.

#### Notes:

(<sup>1</sup>) Väyrynen (2013), chapter 1.3.

(<sup>2</sup>) How Blackburn would place himself in relation to this matter is an interesting question, but I leave it aside here.

<sup>(3)</sup> I could have started this whole study by rebutting Väyrynen's argument, and followed that with the debate between separationists and nonseparationists. But given the historical significance of the ideas in that debate, and given that some of my arguments against Väyrynen rest on my own view, I introduce his view only now.

<sup>(4)</sup> Väyrynen (2013), p. 32, which echoes p. 9 and p. 31.

<sup>(5)</sup> This is very condensed. Across Väyrynen (2013), chapter 5, having dismissed semantic entailments (which I focus on below), Väyrynen also considers that evaluation can be cast as something else (for example, as conventional implicatures, conversational implicatures, etc.) before settling on his particular pragmatic view. For reasons of space I ignore these discussions.

<sup>(6)</sup> See also Väyrynen (2013), p. 208 as a summary: "I assumed [throughout this book] that what distinguishes the thick early on from the thin is that thick terms and concepts somehow hold together evaluation and nonevaluative description whereas thin concepts are purely evaluative. And I assumed that the evaluations to which thick terms are concepts are most closely connected are claims to the effect that something is good, or bad, in a certain way."

<sup>(7)</sup> Väyrynen (2013), pp. 29–30.

<sup>(8)</sup> Väyrynen (2013), p. 30.

<sup>(9)</sup> He never says as much, although it is a clear implication of the whole book and, as I read it, is *supposed to be* a clear and direct implication of the whole book. However, the final paragraph of Väyrynen (2013), p. 185 is relevant. Here he discusses the possibility of 'distributively just' being classified as thin, just as 'ought' is.

<sup>(10)</sup> Väyrynen (2013), p. 33.

<sup>(11)</sup> Lehrer (2009).

<sup>(12)</sup> The first and second arguments are in Väyrynen (2013), chapters 3 and 4 (especially 3.3 for the first, and 3.4 for the second), while the third (comprising a range of considerations) comes in the following chapters, particularly chapters 7–9. See also Väyrynen (2009) for an earlier statement of the first argument.

<sup>(13)</sup> To be really clear, (2) does not express a double negative. The 'Nah...' is supposed to reflect everyday speech patterns.

<sup>(14)</sup> For simplicity, I focus on negations, but Väyrynen also considers questions, epistemic modals, etc.



(<sup>15</sup>) More specifically, he may reject the particular *conception* of LEWD that Huey and Dewey employ with that associated term. But to keep things simple we will ignore this wrinkle, even if it is important in real-life situations.

(<sup>16</sup>) Väyrynen (2013), p. 62.

(<sup>17</sup>) Väyrynen (2013), pp. 62–3.

(<sup>18</sup>) Louie's situation is just like mine when I say, 'That table is not blogon' and where I think BLOGON is not a meaningful or useful concept. When I deny that the table is blogon, I am saying something meaningful and something I take to be true, but I could be taken to be a (sincere) blogon-user, who would happily say, 'While *this* table is not blogon, *that one* over there is.'

(<sup>19</sup>) However, I am summarizing and ignoring many of the interesting details Väyrynen works through, again for simplicity's sake.

(<sup>20</sup>) Väyrynen (2013), p. 70. This is numbered (23) there.

(<sup>21</sup>) Roberts (2015), especially pp. 3–4. Roberts also raises the general question of whether other things *are* equal when considering Grice's razor, which I mention in my response to the third question, although I put forward points different from those she does.

(<sup>22</sup>) See Väyrynen (2013), p. 150. I worry he is a little too dismissive on this point. His main response to the consideration he raises is that the pragmatic account he forwards explains things better anyway.

(<sup>23</sup>) A quick observation. Väyrynen devotes barely any space to thinking about the nature and character of thin terms and concepts, even though evaluation is clearly identified with them.

(<sup>24</sup>) If they reject it but do so based on inadequate understanding, then I could be accused of changing the rules of Väyrynen's set-up, since the scenario of an objector makes sense only if we assume that there is some meaningful dialogue between the parties and no talking past one another.

(<sup>25</sup>) There is one potential fly in the ointment of this entire counter. We assume that someone can understand a concept without thereby sharing it. Why this could be a problem and how nonseparationists can meet it is the topic of the next chapter.

(<sup>26</sup>) Bedke (2014) claims this.

(<sup>27</sup>) Väyrynen (2013), pp. 226–9. As I do, Väyrynen refers to Dancy (1995) as the main source for this view.

(<sup>28</sup>) Väyrynen (2013), pp. 227–8.

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(<sup>29</sup>) Searle (1980), pp. 222–3.

(<sup>30</sup>) See, for example, Väyrynen (2013), p. 10.

(<sup>31</sup>) Väyrynen does try to make sense of the type of position I mark out, namely that evaluation is not exhausted by PRO and CON; see Väyrynen (2013), pp. 208–13. Two points are worth making. First, by his own admission he struggles to make sense of this position, although to be fair there have been very few pieces of work to reference and work with, and no extended discussions at the time of his writing. Second, he latches onto the idea, from Roberts, that there could be marks of the evaluative, and then seeks to show that these marks do nothing to single out supposed evaluative concepts as special. I discussed this in Chapter Six, note 29.

(<sup>32</sup>) For example, see Väyrynen (2013), p. 37: “Moreover, even if paradigmatic thick terms and concepts turn out not to be inherently evaluative, a characterization that sorts *chocolate* and *athletic* into the same conceptual bin as *cruel*, *just*, *selfish* and *courageous* might still be thought to ignore important differences in evaluative depth and significance.” I have not detailed it here, but he is interested in comparing and contrasting regular thick terms with pejoratives among other examples.

(<sup>33</sup>) For more on this see Travis (1997). Despite his obvious commitment to a sharp division between the two, even Väyrynen acknowledges that the world of language is messy. See Väyrynen (2013), pp. 51ff.

(<sup>34</sup>) The relevance here of themes in the thought of the later Wittgenstein will be obvious to many readers.

(<sup>35</sup>) Just to follow through on that, we might say that something is sweet (and I do not mean too sweet), where in fact we want something a bit edgy and dangerous, or something with a bit of bite. Sometimes we are in the mood for sweet pieces of music or dramas, and sometimes we are not.

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