Separationism

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Abstract and Keywords

The main aim of this chapter is to describe in detail separationism: its core aspects, its motivations, its advantages, and its weaknesses. In doing so two broad forms of separationism are detailed and contrasted. 'Simple separationism' is developed using the work of Simon Blackburn. 'Complex separationism' was expressed in a paper by Daniel Elstein and Thomas Hurka and is extended in this chapter. As well as showing how these two forms of separationism contrast and their advantages and disadvantages, this chapter highlights the desiderata that any account of thin and thick concepts much satisfy and lists four worries that one may have with nonseparationism.

Keywords: advantages, Simon Blackburn, Daniel Elstein and Thomas Hurka, flaws, separationism

2.1 Introduction

The main aim of this chapter is to detail one of the two main accounts that seek to characterize thick concepts. As mentioned in Chapter One, I label this account 'separationism'. Although I list and explore some of its advantages towards the end of this chapter, I do not advocate it. In later chapters I do argue against separationism, but my present task is to describe and understand it so as to outline its appeal.

There are some ghosts at our feast. The first is mentioned in passing a few times and it made an appearance in Chapter One. The disentangling argument, which employs the shapelessness hypothesis, is often raised against separationism. Some of the points made by separationists will make sense only once we have considered this argument and hypothesis in Chapter Five. But we must start

somewhere; we would find it hard to understand the disentangling argument without understanding what it was an argument against. I trust that what I say below makes enough sense for now without articulating what the argument and hypothesis are.

Two other ghosts are evaluative conceptual content (or 'evaluation' generally) and descriptive conceptual content. As mentioned in Chapter One, I do not begin by examining these labels in detail, but will merely employ them after a little discussion. For a start, *I* think the difference is something that can be said only once we have discussed the various battles between separationists and nonseparationists. Thick concepts are interesting because they call into question the claim that there is a hard and fast boundary between evaluation and descriptive conceptual content. So it would get matters the wrong way round to think that we have to articulate fully what evaluation is before we began to discuss thick concepts. In addition, it seems a fool's task to aim to give detailed necessary and sufficient conditions, say, to mark the difference between evaluative and descriptive content; or so I will suggest in this study.[1] It therefore seems good enough for our purposes to rely on rules of thumb and intuitions about familiar examples to tell the difference between thin and thick concepts. It seems better to let a view of the evaluative and the descriptive emerge **(p.20)** through examples and attempts at characterization, and then try to make that view more concrete.

In that spirit let me begin by saying that evaluative content *seems* to be the sort of content which expresses, or *is*, our approval and disapproval of certain things.[2] Its most basic and bare form can be expressed by two concepts that I mentioned in Chapter One, PRO and CON. I assume throughout that these are the most basic and minimal positive and negative stances we can take towards things. Philosophers may often talk of simple approval and disapproval in this regard, or like and dislike, and both distinctions seem good enough. Alternatively, we might be inclined to refer to PRO, say, as a 'positive preference', but that may pack too much into the idea. As we will see later in this book, a positive view may not imply that we want the thing, or want to do something with the thing, or that we prefer the thing to something else, and 'preference' carries these connotations. (Or, it does in my view, anyway.) We may not wish to *do* anything with something we think of positively; we may simply think and feel positively about it. Whatever our view about what a preference is, or if similar worries plague approval and likings, all I mean by PRO and CON is, again, the most minimal positive and negative views we can imagine.

I emphasize a point made in passing in Chapter One. Although we may not use the words 'pro' and 'con' very much, I think that we use the concepts, explicitly or implicitly, all the time. We might use various words to express PRO, for example, words such as 'good', 'fair', 'fine', 'cool', 'wicked', the many various slang words that come and go, and various linguistic expressions and tics such

as 'uh-huh', 'alright', and 'yeah'. These words and expressions can obviously be used of other concepts, but in some contexts they are used to indicate only PRO.[3] I will have more to say about PRO and CON throughout this book.

Although we may use PRO and CON every day, evaluation is not confined simply to such bare evaluation. We can express our attractions and repulsions, our joys and annoyances, and so on. Our thick concepts in particular seem to be indicating content that is pro-in-a-way and con-in-a-way. For example, to label something as generous is to praise it for being a certain way, and the way in which it exists is what gives—or *is*—the reason for the praise. This praise and the 'certain way' in which something exists are united in or by a thick concept. The debate between separationists and nonseparationists centres on how to understand that uniting. Such content can alter in strength, of course; if something is excellent it is typically better than if it is just nice, okay, or acceptable.

 (p.21) Although I argue in this book for an understanding of evaluation which is not exhausted by pro and con stances, this starting idea is not a bad one. This idea of evaluation provides a nice, clear contrast with descriptive content, which seems to be the sort of content that describes features of things in a value-free way. This starting characterization might not be that helpful since I have defined descriptive content in relation to evaluative content, rather than giving it a characterization that stands free. But this interdefining, or rough-characterization-of-one-broad-family-of-concept-only-after-the-other-is-introduced, might well be inevitable. At least some clear-cut examples of descriptive content are easy to give. After all, there does not seem to be any evaluation involved in saying that some piece of Paddy's clothing is brown or that the table is 'over there'. However and as advertised, once we think harder about matters, we should see that the domain of evaluative is larger than we may at first think. That idea will occupy us in Chapter Six. For now, we should think about separationism, and in doing so assume that we have a good initial grasp of the distinction between evaluative and descriptive conceptual content.

One final word of warning. Chapter One started us off quite gently, and Chapters Three and Four should also be relatively easy to follow even if both contain a few detailed topics. This present chapter, however, is more technical and abstract. If one is uninterested in the niceties of different sorts of separationism, then the main message to take from this chapter is that separationism is not a single, narrow position. It contains within itself scope for splintering into different accounts.

2.2 Introducing Separationism

In Chapter One I described briefly the very essence of a thick concept, namely a concept that in some way has both an evaluative aspect and a descriptive aspect or, as separationists may prefer to say, evaluative and descriptive elements or

parts. A key question for all theorists is how the evaluative and descriptive combine. What unites all separationist theories is the thought that any story about evaluative and descriptive conceptual content must assume that these are two distinct and separable sorts of content.

Alongside this first idea, further points need stating. Separationists do not claim, first, that thick concepts feel phenomenologically disjointed or feel as if they are a mixture. Nor do they claim, second, that it is easy for everyday users of thick concepts to note exactly where the descriptive starts and the evaluative begins. What they claim is that any thick concept contains parts that can be separated in the abstract, in theory, upon reflection. Nor, third, are they claiming that the relation between the evaluative and descriptive parts of all thick concepts is exactly the same. Separationists can and do state that while some thick concepts have to carry the same sort of evaluation, even to the same strength, in most or all contexts, others do not. An example of the former might be JUST (or JUSTICE). Can we ever imagine something being just and being bad for that reason? The positive evaluation seems quite tightly **(p.22)** wedded to the overall concept. An example of the latter might be ELEGANT (or ELEGANCE). The elegance of one poem might add positively to its value, whereas the elegance of another might be neither here nor there, or might be its greatest failing. Some poems' ideas and moods are better expressed through a rough style and messy structure so as to convey urgency or rawness.[4]

Fourth, separationists do not routinely claim that thick concepts are bogus or useless. They might claim that it is erroneous to characterize thick concepts in the way that nonseparationists do, but that is a different point. We can legitimately describe institutions as just and poems as elegant, just as we describe them as old or long. It is just that we should understand what lies behind the use of such terms and concepts. So, returning to the general point, separationists' key claim is simply that thick concepts are not unitary concepts, and are instead the product of separable conceptual contents or other elements, which in turn might themselves be full-blown concepts.

Fifth, it is open to separationists to cast evaluation in different ways. I have switched in my introductory comments from 'evaluative conceptual content' to 'evaluation' and 'evaluative element'. The first idea is something that cognitivist-separationists will happily embrace, but is something that their noncognitivist cousins will reject. (We met this distinction in Chapter One.) Although a lot of the discussion in this chapter is run in terms of attitudes that are evinced, I am not so concerned at all with how the evaluation is treated; I am more concerned with other ways in which separationists differ.

That is the general position. Why should we adopt it? I detail various reasons for doing so at the end of this chapter, reasons that can be expressed better after my discussion of the positions. But in essence all of these reasons stem from an

idea I have already voiced, namely the difference between evaluation and descriptive conceptual content, between facts and values. These seem to be two radically different ways of responding to or capturing the world. It makes sense, goes the thought, to be suspicious of the claim that any conceptual content that has aspects of both evaluation and descriptive content is a unitary concept, a concept that cannot be analysed into separable parts. The positive, separationist views that stem from this suspicion try to make sense of how we can go about analysing thick concepts into component parts.

In what follows I detail various sorts of separationism, using two broad headings. I consider their rival merits, both in comparison to one another and in comparison to a general form of nonseparationism. Towards the end I sow seeds of doubt regarding separationism as a whole.

(p.23) One last point. My set-up has a fictional quality. It is easy to indicate views that constitute our two broad headings and associate them with particular philosophers. However, there is a grey area where it is not so clear what sort of separationism we have, and my talk of two headings may mislead. This greyness is partly because of the philosophical issues involved, and partly because people have fine-tuned their views over time. I have Simon Blackburn particularly in mind regarding this last point. I sort this issue out towards the end, but we first need to understand the broad views.

2.3 Simple Separationism

The first sort of separationism I label 'simple separationism'. I take work by Blackburn during the 1980s and 1990s as my main example.[5] 'Simple' here indicates that this position is less complicated than its rival. It is not being used pejoratively; indeed, the position has virtues.

The idea is this. Imagine we have a wholly nonevaluative, purely descriptive concept, such as CHAIR.[6] A certain extension of the concept will be fixed: *these* things will be chairs and *those* things will not be. Imagine now that we begin to find some chairs completely lovely for whatever reason. We could write this as 'chair↑', which indicates the descriptive *term* 'chair' said sincerely with a positive tone of voice. We then introduce this term and tone into our vocabulary. Indeed, imagine that it becomes so entrenched in what we and our peer group think and do that a new concept develops, CHAIR-PRO. (We might not literally say 'chair-pro', but this is the concept standing behind 'chair↑'.) CHAIR-PRO could be used of all chairs, although it will probably be used of only a subset. We can imagine a related term and concept, 'chair↓' and CHAIR-CON that cover some of the other chairs, as well as our original CHAIR.[7] We can imagine further examples that indicate toleration, infatuation (with two arrows) and the like. This proposal identifies the evaluative content in the concept as some thin concept throughout, typically PRO or CON depending on whether the evaluation is positive or negative. Note that what has happened in this scenario is that we

have started with a certain tone of voice or evinced attitude and, because of **(p. 24)** some cultural entrenching, we have begun to think that we have some evaluative conceptual content. This content has become connected to or, better, has become intertwined with some descriptive content.

Concepts such as CHAIR-PRO are interesting because they unite what are two separate sorts of conceptual content and they do so obviously. Such examples are odd, however, since they are mere philosophical constructs. Of course, we may on an odd occasion say 'chair↑'. Imagine, for example, a situation where you are relieved that finally someone has brought in the chair you have been requesting for ages, rather than the unwanted tables with which you have been left. An exclamation of 'chair↑!' might be perfectly natural. But despite such rare examples, we do not have a fully fledged concept of CHAIR-PRO. We simply do not need such a thing. We manage perfectly well with CHAIR and when the occasion arises indicate a positive or negative attitude with tone of voice or through other things. The evaluation connected to 'chair' and CHAIR is only accidental. So CHAIR-PRO is most definitely a strange philosophical construct.

This matters because surely the aim of such examples is to make vivid what is going on with familiar, everyday thick concepts. We do not really care about silly concepts made up by philosophers. What have they to teach us?

Luckily, Blackburn constructs a quite famous case that has exactly the same structure as 'chair↓', but which is far closer to familiar concerns.[8] His example is 'fat↓'. He imagines a culture in which it is perfectly fine to be fat, perhaps it is even admirable. Then, some people—"slim, active, lithe teenagers, perhaps"—begin to be disgusted by fat people, and describe them as 'fat↓'.[9] It is clear from this example that 'fat↓' should be separated into two distinct parts, 'description+tone' as Blackburn puts it.[10] We can imagine the story extending and the group carrying on speaking in this way, perhaps influencing others, so that over time or because of significant incidents a new concept is born, FAT-CON.[11] It is clear from what Blackburn says about 'fat↓', and his comments about the work of chief nonseparationist John McDowell, that he is committed to thinking that we should separate concepts such as FAT-CON into their evaluative and descriptive elements, and that we should further see the evaluation as something that should be given a noncognitivist treatment of some sort. Perhaps other concepts might be forthcoming in an extended scenario. Perhaps some **(p. 25)** rejoice in being fat and the concept FAT-PRO is born. There might be a range of reactions attached to the same descriptive content of fat. And, as always, all of these attitudes can be indicated through tone of voice, body language, and the like.[12]

We can characterize other concepts similarly. For example, Blackburn, following R. M. Hare, has drawn attention to the fact that while some people's industry is a good thing, we often bemoan others' industry. Perhaps in the latter case what

is being worked towards is disagreeable or, more pertinently, the industry itself is holding the person back. Perhaps a graduate student is working too hard and cannot see the wood for the trees. She needs to relax and lighten up.[13] Blackburn says similar things about tidiness. An insistence that my university office is kept impeccably tidy aids my work, but keeping to this ideal at home can drive my family mad.[14]

The point of such examples should be obvious. Blackburn, Hare, and others are trying to show that familiar everyday thick concepts such as KIND and WICKED work in the same way. We have some descriptive content to which some evaluative element is conjoined. This evaluative element can be signalled through tone of voice and other things. In some cases the evaluative element we might expect is cancelled or reversed, for example when someone speaks sarcastically. In other cases, we might expect an evaluation of some sort, but it is not clear what the 'typical' attitude would be. (And so on.) Furthermore, the history of certain thick concepts might be quite different from that of 'fat↓' and FAT-CON. We no longer have to signal with tone of voice that we approve of just things. Given typical conventions, judging something to be just in a normal speaking voice is enough to imply that we approve of the thing. But this difference, be it genetic or otherwise, should not put us off the main scent. Everyday, familiar thick concepts should be characterized as involving two distinct and separable sorts of element, the descriptive and the evaluative, where the latter is taken to be something thin.

Hence, the conclusion that Blackburn reaches is that there are, strictly, no thick concepts because there is no thick conceptual content. All familiar, everyday thick concepts can be broken into non-thick component elements. It just so happens that these elements are sometimes conjoined together. So we can talk of FAT-PRO as *a* concept, but really it is the concept FAT conjoined with something else. Some theorists will choose to give a noncognitive analysis of that evaluation, as Blackburn and Hare famously choose to. But, as I have mentioned in Chapter One, we could give the **(p.26)** evaluation element a cognitive analysis while still maintaining the separation of the two parts.[15]

This is all very well, yet I want to expose immediately a slide to avoid. Clearly some people disapprove of people who are fat while others revel in largeness. We have a range of terms in this area—some affectionate, some distasteful— from which we may draw concepts: 'fat', 'obese', 'chunky', 'cuddly', 'gross', 'whale'. Some words can be used nonevaluatively, as in medical charts. Some are typically used positively, while others are typically used negatively. ('Obese' is a medical term, but it can be used by people to chastise and bully.) No one should deny this. Nor should we deny that there is a difference between 'chair↑' and 'fat↓': one example taps into familiar concerns and language use, while the other does not. Similarly, we can readily see that INDUSTRY and TIDY *may* work in the way Blackburn suggests. We seem to have some fairly clear descriptive

conceptual content in both cases; indeed such contents form familiar stand-alone concepts.[16] But just because a concept such as FAT-CON taps into familiar concerns, we should not therefore conclude straightaway that all familiar thick concepts work in this way. That would be to slide from one sort of example to another while unthinkingly accepting that they have the same structure, when so far we have not really thought hard about the case that interests us. TIDY and INDUSTRY might be different from KIND and CRUEL.

That said, if we dig a little we can see that this model appeals. We have already uncovered some nice aspects of this proposal. We have a determinate descriptive concept that, in principle, is accessible to everyone. We then have evaluations that are attached to it in some fashion. Such evaluations are allowed to alter in direction (positive, negative, perhaps none at all) and strength, depending on the context. This seems to reflect the reality of our use of some thick concepts. Where there is a fixed attitude, perhaps with things that are deemed just, this is either a phenomenon to be merely noted, or something to be explained simply because we humans are built so as to like the (descriptive) features that form the justice of just things. The strength of this proposal is that we have a simple picture which allows for flexibility of evaluative attitude, and this seems a key feature of our thick concepts.

There are other virtues as well, which we will come to. Before I end this section, however, it is worth exposing the ways in which simple separationism might further divide. We have some distinct and separable descriptive and evaluative elements. But these two elements can combine differently. Here are two models.[17] We could *conjoin* the two elements: we say that something is a descriptive way, then attach an attitude. This is what is going on with Blackburn's example of 'fat↓' as so far **(p.27)** presented. A different view is where we say that someone is *licensed* (by rules of language, by conventions) to use a thick term, and say that an item is a certain descriptive way, *only if* she attaches a particular evaluation to that descriptive content. Perhaps this is what is going on with JUST, at least as presented so far. By convention, we simply cannot pick out the features of the item in *that* sort of descriptive way and use the concept unless we are prepared to evaluate the group of such features positively.

Simple separationists are not forced to choose between these models as an explanation for all (supposed) thick concepts. They can say that some concepts work one way while others work another. (And they can introduce more models.) Furthermore, simple separationists might say that talk of two models suggests a sharp contrast, but that need not be the case. Actual use of many concepts might be indeterminate between these two models. The extent to which the descriptive part of a concept can be put forward without a particular evaluation or evaluations being present might be something unclear to concept users. Or, it might be clear, but be dependent on context thus leading to different models

being appropriate at different times to explain what is happening. Perhaps in many contexts, where the conjunction model applies, people who disagree about someone being fat-con can at least agree that the person is fat and agree precisely on the descriptive nature of the case; they just have different evaluations. Perhaps in some other contexts it is the licensing model that is appropriate.

On that last point, consider this example. Two people—Betty and Frank—are in the audience of a beauty pageant and it is the convention in their community that in such situations disapproval has to follow if one of the contestants is thought to be fat; it is FAT-CON or nothing. So because one of them, Betty, wishes to refrain from disapproving, she takes issue with whether the descriptive content is instantiated or exemplified. She simply refrains from calling a contestant fat because she does not have a negative evaluation. Frank is different. He takes a negative view of the contestant and so the descriptive content is licensed.[18] In this case, of course, words such as 'cuddly' and 'gross' develop. Frank can legitimately say of a contestant that he is gross, while Betty can legitimately say that he is not gross 'but cuddly instead'. (Realistically, Betty may not be able to deny the relative largeness of the contestant, but she does not conceptualize him straightforwardly as fat.) Frank and Betty differ not just in attitude but in the descriptive content of the concept they employ. The descriptive content of gross is licensed only if users disapprove of things seen to embody it; if they approve of them, they are not allowed to employ that particular descriptive content.[19] Perhaps in other communities and different **(p. 28)** contexts the conjunction model is better. Perhaps Terry and June are straightforwardly arguing about some contestant, and agree wholly in the descriptive content. The difference between them is one of difference in attitude alone. Or, in other words, Terry's use of 'cuddly' and June's use of 'gross' are used as synonyms for 'fat-pro' and 'fat-con', where the 'fat' part is exactly the same. This is not the case with Betty and Frank.

These end comments set up a few things for later. Before we contrast all of this with complex separationism, I should repeat that we have so far not seen any change in Blackburn's thinking, although we will do later. For now we can add, after the discussion thus far, that Blackburn thinks of standard thick concepts as typically better explained by using the licensing model, rather than thinking that both models are probably equally applicable.

It is now time to consider two rival views.

2.4 Two Kinds of Complex Separationism

There are a number of ways in which we could oppose simple separationism. As a way of running certain thoughts I am going to use a discussion by Daniel Elstein and Thomas Hurka as representative. Recall that simple separationism holds that the best way of characterizing all thick concepts with which we are

familiar is to assume that we have a fully determinate descriptive concept that in some way is connected to an evaluation. Elstein and Hurka outline two separationist accounts that are alternatives to this. I refer to Elstein and Hurka's position overall as 'complex separationism'.

(a) Their first account can be introduced in their own words.

> We have discussed two types of concept: at one extreme is a thin concept like 'good', which says nothing about the good-making properties of items falling under it, at the other extreme is a descriptively determinate concept like 'Kraut', which specifies those properties completely, and therefore fully determines the concept's extension. Surely there is room between these extremes for a category of thick (or 'thick-ish') concepts whose descriptive component specifies good- or right-making properties to some degree but not completely, saying only that they must be of some specified general type but not selecting specific properties within that type—that is left to evaluation. Or, to put the point slightly differently, there can be concepts whose descriptive component defines an area in conceptual space within which admissible good- or right-making properties must be found, so any use of the concept associating it with properties outside that area is a misuse, but does not identify any specific point within the area as uniquely correct, as a concept like 'Kraut' does. The concept therefore has descriptive content, but this content is not completely determinate. The pattern of this analysis is something like 'x is good, and there are properties X, Y, and Z (not specified) of general type A (specified), such that x has X, Y, and Z make anything that has them good'. This pattern is reductive, because it uses only the thin concept 'good' and the descriptive concept 'A'. But it accommodates the key disentangling argument, because determining *which* **(p.29)** properties of type A are the good-making ones, which we must do to determine the concept's extension, is a matter for evaluative judgement.[20]

Elstein and Hurka view simple separationism as treating all thick concepts as akin to KRAUT. We have some descriptively determinate concept, in this case 'is a German', which is allied to some negative attitude.[21] But why think that all thick concepts should be analysed in this way? Among many examples, Elstein and Hurka consider JUST or, more specifically, DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE. Should we characterize this concept as having a clearly and fully determinate descriptive content to which some (typically positive) evaluation is then added? Or, alternatively, should it be characterized as being a positive evaluation which licenses a certain fully determinate descriptive content? We could choose either. But if we did we would not be able to analyse disagreements between different theorists of distributive justice in the correct way, something that is clearly desirable.

Why not? Some people think that just distributions are those that are equal distributions in some sense of the term 'equal', and good for being so, while some others think that just distributions are those that are proportionally distributed according to merit, and good for being so. If we characterized these two conceptions as being two distinct descriptive contents, to which positive evaluations were applied, we would not be able to say that an egalitarian and a desert theorist could meaningfully argue with each other about whether a proposed distribution was just. On this analysis JUST or DISTRIBUTIVE justice would mean different things to different theorists and they would be talking past each other, as the philosophical cliché has it. Although political theorists differ, there is some locus of agreement about what counts as a just distribution, and this should be captured by our philosophical characterization. So even if their conceptions of DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE differ, political theorists agree about what the general concept is concerned with.[22]

 (p.30) Elstein and Hurka suggest the following as a first stab: 'x is distributively just' will mean something such as 'x is good, and there are properties X, Y, Z (not specified) that distributions have as distributions, or in virtue of their distributive shape, such that x has X, Y, and Z, and X, Y, and Z make any distribution that has them good'.[23] There are some restrictions on our concept: it cannot be used of generous actions, say, or at least it cannot be used of them in so far as they are generous. But such restrictions do not completely determine the extension of the concept. The descriptive part of the concept only partly determines the extension of the concept since we have to plug descriptive ideas into the X, Y, and Z. We get those once we approve of certain elements being part of our concept and exclude others. Importantly, our approval is not just an approval of an element being part of a concept that allows us to fine-tune it. In approving of a feature we are saying that any distribution that has this sort of feature will be a distribution that is good, and be so for that reason.

This final point sets this separationist position apart from simple separationism. We might have to think hard about where the boundary lies between the fat and the thin. This is not just a matter of thinking about one thing: we might have to think about the balance between (obvious) bodily shape, and something more scientific, such as height–weight ratios. However, when we make such decisions —decisions about what is to be included in the descriptive content of the concept —according to simple separationism the evaluation is separate. This is obviously so according to the conjunction model. We have some fully determinate descriptive content to which an evaluation is added. Even in the licensing model, what is licensed by a certain sort of evaluation is a fully formed determinate descriptive content. In contrast, complex separationism says that many thick concepts should be characterized such that when we pick out certain descriptive features as being part of the concept, this picking out is an evaluation. Why? Such features directly feed into explaining why the item that falls under the concept is seen as good or bad (or, more minimally, pro or con). In the case of

DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE, it is not only that the egalitarian picks out a feature—equal treatment in respect of X—which helps to locate the purely descriptive contours of the concept and *then further* says that an item that falls under this concept is just, as if she could choose to withhold such an assessment. The distribution is seen as just, and hence good, precisely because it has the feature picked out, and the picking out of this feature is a matter of approving of it in the first place.

In all of this we supposedly still have a separationist account, as Elstein and Hurka state. At every stage, and across the whole concept, we are dealing with (supposed) descriptive content—equal treatment, things given according to merit, distributions—and concepts such as GOODNESS (or, I think better, PRO) are applied to and mixed with such descriptive ideas.[24]

 (p.31) (b) Elstein and Hurka's second account is more complicated than the first. They are unsure whether their first account fits thick virtue concepts adequately, and they see a further account as necessary. As they say:

> This second pattern involves a three-part analysis, because it supplements the global thin evaluation that governs the whole concept (the 'x is good…' or 'x is right…' of the first pattern) with a further thin evaluation that is embedded within the descriptive content. Its presence means we cannot determine the extension of the thick concept without determining the extensions of the embedded thin one, that is, without making evaluations.[25]

They illustrate this using a number of concepts. Here I pick their example of INTEGRITY. Integrity involves sticking to one's goals, but not just any goals count, at least on certain conceptions of integrity. These goals themselves have to be seen as important ones, first of all. Elstein and Hurka's example of a non-starter is someone who persistently adds to her beer-mat collection which draws her energies away from preventing the rise of Nazism. Furthermore, even among the significant goals we then have to consider which ones are good, and this will generate many disputes. Think of people who stand up for what they believe is morally right, even in the face of strong disagreement or danger. People will disagree about whether, for example, it is worth sticking up for the rights of abortion doctors to live peaceful lives, or whether certain words and images should be banned from television. On this particular characterization of integrity, then, we have to make an evaluation about which goals are the good ones.

Elstein and Hurka's stab at INTEGRITY is: 'x is an act of integrity' means that 'x is good, and x involves sticking to a significantly good goal despite distractions and temptations, where this property makes any act that has it good'.[26] So anything that falls under the description is seen as good, but within the

description we have made another evaluation, an evaluation of the goal. This clearly sets it apart from simple separationism, since with that account there is no mention of an embedded evaluation within the description that needs to be satisfied and which can be a point of dispute. It is also different from Elstein and Hurka's first account since in that account, like that of simple separationism, there is only one evaluation that governs the whole concept. Or, to put it another way, it is true that according to their first account, Elstein and Hurka think that we evaluate when we are picking out certain descriptive features to be part of the content. However, there is still only one, clear, explicit evaluation that governs the concept. In this second account we allow for another evaluation that explicitly checks or moulds the concept's boundary. In the case of INTEGRITY the suggestion is that the goal aimed at has to be good.

 (p.32) However, Elstein and Hurka note that we could combine the first and second accounts. The key point about their first account is that the descriptive is not fully determinate, whereas the second embeds an evaluation that does not govern the whole concept. It seems obvious that some thick concepts might require a characterization that embodies *both* ideas. As Elstein and Hurka suggest, perhaps there is a dispute about exactly what integrity involves: is it based on the goal of being good, or is it based on a person's belief that the goal is good (assuming the belief to be non-culpable), or both? We might require a conception of INTEGRITY that has a descriptive element that leaves this open, not least because different contexts might require us to prioritize different specific ideas. Similarly, we might say for some conceptions of DISTRIBUTIVE justice that not every distribution in which things are equalized is a just distribution, for we might need to approve those things as being appropriate for such a characterization. It might—*might*—be seen as just to equalize the number of hairs on people's forearms, but most people would not consider such an equal distribution just, since JUST should be reserved for more important things.[27]

Elstein and Hurka's two accounts, and their combination, show that thick concepts might need more nuanced treatment than simple separationism provides: a separationist treatment might need to do more than wholly divide the descriptive from the evaluative, even if one thinks of the two sorts of content as distinct and separable. The way in which we mix those elements is very important. This takes us to a critical comparison of the accounts.

2.5 A Grey Area
I have mentioned that assuming that we have two clear and distinct sorts of separationism is a fiction. There is some grey area. Why would one think this? After all, it seems as if we have a clear dividing line: one sort of separationism assumes some descriptive content that is fully determined aside from any evaluations, while another allows evaluations to help mould the (still separable) descriptive content.

Consider the following from Blackburn, published recently, where he distinguishes a strong and a weak sense of the disentanglement of thick terms into an evaluative element and some descriptive conceptual content.

> One sense would require that the extension of the term is one thing, given by a purely descriptive concept, while the other dimension (usually an evaluative one) simply attaches to what is thereby described. This is roughly the case with, for instance, terms of racial or national abuse: the members of the race or nation are identifiable in empirical terms, and the abuse added. The extension can be identified independently of the 'evaluation' (or abuse). As far as I am aware, nobody now thinks that this model applies to interesting candidates for thickness, such as 'cruel' or 'courageous'.

> **(p.33)** However there is a much more interesting, but weaker sense of disentangling, in which it is still an open question whether such terms can be disentangled. In this sense, the claim is that there are two vectors or dimensions in question, but that they interact. Most obviously, the evaluative element can help to determine what is put into the extension. So, for instance, you do not call someone 'pig-headed' unless you wish to imply a criticism of them, and this fact goes some way into determining who is so-called. The descriptive dimension is that of being resolute or firm, disinclined to change your mind under discursive pressure from others; the other dimension is that of being so *unduly* or inappropriately. The term signals both things, but there is no identifying its extension without employing the evaluative side. There is still disentangling, since there are so clearly two different vectors, and there is predictably going to be disagreement over when 'unduly' kicks in. One man's admirable resolution is another man's pig-headedness. So the descriptions and the valuations interact, and only when they harmonise, in one mind or another, will the term get used. Clearly the common argument that there is no determining the extension of any particular term without deploying an evaluation (or piggy-backing on an evaluation that one does not share) is of no force whatsoever against this view, since it simply seizes on exactly what the view describes.[28]

This is a version of the licensing model. A certain attitude helps to determine the descriptive content of the concept one is using. The difference between what Blackburn says here and what we imagined happening before is that in this passage he now notes that there may be some general description that fits the specific descriptive contents that are licensed by the various attitudes and which together form the various concepts in play. In the case of the beauty contest, perhaps that general description is BIG or BIG FOR A PERSON. Betty's positive view means that she is licensed to fill in the descriptive content by picking out certain things and ignoring others, perhaps, and uses words such as 'cuddly'.

Frank's negative view licenses him in assuming different specific descriptive content, and this results in him using derogatory words.

This comes close to saying what Elstein and Hurka say in their first model. We have some evaluative attitude which does not just license a description, but influences what that precise descriptive content is. However, there is a difference. Elstein and Hurka explicitly assume that we have some general description that can be held by all disputants, and then the differences between them are a function of clearly isolable and different Xs, Ys, and Zs. Blackburn does not go down this route. Instead, we have a general description: in the case imagined 'being resolute or firm'. Once that is in place we have people being placed on some descriptive dimension according to their attitudes towards any candidate example, and the strength of such attitudes.

This difference may just be a matter of presentation.[29] But given some of their examples, such as DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE, it is clear that Elstein and Hurka think their **(p.34)** analysis as presented is needed. Even if we have a general description common to all disputants, that does not mean we have a single dimension or scale along which such disputants then plant themselves. The content of the specific descriptions that are covered by the general description may be quite different, even radically so, and this may be best captured by talking of quite different Xs, Ys, and Zs, isolable in this analysis because they are so different.[30] In contrast, even though Blackburn is indicating some general content, which then gets specified differently because of the evaluation, it seems fair to describe him as thinking that this general content is determinate, and that the evaluation just helps to locate what sort of exact content one gets. Or, in other words, one can specify the descriptive content of a concept, and this itself will give a good indication of the descriptive content of the concept even if that content needs to be specified. The general description given in Elstein and Hurka's first model needs some specific ideas to move us beyond any general ballpark idea: a general ballpark descriptive content on its own is not enough to fill out the concept. This is enough to justify initial discussion of two broad models, and to retain our idea of two models when looking at the details of various theories.[31]

 (p.35) However, two points are pertinent here. First, I leave it open as to whether (if one is a separationist) just one of these models should be thought to fit all concepts or, as I suspect, some models are better suited to some concepts and some contexts, and other models are better suited to others. After all, it is this reasoning which leads Elstein and Hurka to develop two models, and as Blackburn says, in some contexts use might be indeterminate between the conjunction and licensing models.

Second, although it is still helpful to think in terms of there being two models, it is pretty obvious now that there is some grey area. How the evaluation is used to pick out the descriptive content is a complicated issue, and it may not produce stark contrasts. Similarly, how the specific descriptive content is to be analysed may not be something that can be packaged as isolatable Xs and Ys, and it may be unclear what the descriptive scale is like along which judges find themselves. What is meant by 'general' here and what is meant by 'specific' is unclear. All of this suggests untidy mess rather than clear-cut difference. We should be alive to the fact that the two sorts of separationism introduced may be closer than may appear at first, both to outsiders and even separationists themselves.

So we have some mess. However, we can think about the criticisms separationists give of each other, at least to indicate an interesting trade-off that has implications for the whole terrain and debate about thick concepts.

2.6 Some Critical Points

I pursue two points of critical comparison: Elstein and Hurka's first account is designed to explain disagreements, while simple separationism allows for flexibility of evaluative attitude. After this I introduce a worry with separationism more generally, to sow some seeds of doubt. I end by listing reasons why one might wish to be a separationist.

(a) I first consider how simple separationism fares against Elstein and Hurka's idea that disagreements cannot be analysed properly.

Note immediately the difference between the conjunction and licensing models. The licensing model has it that by convention some evaluation has to be in place *before* a descriptive content is licensed. We imagined both models applying to people's disagreements concerning fat people. In the licensing scenario we noted that because an evaluation has to be in place for a certain descriptive content to be licensed, then this model applies only if we were happy to say that the two concepts employed—CUDDLY and GROSS—also had slightly different descriptive content. If not, the conjunction model would capture things better. So on the licensing model, we can still talk of there being flexibility of attitude, but only if we also admit that the specific descriptive content is flexible.

This means, further, that on this characterization we have to be careful when speaking of there being disagreement. When Frank says that a beauty contestant is **(p.36)** gross, while Betty says that he is cuddly, and where both concepts are interpreted as 'licensed' concepts, then we can say that the concepts are opposed in a sense. But it is not as if Frank and Betty agree that the person is fat yet differ only in attitude. (That was why I introduced Terry and June.) Rather, Frank and Betty are partly disagreeing about what exactly it is to be fat and what the term 'fat' means in the first place, and that will probably be influenced by what sort of attitude they take towards fat people in certain contexts. Frank is conceptualizing, encoding, and communicating specific

descriptive content different from the content Betty is working with. If we are unhappy with this characterization of any particular debate and use of a concept (or concepts)—if we want to say that there is complete agreement in descriptive content—we need to choose the conjunction model to provide explanation.

With that said, let us see how each model fares when compared with Elstein and Hurka's worry. (Note that Elstein and Hurka do not explicitly consider each model in turn.) First, consider the conjunction model with its assumed sameness of specific descriptive content in disputes. That model is all very well in explaining disagreements where the disputants agree (exactly) about descriptive content but disagree in attitude. Yet, there are other sorts of disagreement— surely a large number—where the two disputants agree in attitude about the general concept that they wish to employ *and* agree with the general contours of the concept, but still disagree about whether the concept applies in a particular case. That is the point lying behind Elstein and Hurka's first account and examples such as DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE. It seems obvious that the conjunction model fails to capture many disagreements for many uses of concepts.

What of the licensing model, as understood by Blackburn in the more recent piece I quoted? Its prospects are a lot better. When Betty and Frank are exchanging terms and concepts when they are at the beauty pageant (and where we interpret their use of CUDDLY and GROSS along the lines of the licensing model), there is some general dimension which they have in common that influences their terms, and this seems enough to ward off the challenge. Elstein and Hurka analyse what happens as there being a general and common descriptive element that is made more specific with the introduction of isolatable elements, indicated by X, Y, and Z. The fact that Blackburn chooses to have some general descriptive dimension and eschews talk of further isolatable elements in his analysis does not mean at all that he cannot meet their challenge about disagreements.

A further worry may crop up, which should be raised if only to be dealt with. Elstein and Hurka's analysis gives equal weight and importance to the descriptive and evaluative elements, or at least the overall pattern of analysis is flexible enough to allow different weightings for different concepts in different contexts. It seems right that there be this flexibility and likely equal weighting. A theorist thinks of *this* distribution as just because of how she sees it descriptively and her overall positive impression. But, in contrast, the licensing model seems to see the evaluation as prime, at least symbolically. This is suggested by the label: the evaluation licenses—allows, **(p.37)** admits of, gives access to—the descriptive content. The evaluation is in place and this licenses the description. It can certainly seem that things are this way when compared to the conjunction model. However, again I think we have a worry that can be cleared up. After all, it is not as if Frank and Betty have some evaluation and then fill in the

descriptive details when they are arguing. (Well, phenomenologically speaking this might happen, but this seems wrong as a theoretical characterization of their concept use.) Sure, they adopt a certain descriptive content only because they have a certain evaluation. But one reason that they adopt the evaluation is because they are inclined to pick out and conceptualize the descriptive features of a contestant in a certain way. To my mind, the licensing model can admit that the descriptive part of the concept, and any particular conception of it, is as important as the evaluation that licenses it.

So I am not so sure that simple separationism for those cases where the licensing model applies fully (or somewhat) lacks the resources to be adapted to answer Elstein and Hurka's worry. Of course, the extent to which the licensing model is applicable to our concepts, even if separationism is correct overall, is moot.

(b) How do Elstein and Hurka fare against the strength already mentioned of simple separationism, namely the flexibility of attitude?[32]

Let us begin with their first analysis. In the definitions cited from them we had only one thin concept mentioned, namely GOOD, and this is the case with other analyses. Is it possible for them to develop analyses of concepts where the flexibility of attitude is explicitly encoded? For a start, one might challenge whether we should be interested in the flexibility of attitude. A familiar general position in ethics has it that our everyday virtue (and vice) concepts have only one attitude attached: it is conceptually impossible for something to be just and bad for that reason. But this is a controversial position for such concepts, and there seem plenty of thick concepts that are not virtue or vice concepts, so I think the challenge to Elstein and Hurka needs to be followed.

So how might their analysis, suitably developed, work for a concept such as ELEGANT?[33] We might say that 'x is elegant' means something such as 'x is either good or bad or neutral, and there are properties X, Y, Z (not specified) that things (in a wide sense) have in virtue of appearing to the eye as refined and efficient, such that x has X, Y, and Z, and X, Y, and Z make any object that has them good or bad or neutral'. (The 'appearing to the eye as refined and efficient' part is obviously my initial stab at getting us into the right ballpark. It is imperfect, but our focus should rest on other matters.) In some respect this analysis is not itself bad. We just have some additional stuff—more evaluations and how they link to the Xs and Ys—to take **(p.38)** into account when trying to analyse a concept. And it might be something that, before we consider nonseparationism, seems to capture the phenomena perfectly well. But, despite this, there is a general worry, which is only a hunch for now. With this analysis there is now more stuff to account for and fill in or, in other words, we have far less anchoring and far more flexibility then we had previously. There may be no way in advance of predicting how the different evaluations and different Xs, Ys,

and Zs interact. It is certainly going to be more complex then was envisaged previously. How can we be confident that we understand the concept and its application without understanding how the descriptive and the evaluative can connect in the first place, particularly when the contours of the concept as given are so loose? As we will see, this inchoate suspicion will develop into the disentangling argument.

At this stage we can raise a similar worry for Blackburn. He has fine-tuned his licensing model to include a general descriptive dimension linking two related concepts and their uses. This hides a problem and is in tune with that just raised against Elstein and Hurka. How can we be certain that Betty and Frank are using concepts that are related such that when Betty says that someone is cuddly and Frank says he is gross we can say that they are in a real dispute? What is this descriptive dimension along which they both lie? It seems as if the interplay between the (separable) evaluations and this general but common descriptive content may be complex. Again, I will make good on this inchoate worry later in the book.

Does this worry about evaluative flexibility apply to Elstein and Hurka's second analysis? Probably not, since they introduce it explicitly for cases where there is a thin concept embedded in the descriptive part that, roughly speaking, helps us to make sense of it. Think of the account of INTEGRITY: an action is one of integrity only if we approve of it. It would be odd, following Elstein and Hurka, to have something such as 'x is an act of integrity' meaning 'x is good or bad and x involves sticking to a significantly good or bad goal despite distractions and temptations, where this property makes any act that has it good or bad or neutral'. This does not fit what they are trying to do with integrity (and similar concepts), because including two 'bad's would make an action one of foolhardiness, or zealotry, or something worse. This changes the concept being analysed, rather than accounting for one concept accommodating the flexibility of attitude or evaluation.

Of course, a defence of Elstein and Hurka on this score works only in so far as there are concepts that we think need to be analysed in the way they do with their second account. We could imagine someone saying that integrity and other concepts should be analysed differently, perhaps in terms of the licensing model. But, as a neutral between these two sorts of separationism, I have to say I side with Elstein and Hurka here, at least given how people use a concept such as INTEGRITY. If I were given to separationist analyses, I would concur that the descriptive content has to embed an evaluation: people do not have in mind just any goal when thinking about integrity.

So, thus far, a score draw: Elstein and Hurka's best point works very well against one model that can be favoured by simple separationists, but not at all well **(p.39)** against another. Similarly, only one of their two analyses fails when

it comes to the point about flexibility of attitude. We can see this as indicative of a trade-off when it comes to separationism: the more we play up the idea that some separable evaluation can be flexible, the harder it is to develop an understanding of how disputes work, while the more we try to harness and nail elements in our characterization of concepts, the harder it is to accommodate the supposed phenomenon of evaluative flexibility.

The main point here—and the main point to emerge from this whole chapter as we move from looking at the details of the position to look at its overall nature and point—is to realize that ideally an account of thick concepts would aim to satisfy both demands: we want an account that allows us to talk meaningfully about disagreement and also one that accommodates evaluative flexibility (if one indeed thinks it is a desideratum). These twin demands will come back later in the book.

(c) Here is one further point. I discuss it briefly so as to set up a worry that links to my discussion of shapelessness in Chapter Five.

In note 20 I mentioned that Elstein and Hurka believe that their separationist analysis can accommodate the best point ranged against simple separationist accounts from nonseparationists. This connects with the aforementioned point about disentangling and shapelessness. We will concentrate on this later in Chapter Five. For now, we need merely discuss that Elstein and Hurka believe the key part of the nonseparationist challenge is that separationism cannot accommodate the idea that evaluative content determines concepts' extensions.[34] (It is obvious that both of their analyses do take this into account.) Now, I do not believe this idea, as stated this simply, is the main nonseparationist point. We can see quite easily that in some sense even simple separationists can accommodate this idea of extension, and so Elstein and Hurka's criticism of their rivals fails.

Simple separationists think quite plainly that we will have to have knowledge of the evaluative point or points of a concept in order to predict its extension. After all, it is very likely, even determined, that CHAIR-PRO and FAT-CON have more limited extension than CHAIR and FAT. Knowledge of the evaluative content in our first pair of concepts is *crucial* to knowing the boundaries of the whole concept since it provides limits. Only a certain number of chairs will have CHAIR-PRO applied to them, and which ones are so categorized will be determined by the evaluation. So, strictly, what Elstein and Hurka say is false.

That said, they are attempting to cope with the *spirit* of the nonseparationist charge much more. The spirit of the charge, in their eyes, is that evaluative content is more involved than a simple conjunction or licensing account will allow. This is particularly apparent in their second model, where some evaluative element is **(p.40)** embedded in the descriptive content. But this leads to

another worry. If Elstein and Hurka think that nonseparationists will be dissatisfied with the response by simple separationists—because what they are requesting is some acknowledgement that concept users have to appreciate the evaluative point of the concept as a whole—then nonseparationists will also be left dissatisfied with what Elstein and Hurka say. This is because, in brief, one cannot really understand what descriptions are relevant to the concept as a whole unless one 'imbues' the whole of the concept with evaluation; inserting a separable pro or con evaluation to govern some of the separable description does not cut it. This is a more refined echo of the 'inchoate suspicion' raised in the middle of (b). I elaborate on and deepen this idea in Chapter Five.

(d) Why should we adopt separationism in the first place? As mentioned in Chapter One, the general adoption of the fact–value distinction has much to do with it. This leads to four points. First, adoption of the fact–value distinction is seen by some as uncontroversial since it seems to encapsulate much of modern thinking, especially that encapsulated by the rise of modern science. Any philosophical analysis worth its salt cannot afford to ignore the demands and intellectual currents of modern science. If we agree that the evaluative and the descriptive should be held apart, then it seems that any analysis of evaluative concepts—especially thick ones—has to place this idea at the very centre. The second point in favour of separationism links nicely to the first: not only is the separation of evaluation and description supposedly reflected in much of modern thinking, it is simple and clear. *These* things are values, *those* things are (nonevaluative) facts, and never the twain shall meet.

The third point in favour of separationism is easiest to understand when focused on simple separationism. Making the descriptive part fully determinate allows for a relative ease of understanding on the part of people only slightly familiar or very unfamiliar with the concept. Let me explain. Sometimes it is easy to understand what a concept is and how it is applied by others. But sometimes it can be very hard and can take much time and energy. For example, an anthropologist might take months or years when investigating some alien tribe and how they conceive of the world. The concepts that the members of the tribe employ might be quite different from the anthropologist's; they might not simply apply TABOO to different things, but they might have a new and strange concept, such as SCHMABOO, the contours of which may be difficult to discern. We typically think that understanding is possible, even in hard cases. Simple separationism supposedly gives a nice account of how such understanding is possible. There are two things we need to do. First, we have only to work out what the descriptive content of the concept is, perhaps by considering a number of cases and having some dialogue with a user, in order to understand the whole concept. Second, we have to work out, or simply be given the knowledge of, which evaluation accompanies the descriptive content or, more complicatedly, which evaluations are appropriate in which context. If we parcel things up in this way, **(p.41)** it seems that understanding others' concepts will be a fairly

easy matter. The part of the concept that is nonevaluative seems to be the driving force and senior partner in many cases; just think back to our CHAIR and FAT examples where some thin evaluation is simply tacked on.[35] By definition, apparently, nonevaluative, descriptive content is something that is accessible and understandable to everyone. We can have any value system we like and still be able to understand which thing is a chair and which thing is a table. So although some work will have to be done, and some anthropologists may have to find some friendly insiders to help them navigate their way through which thin evaluations are given at which times, understanding others is, in principle, no great mystery.

In contrast, if nonseparationists really think that the evaluative is intertwined in some nonseparable fashion with the descriptive and, hence, further, that we need to appreciate and even share the evaluation of those that sincerely employ the value concepts we are trying to understand, then the seemingly routine task of understanding others does become a great mystery. Do anthropologists really have to share and sincerely apply SCHMABOO in order to understand this concept? Surely not. So why not assume that the key part of the concept is something accessible and understandable to all?

Although I have run this third point in terms of simple separationism, the moral holds for complex versions. Complexity is introduced because we have to have more knowledge of which nonevaluative elements are being seen in a positive or negative light. But those evaluations are still thin and the building blocks are still simple, as in the first version of separationism. The concepts we investigate as 'outsiders' should still be fairly easy to grasp, especially if we have an insider friend to help guide us through the concepts.

This links to a fourth reason in favour of separationism. Blackburn argues that a point in favour of his account—which applies to all separationist accounts—is that it allows for normative criticism.[36] We can all agree that this descriptive element is 'the' or 'a' part of a concept or, alternatively, that some nonevaluative stuff can be grouped in a certain way using a concept. And then, as a separate process, some people will wish to approve of the part included in the concept or approve of the stuff that is being categorized. Some will disapprove of it. According to Blackburn this is the basis for normative criticism. Here is what he says about CUTE as applied to women:

> Now it is *morally* vital that we proceed by splitting the input from the output in [the case of CUTE]. By refusing to split we fail to open an essentially specifically *normative* dimension of criticism. If the last word is that these people perceive cuteness and react to it with the appropriate cuteness reaction, whereas other people do not, we have lost the analytic tools with which to recognize what is wrong with them. What is wrong with them is along these lines: they react to an infantile, unthreatening

appearance or self-presentation in women, or **(p.42)** overt indications of willingness to be subservient to men, with admiration or desire (the men) or envy and emulation (the women). Cute things are those to which we can show affection without threat, or patronizingly, or even with contempt. Children and pets are quintessentially cute. Applied to women, I say, this is a bad thing. Once we can separate input from output enough to see that this is what is going on, the talk of whirls of organism, or single 'thick' rules, or a special perception available only to those who have been acculturated, simply sounds hollow: disguises for a conservative and ultimately self-serving complacency.[37]

His worry is that nonseparationist accounts of the thick just accept concepts and their applications as they are. But that cannot be the end of the matter, for some concepts are bad and are applied in a bad way. It is important that we are able to note what the concept is about, and this appreciation be available to people outside of those that use the concept in a certain social milieu. (Think back to the third point.) From that we can then see whether a certain sort of categorization applied with approval to a certain sort of thing is itself good or bad. This is all supposedly made a lot easier if we can separate evaluation from descriptive content.

The introduction of complex separationism—and Blackburn's recent points about simple separationism—may seem to muddy the waters, things are in fact still clear. To repeat a word introduced by Blackburn earlier, we have two separate vectors. And it is perfectly to the point regarding normative criticism to think whether the attachment of *that* evaluation to *that* specific sort of description (along *that* general descriptive vector) when applied to *that* person or thing or action is itself good.

I think all four of these challenges can be met. The first challenge is the largest and broadest. It will be addressed in Chapter Six, as will the second. In response to both points, I can say now that I do not think the reality of our use of concepts is as simple and clear as separationists think. The third and fourth points are discussed in Chapter Eight.

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter we have begun to understand how one might capture thick concepts. We now have some handle on separationism. We can see how it might splinter into different views and we can appreciate that there is some grey area between those views. I have also introduced some advantages of the overall position. Lastly, we are getting a sense of the terrain and at the end of §2.6(b) I introduced a trade-off which itself introduces two desiderata: we may wish to accommodate evaluative flexibility, and we need also to ensure that we can account for how disputes work. Those two desiderata will return: the first in Chapter Three and the second in Chapter Eight.

I now turn my attention to what unites separationists in Chapter Three, in order to prepare the ground for how one can argue against their position. How exactly do they understand and model the relationship between thin and thick concepts?

Notes:

(^{1}) Aristotle's advice from *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094b–1095a about the precision of explanation being appropriate for the subject matter seems apt here; Aristotle (2000). Furthermore, in what language would such necessary and sufficient conditions be spelt out? Descriptive language? This would obviously be viciously circular.

(^{2}) Here I loosely articulate the conservative view of evaluation, mentioned in Chapter One. I tighten this up and compare it with the liberal view in Chapter Six.

(^{3}) For a different view about such thin concepts—that they are merely a philosopher's construct—see Chappell (2013). I think that Chappell is correct that very often philosophers are not alive to the encrustation that supposed thin concepts have, and that this may render such concepts less thin than is usually thought. However, I also think this paper misses something else that is of the everyday and ordinary, namely the sort of positive and negative judgement that I indicate in the main text.

(^{4}) I use JUST and ELEGANT only to illustrate the general contention. Things can be said against the claims made about both examples. For instance, maintaining a strict form of justice can at times be detrimental to friendship and familial love. However, this point should not detain us.

(^{5}) See Blackburn (1984), pp. 148–51; (1992), pp. 285–99; and (1998), pp. 92–104. Across these pieces there is a fine-tuning of Blackburn's view, which culminates in something he says in Blackburn (1998) and something he says in Blackburn (2013). I discuss this in §2.4. Thinking about his central and earlier work on the topic will be instructive, however, as many ideas still hold. Other examples of simple separationism include Stevenson (1944), chapter 3, and Hare (1952), p. 121; and (1963), pp. 21–9. Daniel Elstein and Thomas Hurka seem to cast Blackburn as a simple separationist in Elstein and Hurka (2009), notes 10 and 11, and do not comment on the fine-tuning of his view that I pick out. Another notable separationist paper is Smith (2013), which draws on Hare's work.

(^{6}) I believe that CHAIR is a pretty good bet for being a nonevaluative, descriptive concept, and that stands despite my arguments in Chapter Six that are designed to make us question what the difference is between the evaluative and the descriptive.

(^{7}) A new concept, CHAIR-NEUTRAL, may come about, which serves to indicate no evaluation where one could be expected to be given. That would be a different concept from that which involved just 'no evaluation', that is just CHAIR.

(^{8}) The example is first introduced in Blackburn (1992), p. 290, but is given more detail in (1998), specifically pp. 94–7 and with other points made across pp. 97–104.

(^{9}) Blackburn (1998), p. 95.

(^{10}) This is used primarily in Blackburn (1992).

(^{11}) Blackburn sticks throughout his writings to 'fat↓' and emphasizes tone of voice and the like. Nowhere does he refer to a possible *concept*, with some attached evaluation, which is entirely in keeping with his noncognitivism. To keep things strict, and because it helps with points I make later, I introduce FAT-CON. I use this concept a lot in this chapter because 'fat↓' is a well-used example in Blackburn's writings and it is easy to manipulate so as to make points. We could worry that FAT is itself an evaluative concept, but I leave that nicety aside and employ it as Blackburn intends it, as a nonevaluative concept. (Thanks to Graeme A. Forbes for this final point.)

(^{12}) Blackburn discusses this point at length in Blackburn (1992).

(^{13}) Blackburn (1992), p. 286 and Hare (1952), p. 121. Blackburn's example of 'industry of which we disapprove' is some people's attitude towards Margaret Thatcher when she was Prime Minister of the UK. Yet that negative attitude might be focused on her aims, indeed this is how Blackburn portrays it, and any disapproval of the industry may well ride on that rather than being directed at the industry itself. This is not quite what Blackburn needs to support his claim about the flexibility of the evaluative element, hence my example of the student in which the industry itself is viewed negatively.

(^{14}) Which it does.

(^{15}) See again Elstein and Hurka (2009), pp. 516–17.

(^{16}) Again, reflecting on and questioning this will be done in Chapter Six.

(^{17}) The labels are from Allan Gibbard in Gibbard (1992). See also Blackburn (1984), pp. 148–9 for a full discussion of conjunction and (something very much like) licensing. Blackburn suggests the point about indeteminancy in my next paragraph. Gibbard briefly defines a third model, *presuppositional*. I ignore it here for simplicity's sake but it will appear in Chapter Seven.

(¹⁸) In reality, things might be complex in both cases. I say 'negative view', but Frank might be laughing helplessly at the large contestant and enjoying the experience. But here his positive view is a function of the presence of a fat person in a beauty contest; he thinks the fatness itself is definitely not to be admired.

(¹⁹) It is harder to develop examples with 'fat' where the licensing model is appropriate. If you find yourself thinking that this example is too far-fetched, then that is no opposition to the validity of the licensing model. It might indicate that this model fits concepts such as KIND better.

(²⁰) Elstein and Hurka (2009), p. 521. Elstein and Hurka's starting motivation is to show that separationism can accommodate the disentangling argument. They worry that simple separationism cannot, and this is a flaw both in terms of strategy, since it is the main argument against separationism, and a flaw generally, since they think that there is something correct that lies behind the argument. I believe that they do not fully understand the argument and that their position is also vulnerable to it, as I show in Chapter Five. I also believe that what they think of as being the argument can be accommodated to some extent by simple separationism, as I show later in this chapter.

(²¹) KRAUT is discussed in Blackburn (1984), pp. 148–51, although the context is slightly different. For what it is worth, I dislike Elstein and Hurka's bracketed suggestion in the quotation that what they might be developing is a characterization of 'thick-ish' concepts that lie in the middle, as if KRAUT were 'fully thick'. As far as I am concerned, even if the descriptive aspect or part of a thick concept is less specific than related concepts, I still take it to be 'fully' thick, since this is just a matter of there being some sort of union of descriptive content and evaluation. For example, COMPASSIONATE is more specific than KIND, yet both are standardly assumed to be fully fledged thick concepts, as are the concepts characterized by Elstein and Hurka that have less than completely specified descriptive content. I return to this point in Chapter Four.

(²²) Both the example and the distinction between concepts and conceptions calls to mind John Rawls' discussion in Rawls (1971), p. 5.

(²³) Elstein and Hurka (2009), p. 522.

(²⁴) Elstein and Hurka's first account is also found in Gibbard (1992). His account incorporates an element concerned with whether a reaction—typically a more specific reaction than pro or con—is warranted. (Gibbard's main example is LEWD, and the relevant feeling is labelled L-censoriousness.) But it is essentially the same account.

(²⁵) Elstein and Hurka (2009), p. 526.

(^{26}) Elstein and Hurka (2009), p. 526.

(^{27}) Elstein and Hurka (2009), p. 531.

(^{28}) Blackburn (2013), p. 122.

(^{29}) Indeed, in personal communication Blackburn said that he quite liked Elstein and Hurka's first proposal, although he also said that he did not want to backtrack on what he said in Blackburn (1984). I hope that my discussion pitches his view neatly between these two thoughts.

(^{30}) The different specifics of the rival theories of Rawls and Nozick come readily to mind again here. One could not capture the differences between Rawls and Nozick in disputing whether something was just or unjust by thinking in terms of a single and general descriptive dimension along which Rawls and Nozick planted themselves because of their attitudes towards certain instances.

(^{31}) If more justification is needed, consider this. At no point in his writings does Blackburn *clearly* state something along the lines of Elstein and Hurka's first form of complex separationism. We might imagine that 'fat↓' gives him ample opportunity to do so. Perhaps some think of FAT as having something to do with bodily shape, while others prefer to prioritize clear medical measures. Or just with regards to the former, some might think that someone qualifies as fat if his stomach is large and bulging, while others look in addition to the thickness of the limbs and the neck. These differences, particularly the first, would require different dimensions, I think.

At one point in Blackburn (1992) he compares his account with Gibbard's. (In note 24 I mentioned that Gibbard's account can be seen as a version of the first sort of complex separationism.) It seems as if he will come close to agreeing with Gibbard, but in doing so only confirms their differences. He says, "So far, it might seem that examples of description+tone must be distinct from those of 'gopa' and 'lewd' [Gibbard's main examples] in that the descriptive side is fixed, and the sneer or other tone optional.…But that is not quite right. For we can easily imagine just the same kinds of dispute over terms of description+tone. Amanda and Beryl may have been card-carrying fattists until Amanda met Clive. 'Clive is so fat↓' challenges Beryl. 'No, not fat↓—stocky, well-built' dreams Amanda. The dispute need not be one about vagueness, as we can see if we play it through with Pavarotti instead of Clive. Pavarotti is unquestionably fat, but many fattists would recoil from calling him fat↓.…'fat↓' shares with other derog. terms the property that where you do not want to express or endorse the attitude, you will refuse application of the term" (p. 290). Or, in other words, Blackburn's explanation of the dispute between Amanda and Clive relies on the licensing model. Amanda will not call Clive 'fat↓', simply because she does not have the negative attitude towards him that licenses the associated descriptive

content. By implication, Blackburn thinks that this, or the conjunction model, or some combination, can explain all such disagreements.

As well as the quotation in the main text, see also Blackburn (1998), p. 103. Here Blackburn comes close to advocating the first model of complex separationism, but again, when thinking about the general description of something being lewd, he claims that the evaluative and descriptive elements can be "moulded in different ways", claiming, I think, that we have two sorts of range here that collide and which result in different but related concepts being applied by different people.

(32) As with the conjunction and licensing models, Elstein and Hurka do not consider this issue explicitly. Note that they are neutral between cognitivist- and noncognitivist-separationist analyses, but I retain 'attitude' here for continuity with Blackburn's criticism.

(33) I am taking this as a *prima facie* good example of a concept where we want to have flexibility of attitude.

(34) Elstein and Hurka (2009), pp. 519–20.

(35) Hare in Hare (1952), pp. 121ff thinks that the descriptive meaning of TIDY and INDUSTRIOUS, for example, as being more important than the evaluative meaning.

(36) Blackburn (1998), pp. 101–5. He repeats this idea early on in Blackburn (2013).

(37) Blackburn (1998), pp. 101–2.

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