

Review Essay: Thickness and Evaluation*

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Pekka Väyrynen, *The Lewd, the Rude and the Nasty: A Study of Thick Concepts in Ethics*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 288 pages. ISBN: 978-0-19-931475-1 (hbk). Hardback £32.99.

Väyrynen's book is the first book-length study focused on the issue of thick concepts. While many ethicists and metaethicists have taken an interest in this topic, to the extent that it arguably qualifies as a 'hot' topic, Väyrynen's systematic treatment of the issues is very welcome. Apart from what it achieves concerning thick concepts, Väyrynen's book is also an instance of a more general phenomenon: theorists incorporating insights from linguistics and philosophy of language into metaethics. Not only is it an instance of the phenomenon: it is an example of this methodology at its very best.

The notion of a thick concept is best introduced by examples. Among thick concepts are *discreet, cautious, industrious, assiduous, frugal, prudent, treacherous, just, decent, generous, loyal, grateful, courageous, sleazy, uptight, cruel, brutal, deceitful* (all Väyrynen's examples, from p. 1) – as well as, of course, *lewd, rude, and nasty*. Giving a proper theoretical characterization of the notion of a thick concept, is

* [Acknowledgments]

difficult.¹ But some characterizations take as their point of departure that thick concepts somehow merge descriptive and evaluative aspects (where thin concepts by contrast are more purely evaluative). Other characterizations are based on the idea that thick concepts are more specific than thin ones.

Thick concepts have been put to use in various ways in the philosophical literature, perhaps most famously in arguments against non-cognitivism and more generally in arguments against there being a fact-value dichotomy – these are arguments to the effect that the descriptive and evaluative aspects of a thick concepts cannot be disentangled. I will return to such considerations. More generally, many theorists think (meta)ethics should focus more on the thick and less on the thin.²

Väyrynen's own characterization of the notions of a thick term and a thick concept is as follows:

A term *T* stands for a thick concept if (i) *x is T* entails, as a conceptual matter, that *x* falls under some distinct concept or concepts N_1, \dots, N_n (not specified) of a certain (specified) general type *A* (where *A* and N_1, \dots, N_n may be purely non-evaluative descriptions or involve [...] evaluations) and (ii) literal uses of *x is T* in normal contexts somehow convey global evaluations to the effect that *x* is good, or bad, in a certain way. (p. 42)

Strictly, this only says what it is for a term (specifically, a predicate) to stand for a thick concept. Presumably, a “thick term” is a term that stands for a thick concept.

The notion of a thick concept is not characterized directly. One reason it may be good to stress this is that one can think that there may be concepts that intuitively are to be

¹ See Eklund (2011), as well as Väyrynen, section 1.2.

² Väyrynen lists many friends of this view, including e.g. Anscombe (1958), Foot (1958), Platts (1979), Williams (1985), Hurley (1989), Hursthouse (1996), Kirchin (2010) and Roberts (2011).

regarded as thick even while no term as a matter of semantics stands for these concepts.

Väyrynen's Pragmatic View on thick concepts is the view that "Global T-evaluations are implications of T-utterances which are normally not at issue in their literal uses in normal contexts, and which arise conversationally" (p. 122). The chief opposing view is the Semantic View, according to which "The semantic (truth-conditional) meanings of thick terms and concepts contain global T-evaluations" (p. 59). Less technically put, the Pragmatic View is the view that the evaluations intuitively associated with thick concepts – when we apply a positive (negative) thick concept to something we are saying something positive (negative) about it – are only pragmatically associated with the concepts, and the semantic view is that these evaluations are semantically associated with the concepts. (The talk of "global" versus "embedded" evaluations is comes from Elstein and Hurka (2009). Very briefly, if a predicate F is globally evaluative then to say "x is F" is to evaluate x in a particular way. A predicate can in principle embed evaluation in some other way.)

Given the way Väyrynen himself uses the label "thick", a term or concept is thick even if it is not evaluative as a matter of meaning or content. On a different way of using "thick", a term or concept is thick only if its content is in and of itself evaluative. Someone who uses "thick" this latter way would say that on Väyrynen's view, many supposedly thick terms and concepts are in fact not thick.³ In what follows I will speak Väyrynen's way.

When one characterizes what it is to be thick one ideally wants to contrast the thick both with the thin and with the wholly non-evaluative. It is clause (ii) that is

³ For example, Roberts (2011) characterizes Blackburn's (1992) view as follows: "Blackburn holds that there are no thick concepts, only loaded terms, that is, that the evaluative aspect of a so-called thick term is no part of the content of the concept expressed by that term" (p. 495fn14). She then uses "thick" in this latter way. If one uses "thick" Väyrynen's way, one should say that Blackburn does not deny that there are thick concepts but understands their evaluativeness pragmatically.

supposed to provide the contrast with the wholly non-evaluative and clause (i) that is supposed to provide the contrast with the thin. I am doubtful that clause (i) wholly successfully accomplishes this. There are arguably some descriptive constraints associated even with the thinnest of our terms. Väyrynen actually agrees, and takes the distinction between the thin and the thick to rather be a matter of degree. Even the thinnest terms are thick given the above characterization.

Väyrynen relies on two kinds of arguments. First, there are *defeasibility arguments*. Väyrynen emphasizes, e.g., that it seems in order to say “whether or not Madonna’s show is lewd, it’s not bad in any way distinctive of explicit sexual display” (p. 70). The thought is that if the evaluation were semantically associated with “lewd” it would not be in order to say this, any more than it would be in order to say “so-and-so is a bachelor, but so-and-so isn’t a man”.⁴

Second, there are *projection arguments*. Some people find some thick concepts *objectionable*. For example, some might find “lewd” objectionable, thinking its use in some way presupposes the prudes’ way of thinking about sexuality (roughly, that its use presupposes that there is something bad about displays of sexuality). Following Väyrynen, call those with this view *lewd-objectors*. Lewd-objectors of course refuse to call things lewd. They do not say, for instance, “Madonna’s show is lewd”. What is more interesting, they would also (Väyrynen says) avoid using “lewd” in embedded contexts. Consider

1a. Nuh uh, Madonna’s show isn’t lewd; it’s sexually insinuating alright, but no private parts are exposed.

b. Is Madonna’s show lewd?

⁴ Well, it could be in order to say something of the latter form in certain contexts. One could use such a sentence to describe a female who behaves like a stereotypical bachelor. But then “bachelor” arguably isn’t used literally.

c. Madonna's show might be lewd.

d. If Madonna's show is lewd, the tabloid press will go nuts. (p. 74)

The claim is that lewd-objectors would refrain from using 1a-1d. But this is something the Semantic View cannot explain. If the evaluation were just part of the semantic content of "lewd", then the lewd-objector should have no problem at all with "Madonna's show isn't lewd". Some other account of the evaluation associated with "lewd" is needed. (I present Väyrynen's argument in a somewhat simplified way, as if it purported to be a demonstrative argument. Väyrynen himself rather presents his argument as an inference to best explanation.)⁵

1. What Väyrynen does not rule out

The Semantic View is the majority view. Already since this is so, convincing arguments for the Pragmatic View are significant. But I still want to emphasize the limitations of what Väyrynen is arguing: what views in the vicinity Väyrynen's arguments for the Pragmatic View and against the Semantic View do not refute, even if successful as far as they go.

Note first that the notion of a thick concept nowhere appears in the characterization of the Pragmatic View. The Pragmatic View is only a view on the linguistics of *thick terms*. It is not about concepts at all. Given that one should distinguish between terms and concepts, and that there can be concepts, including concepts we employ, that are not semantically expressed by any term we use at all, this is rather striking.

The Semantic View as stated does happen to mention concepts, but this seems

⁵ In my summary of Väyrynen's main arguments I have stuck closely to Bedke's (2014) way of characterizing them.

incidental. Väyrynen's actual argumentative strategy is that of looking at paradigmatic thin terms. By looking at (what purports to be) various acceptable literal uses of them, Väyrynen concludes that the evaluativeness is a matter of pragmatics and not semantics. This is exactly what his Pragmatic View states. The Semantic View in part says that the semantic meanings of thick terms contain global T-evaluations; and Väyrynen's arguments clearly target that aspect of the Semantic View. The only way Väyrynen's arguments can plausibly be thought immediately to show that the contents of thick concepts do not contain global T-evaluations is if it is assumed that thick concepts (if any) are the meanings of thick terms. But this seems like something that cannot just be blithely assumed. Nor does Väyrynen take himself to assume this. He has an explicit discussion of the relation between thick terms and thick concepts, noting that the relationship needn't be straightforward (see the discussion in section 3.1.2, pp. 69ff). But it still seems to me that his actual argumentative *strategy* presupposes that the relationship is straightforward: that thick concepts, if any, are semantically expressed by actual thick terms.

Väyrynen does, I should immediately note, separately discuss the view that thick terms are context-sensitive and semantically express different concepts in different contexts, and that in some contexts they semantically express something evaluative. He gives arguments for why this view is to be dismissed (pp. 73ff). But there are other possibilities as well. It can be that some concepts with the characteristics many other theorists would want to ascribe to thick concepts do exist and contents involving them tend to be *pragmatically* conveyed using thick terms. This view may or may not in the end be attractive. And it might be that some of what Väyrynen says can be used against the view. But Väyrynen never addresses it head on. So Väyrynen leaves open that there are thick concepts whose (global)

evaluativeness is a matter of their content. (Although it deserves stressing that those who emphasize thick concepts in ethics and metaethics tend to think these concepts are somehow central to our ethical thinking. One may then ask: if they are so central, why would we not have words that semantically express them?)

In general, it is worth pointing to a number of different views that are left unscathed by Väyrynen's discussion. I now mention some further such views. One purpose to which thick concepts have been put is that of supporting the idea that there are cases where one cannot properly grasp a concept without having the proper evaluative outlook. This idea might seem to be immediately ruled out given the Pragmatic View, on the ground that if a global T-evaluation is not contained in the content of the concept, then surely employment of the concept cannot require a particular evaluative outlook. But something at least very much in the spirit of the view sketched is perfectly consistent with Väyrynen's Pragmatic View. For consider the following possibility. Some properties are such that the only way one can refer to them non-derivatively requires having a particular evaluative outlook: it is only such an outlook that provides the requisite cognitive or epistemic access for that. Others too can refer to these properties, but only derivatively, by belonging to the same linguistic community as those with the evaluative outlook in question. This is all consistent with Väyrynen's view, for the view is only about the meanings of terms. Maybe our term "lewd" is such that Väyrynen's Pragmatic View is true of it, while the *property* it ascribes, the property of lewdness, is a property that one can only derivatively refer to if one does not share a particular evaluative outlook. Even those who do not share the outlook can use the term "lewd" with linguistic propriety, even while the fact that we have a term that ascribes the property lewdness requires that some of us do have (or, weaker, that some members of our community have had) the

evaluative outlook in question. Compare names. If I overhear someone use the name “Bob” I can go on to use the name to semantically refer to whatever it semantically referred to in the speaker’s mouth. Using a word with its customary reference is easy. This is so even if “Bob”’s reference is something quite special, such that it is only because some of us have special cognitive capacities that we have such a name as “Bob” in our language at all.

Anyone who distinguishes between concepts and properties (the concept water and the concept H₂O are distinct concepts but they ascribe the same property) must acknowledge that there is at least a conceptual distinction between thick concepts and thick properties. This parallels how one can and should distinguish between evaluative concepts on the one hand and evaluative properties on the other. Some views can allow that some evaluative concepts fail to ascribe evaluative properties; some views can allow that some evaluative properties are ascribed by concepts that are not evaluative. More radically, some theorists could hold that only properties are genuinely evaluative and that there are no evaluative concepts at all.⁶ And some theorists could hold that only concepts are genuinely evaluative and there are no evaluative properties at all. As my topic here is the thick specifically, I will not pause to evaluate the plausibility of either kind of view. Turning to the thick, one possibility is that there are semantically thick concepts but no thick properties. (One kind of argument for that sort of view would be that thickness is a matter of *description and evaluation* combined; and *describing* is something that terms and concepts do but properties do not. Such an argument may, however, trade on an

⁶ Recall the earlier discussion of different ways of using the locution “thick concept”. On Väyrynen’s way of using this locution, a concept can be thick even if its content is not inherently evaluative. If one uses “evaluative concept” the same way, a concept need not be inherently evaluative in order to count as evaluative; it is sufficient that it tends to be used evaluatively. Given that use of “evaluative concept” it would be very odd to insist that there are no evaluative concepts. The way to state the possibility mentioned in the text would be: there are no concepts that are evaluative as a matter of content (as opposed to merely being used evaluatively).

understanding of “description” that in the context is too strict.) Another possibility, more relevant to what Väyrynen seeks to establish, is that while no concepts contain evaluation as part of their content, there are thick properties such that evaluativeness is part of their nature. While the thick concepts we use do not as a matter of semantics convey global evaluations, there are thick properties: evaluative properties that in some sense merge features characteristically associated with non-evaluative properties and features characteristically associated with evaluative properties. Those who believe in thick concepts somehow merging the descriptive and the evaluative do sometimes speak as if they also believe in thick properties that behave analogously.⁷ Väyrynen’s argument against the Semantic View on thick concepts does not immediately speak against the existence of thick properties. It does not even immediately speak against these thick properties being ascribed by thick concepts understood as Väyrynen understands them.

I have just mentioned some views on the thick that Väyrynen’s arguments do not rule out. Even if the views are not strictly ruled out, Väyrynen could maintain that whatever appeal they have depends on the mistaken view on thick concepts (the Semantic View) that Väyrynen is out to refute. Maybe this is so. I am not concerned to argue that it is not so. But argument for the claim that it is so would be needed. The views on the thick I have just called attention to are not even mentioned in Väyrynen’s book.

2. Thick concepts and the fact-value distinction

In the last chapter of the book, “Thick Concepts: Deflating Significance”, Väyrynen discusses the upshot of what he has argued for the debate over thick concepts. He

⁷ See e.g. Dancy (1993), McNaughton and Rawling (2000) Zangwill (2013), and Alfano & Loeb (2014).

discusses the consequences of what he has argued for claims often advanced in discussions focusing on thick concepts. One thesis he discusses is

(FV1) The factual and the evaluative are mutually exclusive (p. 234),

Väyrynen comments that the best case for using thick concepts to challenge (FV1) would be if the following theses,

Inseparability Thick terms and concepts are or represent irreducible fusions of evaluation and non-evaluative description; these aspects cannot be “disentangled” from one another. (p. 12)⁸

Irreducible Thickness Thick terms and concepts are evaluative “in their own right”, independently of their relationship to any other evaluations characterizable in independently intelligible terms. (p. 209)⁹

were true, but that given his arguments, including his arguments for the Pragmatic View and against the Semantic View, this case cannot be made.¹⁰ The idea is that these two theses presuppose the Semantic View. Maybe Väyrynen is right about the “best case”. But discussion of (FV1) and close cousins is often marred by the fact that two theses in the vicinity are not carefully distinguished. One issue, having to do with representations – linguistic expressions and concepts – concerns whether the

⁸ Väyrynen (p. 12fn20) lists Wiggins (1976), Platts (1979), Williams (1985), Putnam (2002) and Kirchin (2010) as friends of Inseparability.

⁹ Väyrynen (pp. 210-11, fn51, 54) mentions Dancy (1995), Harcourt & Thomas (2013), Kirchin (2013) and Roberts (2013) as friends of Irreducible Thickness.

¹⁰ He mentions Dancy (1995), Harcourt & Thomas (2013), Kirchin (2013) and Roberts (2013) as friends of Irreducible Thickness.

categories of factual and evaluative representations are exclusive. Another issue, having to do with metaphysics, concerns whether there is an exclusive distinction between the kinds of properties and facts that evaluative predicates and sentences tend to stand for and the properties and facts that non-evaluative predicates and sentences tend to stand for.¹¹ The relevance of the distinction to Väyrynen's discussion is that Väyrynen without explicit comment immediately focuses on the issue having to do with representation. Theses like Inseparability and Irreducible Thickness, and the Pragmatic and Semantic Views, are in the first instance only related to the issue concerning representation. For all that Väyrynen argues, one could still argue against the separate thesis concerning properties and facts by appeal to the nature of thick properties.¹²

Another thesis Väyrynen considers is

(FV2) Nonevaluative facts are somehow qualitatively different from values; even if there are evaluative facts, these are at least in some significant respects discontinuous with other sorts of facts. (p. 234)

About this Väyrynen says, "The best case for using thick terms and concepts to challenge (FV2) would...be if Inseparability or Irreducible Thickness were true. Each would seem to undermine, in its own way, the existence of the sort of qualitative difference that (FV2) requires" (p. 234f). Given the Pragmatic View, Inseparability

¹¹ Maybe one reason the distinction is not always heeded is that the issue comes up in connection with non-cognitivism – and the non-cognitivist characteristically denies that evaluative predicates stand for properties.

¹² Compare too p. 15, where Väyrynen says "One fact-value distinction is the idea that the factual and the evaluative are mutually exclusive (Putnam [...]). This would have significant implications regarding the semantics, metaphysics and epistemology of value." I would rather say that there are different "fact-value distinctions"; a distinction with significant implications for the semantics of value doesn't immediately have such implications for the metaphysics of value, etc.

and Irreducible Thickness are unsupported. Väyrynen concludes that “if the Pragmatic View is correct, then thick terms and concepts raise no challenge to (FV2)” (ibid.). I guess it is obvious from the preceding discussion what I have to say about this. Points about thick terms and concepts are in the first instance points about how things stand on the representation side, with terms and concepts. But (FV2) is a thesis about properties and facts. So what Väyrynen primarily focuses on is not even directly relevant to (FV2).

Väyrynen could certainly insist in response that it is the critics of (FV2) who hold that points about thick concepts problematize (FV2), so the distinction I stress are primarily problems not for him but for the critics of (FV2). Maybe he would be right about that.

3. What is evaluation?

What are “evaluations” in Väyrynen’s discussion, for example in his statement of the Semantic View? Generally, what does it take for a concept to be evaluative (in and of itself, as a matter of content), and what does it take for a property to be evaluative? (Note that these are different questions, and that the answers to these questions may well differ in important ways.) Väyrynen has a discussion of this, but let me first discuss the matter in abstraction from his explicit remarks. I believe that the matter is a crucial one, and that there are problems here that Väyrynen does not properly attend to.

Much of Väyrynen’s argument against the Semantic View and for the Pragmatic View is in terms of what is entailed regarding *goodness (/badness) in a way*. This suggests a sufficient condition for evaluativeness for concepts: a concept *C* is evaluative if *a is C* conceptually entails *a is good (/bad) in a way*. I take it that

transposing this to the evaluativeness of expressions is straightforward, at least when it comes to predicates. (Transposing it to the case of properties is less straightforward. Consider the suggestion that property P is evaluative if a's being P necessitates that a is good (/bad) in a way. The trouble with that is that given that evaluative properties supervene on descriptive ones, this will misclassify descriptive properties as evaluative. The source of the problem is in the "necessitates". But we cannot talk of conceptual entailment anymore when we consider properties. Given that there can be different concepts of the same property, it does not make good sense to speak of properties as standing in conceptual entailment relations. *a is H2O* conceptually entails *a contains hydrogen*; *a is water* does not. The concepts *H2O* and *water* ascribe the same property. What should we then say is conceptually entailed by something's having that property?)

This sufficient condition for a concept to be evaluative is arguably too weak. Goodness and badness in a way come cheaply. If something is F, then that is good in the following way: it is good for the purpose of having something that is F. Admittedly, it is a separate question whether this is a conceptual entailment. But *if something is F then it is good for the purpose of having something that is F* certainly has an analytic feel to it.

A different suggestion about what it takes for a concept to be evaluative is: concept C is evaluative iff *a is C* conceptually entails *a is pro tanto good (bad)*. Since pro tanto goodness (badness) clearly conceptually entails goodness (badness) in a way – assuming one takes the notion of conceptual entailment to be in good standing in the first place – this suggestion is equivalent to what Väyrynen works with if, but only if, goodness (badness) in a way conceptually entails pro tanto goodness (badness). Reason to doubt this latter assumption comes from consideration of such 'ways of

being good' as *good for realizing the aims of Nazism* or *good for maximizing human suffering*. Problems in transposing this to the case of properties are the same as in the previous case. Given standard assumptions about the supervenience of the evaluative upon the descriptive, pro tanto goodness can be necessitated by purely descriptive properties.

If we understand evaluativeness in terms of links to pro tanto goodness (badness) and if goodness (badness) in a way does not suffice for pro tanto goodness (badness), then we face the difficult question of how then best to linguistically test for evaluativeness. A problem is that the notion of pro tanto goodness (badness) is, if not a technical notion, then at least a notion that it is hard to isolate in ordinary discourse.

Both these first suggested necessary and sufficient conditions for the evaluativeness of concepts rely essentially on a notion of conceptual entailment, and so anyone with doubts about such a notion will be skeptical of these conditions.¹³ An alternative way of construing evaluativeness of concepts is as derivative upon evaluativeness of properties: a concept is evaluative if and only if the property it ascribes is evaluative. I think this is quite implausible myself, and that both directions of this equivalence face counterexamples, but let me not get into this as I have discussed the matter elsewhere.¹⁴ At any rate, if this is how we understand the evaluativeness of concepts then their evaluativeness depends on metaphysics. Linguistic arguments like Väyrynen's would not have much force. Thick concepts can lack conceptual connections to any sort of concept of goodness or badness and still be evaluative, by virtue of the nature of the properties they in fact ascribe.

A quite different suggestion for how to think about evaluativeness links that issue to that of motivational internalism. A concept C is positively (negatively)

¹³ There are also other reasons to be skeptical of these proposed conditions. See Eklund (2013).

¹⁴ See Eklund (2013).

evaluative iff judging *a is C* is constitutively linked to having a pro-attitude (con-attitude) toward A. Motivational internalism is of course controversial, and given this construal of evaluativeness it cannot be taken as uncontroversial that any of our concepts are evaluative. The relation between understanding evaluativeness by appeal to motivational internalism and Väyrynen's arguments is not entirely straightforward. Väyrynen is concerned with links between thick concepts and goodness (/badness) in a way, but that issue may be orthogonal to issues concerning motivation since judgments about goodness/badness in a way need not be linked to motivation even if judgments about plain goodness/badness are.

As the discussion illustrates, the question of how to understand evaluativeness matters when one tries to assess Väyrynen's arguments. Which conception of evaluativeness can be taken to underlie these arguments? Let me turn to what Väyrynen actually says about how he understands evaluation for the purposes of his discussion:

My suggestion for characterizing evaluation without reference to pro tanto value is to understand it as information that is somehow positive or negative in flavor. This needn't mean the sort of bare "pro" or "con" assessment exemplified by the proto-emotivist understanding of evaluative judgment as an expression of a "boo" or a "hurrah". Evaluation might rather be understood as information to the effect that something has a positive or negative standing – merit or demerit, worth or unworthy, 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. (p. 29)

This all strikes me as reasonable as far as it goes. But I am not sure how helpful it is. If Väyrynen spoke of evaluation simply as information that something has positive or negative standing relative to some standard, his criterion would be extremely liberal in the way that a “good in some way” criterion is extremely liberal. Taking note of this, Väyrynen imposes a requirement on the standard. It “must be of the kind that is capable of grounding claims of merit or worth”. But he does not really explain what this means, or how it is supposed to rule out what it rules out. It is clear that he wants to avoid the extremely liberal view, but it is unclear how his actual formulation could achieve this – and how what he proposes is an improvement over appeal to pro tanto goodness and badness.

4. On Väyrynen’s arguments

In the foregoing, I have been concerned to point out what nearby theses Väyrynen’s arguments don’t succeed in refuting even if Väyrynen successfully argues for the Pragmatic View and against the Semantic View, and I have been discussing questions about what it is to be evaluative that I don’t think Väyrynen takes seriously enough. In this section I will present considerations more directly targeted against Väyrynen’s arguments.

First, I think there is a kind of Semantic View that Väyrynen fails to consider. Consider a broadly Fregean descriptivist view, as such views have often been discussed post-Kripke: associated with an expression is a set of descriptions, and the semantic value of the expression is what satisfies these descriptions. Or better, consider a liberal view of this kind where the semantic value does not actually have to

satisfy all the associated descriptions but only has to satisfy a weighted most. A name “a” associated with descriptions “F”, “G” and “H” can have as semantic value something which satisfies “F” and “G” but not “H”. And to be competent with the name one need not be able to associate the name with all the associated descriptions but only with a weighted most. The descriptions are still, it would be natural to say, *semantically* and not merely pragmatically associated with the name; there is a standing, conventional connection between the name and the descriptions. But notice: if so, one could say “a is not H” without linguistic impropriety, despite “H” being semantically associated with “a”. But this parallels the data Väyrynen uses for the defeasibility argument that he marshals against the Semantic View. There is then a semantic view which is perfectly compatible with those data. This is a semantic view that does not receive any attention in Väyrynen’s discussion. (I happen not to like this specific view myself. But I do favor a view according to which a principle can be meaning-constitutive for an expression even though the expression does not actually satisfy the principle and even though the principle can be competently rejected by users of the expression, and I have applied this general type of view in the case of thick concepts – see Eklund (2011).¹⁵)

Even if there is a semantic view which is perfectly compatible with defeasibility considerations, there remain Väyrynen’s projection considerations. Let me then turn to discuss those considerations in their own right. A complication regarding those considerations is that it can be, consistently with the projection data that Väyrynen points to, that ‘lewd’ is semantically evaluative but is *also* associated with evaluation pragmatically. It can then be that the ‘lewd’-objector’s refusal to use 1a-1d is explained by whatever evaluation is pragmatically associated with ‘lewd’. In

¹⁵ Although I now think the discussion in Eklund (2011) suffers from not being sufficiently attentive to what it is for an expression to be evaluative.

the abstract this suggestion should sound rather baroque and uneconomical. In order to ward off this sort of view, Väyrynen appeals to simplicity in connection with making use of the projection data: the idea is that the Pragmatic View is the simplest view that deals with the projection data.

There is important interplay between the projection considerations and what one thinks evaluation is in the first place. Consider what I will refer to as a *antimoralist*, who think does not see reason to favor what is good or disfavor what is bad. She the notions of goodness or badness belong to the ideology of slave morality. (Or whatever.) She thinks the notions of goodness and badness are infected by some defective ideology and should be replaced by, say, Nietzsche-inspired counterparts, call them *supergood* and *superbad*. I call the character an “antimoralist” because that is the label sometimes used, but the way I intend the “good” and “bad” here to be understood is as thinly or generally as possible, and not to be understood as pertaining specifically to morality.

This antimoralist is in some ways analogous to the lewd-objector; she is, so to speak, a good-objector. Compare now

1*. Giving to charity is good.

1*a. Giving to charity is not good.

1*b. Is giving to charity good?

1*c. Giving to charity might be good.

1*d. If giving to charity is good, the Mother Teresa gave to charity.

Of course, the antimoralist wouldn't use 1*. What is more interesting is that the antimoralist would be as unwilling to use 1*a-1*d as the lewd-objector is to use 1a-

Id, and her reasons for the unwillingness would be analogous. How significant is this for what Väyrynen is trying to argue?

Exactly how significant it is depends again one's exact views on evaluation. For example, if one thinks that goodness/badness talk is trivially semantically evaluative and any other evaluative talk is so by virtue of relations to goodness/badness talk then one will not be much impressed by this challenge. But let me stress the nature of the supposed problem. The thought is that we have a *good*-objector (by analogy with the lewd-objector), who because of her qualms about "good" refuses to say things like 1*. She is also unwilling to employ 1*a-1*d. It appears one could run an argument exactly parallel to the one Väyrynen uses in the case of "lewd". If the evaluation in question resided entirely in the semantics, this could not be explained. The arguments are parallel. If Väyrynen's argument shows that "lewd" is not semantically evaluative, the parallel argument shows that "good" is not semantically evaluative either.¹⁶

The reason we are not supposed to think of the "good" here as the specifically morally good is that it can be held that the notion of moral goodness is anyway properly classed as thick – that the qualifying "moral" introduces such an element of specificity or of description that we are dealing with something thick.

When considering the possibility of an antimoralist, I find it natural to say that there are two kinds of evaluation associated with "good". It is semantically evaluative, and in addition, someone who cheerfully uses the word thereby conveys that she approves of the associated way of valuing. The antimoralist's aversion to using 1*a-1*d is due to the latter aspect. But this does not negate the fact that "good" also is evaluative as a matter of content. As noted, Väyrynen appeals to simplicity

¹⁶ Roberts (forthcoming) also uses the antimoralist to cast doubt on Väyrynen's argument from projection behavior.

considerations against the view that there are different kinds of evaluation associated with thick concepts. But if we anyway have to say that there are different kinds of evaluation associated with “good”, it seems only reasonable to say the same thing in the case of thick concepts.

It may be tempting to respond to the case of the antimoralist by saying that such a character would be conceptually confused in a way that the ‘lewd’-objector is not. Where the ‘lewd’-objector acts appropriately, given her evaluative outlook, the antimoralist ought not to refuse to use ‘good’ so much as to give voice to her view by saying that something is good iff it is supergood – and the rest of us are mistaken insofar as we don’t realize this. I grant that it is intuitive to treat the cases differently in this way. But one would want to see the argument for so proceeding.

In the metaethics literature, much has been made of the possibility of the *amoralist*: someone who makes moral judgments but purportedly is not motivated by them – fails to have the attitudes otherwise characteristically associated with such judgments.¹⁷ The amoralist can be, and has been, appealed to in debates about what it is for judgments or expressions to be evaluative. (And it is then relevant to go beyond focus on the specifically *moral* and consider if for all notions of goodness or badness however general one can imagine someone who makes judgments involving this notion of goodness or badness but remains unmoved.) If semantic evaluativeness requires the truth of some motivational internalist thesis, then appeal to an amoralist can refute particular semantic evaluativeness claims. Appeal to the antimoralist is in the same spirit, but speaks primarily to the use of projection data.

5. Conclusion

¹⁷ See Brink (1989).

As indicated by my remarks early on, I have a very high opinion of Väyrynen's book. It is certain to carry the discussion of thick concepts forward in many ways. But I have here focused on criticism. An overarching theme of the criticism has been to broaden the perspective from Väyrynen's book: for example to ask questions about the thick that he is not asking, to problematize the notion of evaluativeness, and to consider whether what he says carries over to the paradigmatically thin.

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