

THICK CONCEPTS AND INTERNAL REASONS

Introduction

It has become common to distinguish between two kinds of ethical concepts: thick and thin ones. Bernard Williams, who coined the terms, explains that thick concepts such as “coward, lie, brutality, gratitude and so forth” are marked by having greater empirical content than thin ones. They are both action-guiding and world-guided:

If a concept of this kind applies, this often provides someone with a reason for action... At the same time, their application is guided by the world. A concept of this sort may be rightly or wrongly applied, and people who have acquired it can agree that it applies or fails to apply to some new situation.¹

Thin concepts are concepts such as good and bad, right and wrong, obligation and duty.

Judgments applying thick concepts have been seen as lending support to the possibility of explaining moral knowledge, and objectivity in ethics.² It appears that due to their empirical content – their world-guidedness – judgments employing thick concepts can be true or false, depending on whether they get the worldly facts right. In addition they provide reasons for action – they are action-guiding – and thus may provide the starting point of a realist account of practical reasons: the view that reasons

¹ Williams 1985: 140f.

² See for instance McDowell (1981), but also (1978) and (1979).

are facts and whether or not a person has a reason to act does not (normally) depend on her attitudes. The cruelty of an action is a reason not to perform it or to prevent it; that an action is kind is a reason in its favour. Of course these remarks aren't conclusive – far from it. But even so, some non-cognitivists may regard them as completely wrong-headed, and so does Bernard Williams even though he is not a non-cognitivist. However, he believes that having a practical reason does depend on a person's attitudes and motives.

A certain worry about thick concepts will make clear what the problem is. It has most expressly been raised by Simon Blackburn, who sees it as undermining even the most superficial plausibility of moral cognitivism, as well as the claim that the properties picked out by thick concepts provide reasons. While we may readily accept that the kindness of an action or the fact that it is required by justice is a reason to perform it, there are many thick concepts whose action-guiding role we would reject. Some derogatory – e.g., racist or sexist - words express thick concepts too, Blackburn notes. And surely there are no racist or sexist truths. Furthermore there are concepts that some people use evaluatively (like chaste or obscene), but many of us do not regard the propositions in which those concepts feature as even *prima facie* reason giving. In raising these points, Blackburn claims that it is morally objectionable to regard the facts asserted in propositions which employ thick concepts as action-guiding because it leads to “a conservative and ultimately self-serving complacency.”³ As he sees it, the problem is that if we believe that the correct application of thick concepts yields evaluative truths and that evaluative truths state reasons for actions, we seem to be committed to accepting that some people are, say, fat, *derog.*, and therefore to be ridiculed, and that

³ Blackburn 1998: 102.

there is at least a *pro tanto* reason to lead a chaste life, or feel affection towards cute women. Therefore, the view that all evaluative properties provide reasons for action or for attitudes such as admiration, affection or (dis)approval must be rejected. I will call this worry henceforth *Blackburn's challenge*.⁴ The challenge is that understanding judgments employing thick concepts as expressing evaluative truths and providing reasons for actions or for attitudes leads to a morally unacceptable view. Blackburn suggests instead that we should separate the conditions for applying thick concepts and the reasons that we have in virtue of the concept applying. She may be cute, yes, but that is not a reason for "admiration and arousal."

...it is *morally* vital that we proceed by splitting the input from the output in such a case. By refusing to split we fail to open an essential specifically *normative* dimension of criticism.⁵

According to Blackburn, the meaning of thick concepts is made up of two distinct and in principle separable components: a descriptive one and the expression of an attitude. The truth-aptness and cognitive appearance of judgments employing thick concepts is explained by the descriptive component alone. Blackburn writes "[w]e get nothing but detachable and flexible attitudes, coupled with delineations of traits of character or action"⁶ and - addressing the problem that separation may in practice be difficult - "the reason we have no natural way of identifying *the* attitude expressed... is that there is no such thing as *the* attitude."⁷ There is, rather, a plurality of attitudes which are to be

⁴ I do not mean to suggest that only Blackburn is concerned with this worry, or that he was the first to raise it. Most accounts of thick concepts address it at some level. (Compare for instance Scanlon (2003); Gibbard (2003b)). Yet Blackburn puts it more centre stage than others. Hence the name. See also Väyrynen (2009).

⁵ 1998: 101.

⁶ 1992: 198.

⁷ 1992: 296.

distinguished by context or tone of utterance. I will call this reply to *Blackburn's challenge* the *separability thesis*.⁸

I agree with Blackburn that any account of thick concepts has to face and answer the challenge that he poses. In this paper, I will focus on one reply to the challenge which denies separability, namely Bernard Williams'. Williams answers Blackburn's challenge, while holding on to a cognitivist understanding of thick concepts. But his particular brand of cognitivism is peculiar: Williams rejects the *separability thesis*,⁹ and claims that correct applications of thick concepts yield *evaluative* (and not just descriptive) knowledge. But this is a special kind of knowledge. It is confined to a local community. The members of a community which uses certain thick concepts may have reasons to act accordingly, but the non-members do not. And even the reasons of members remain a little fragile: they may not want to continue using their concepts upon thorough reflection.¹⁰ The *local knowledge* view allows Williams to answer Blackburn's challenge, because even though thick concepts are evaluative concepts and their application can yield evaluative knowledge, no one who isn't a member of the relevant community has

⁸ Following McDowell, it has become more common to talk about 'disentanglement' in this context. I prefer to speak about separability just to emphasize that in order to distinguish two components it needn't be possible to actually disentangle them. Possibly, thick concepts are made up of two components, but we may not have or use concepts that are extensionally equivalent to either one of the components.

⁹ Williams' rejection of separability is motivated by a view he shares with McDowell: that there are no descriptive concepts which are extensionally equivalent to thick ones, and that therefore the extension of a thick concept is not fixed by its descriptive component. While it is probably correct that there often are no extensionally equivalent descriptive concepts, it is far from clear how to argue from this observation to non-separability. The so-called 'disentanglement argument' for non-separability has been forcefully criticized (see for instance Elstein and Hurka (2009)).

¹⁰ Williams 1985, chapter 8.

reason to be guided by the concept.¹¹ Complementing a cognitivist view of thick concepts with reasons internalism that allows him to answer the challenge.

My aim in this paper is to show that Williams' position is, despite its initial attraction, untenable. In particular, I am going to show why the internal reasons view is incompatible with Williams' own understanding of thick concepts. My modest result is that the internalist view of reasons does not help to answer Blackburn's challenge. My aim in this paper is not to answer the challenge but, rather, to explore the possibility of developing Williams' attenuated version of cognitivism, and the possibility of combining it with reasons internalism.

Two clarifications:

- I. *Cognitivist separability*. Separability can be understood in a sense very different from Blackburn's. Some cognitivists¹² suggest that thick concepts are made up of two components: a descriptive one and a thin one. Roughly, kindness has a descriptive content, and those who use the concept regard actions which exhibit the descriptive features of kindness as good. As a response to Blackburn's challenge, a cognitivist of this stripe may suggest that we have to figure out whether the person who uses the concept is right in assuming that having the descriptive features in question makes an action good. We can 'test' thick concepts by asking ourselves whether acting kindly is really good.

¹¹ This reply to Blackburn's challenge is of course not Blackburn's, and he may well find it inadequate. It embraces a certain kind of relativism of reasons which Blackburn would probably reject.

¹² As Elstein and Hurka (2009) point out, many – perhaps most – of the metaethicists from the first half of the 20th century are among them.

T. M. Scanlon¹³ for instance suggests a test of this kind in order to distinguish thick concepts which refer to properties that can provide reasons from those that those that do not. He claims that we can provide what he calls “a reductive account” of some thick concepts in the sense that in some cases we can explain “a thick concept in terms of a thin one”. (284) Some thick concepts can be reductively explained within the correct moral theory that explains the thin concepts. The availability of such an explanation vindicates their use. I will come back briefly to this view in the end, but it will not be the focus of this paper. It is of course another reply to Blackburn’s challenge, but investigating it more closely is for another time.¹⁴

2. *Reasons*. Practical reasons are understood by some as reasons for action only, and by others as comprising also reasons for pro- or con-attitudes of a certain kind (such as admiration, respect, (dis-)approval).¹⁵ While they are different in some regards, I don’t think their differences matter in this context. Either way, I will generally assume that reasons are facts (or true propositions)¹⁶. This is meant to rule out a view that probably almost no one holds anyway, namely that reasons are psychological states such as beliefs or desires. I don’t think that regarding reasons as facts begs the question against Williams’ account, because, while he is not very clear on this point, it seems perfectly compatible with his view: It is the fact that p which provides a reason for action provided

¹³ Scanlon (2003).

¹⁴ Elstein and Hurka (2009) have also suggested an analysis of the thick in terms of descriptive and thin concepts. They do not, however, address Blackburn’s challenge.

¹⁵ This is sometimes combined with the view that reasons for action derive from reasons for attitudes (Scanlon, 1998: 18ff.)

¹⁶ On some accounts facts and true propositions are the same; others maintain that a fact is what makes a true proposition true. But I don’t think the difference matters here.

there is a sound deliberative route from a person's motives to the conclusion that she should φ – not her belief that p , nor the motive itself.¹⁷

I. A sketch of Williams' view

Williams' discussion of thick concepts shaped much of the subsequent debate. It serves two aims: He attempts to take some of the arguments in favor of moral cognitivism on board, while nonetheless proposing a non-realist, non-objectivist understanding of the knowledge gained through applying thick concepts (thereby answering *Blackburn's challenge*), and, secondly, he undertakes to square a proper understanding of thick concepts with his own account of internal reasons.

Thick concepts, Williams thinks, are typically the concepts of one specific community or another. (This is consistent with the possibility that the community consists, contingently, of everyone.) Their parochial character becomes apparent if we focus on a concept such as 'chaste' which is not one that we ourselves would use when deliberating about what to do, but which we understand well enough, and for the most part, we don't object if other people are guided by it in making their decisions. Williams claims that those who belong to a community which uses certain thick concepts such as 'chaste' "will have [ethical] knowledge, when they deploy their concepts carefully, use the appropriate criteria, and so on."¹⁸ But their ethical knowledge – or rather: the facts that make their beliefs true¹⁹ - provides reasons only for those who *belong* to the

¹⁷ This may be the best way to understand e.g. Williams' famous gin-petrol example: it is the fact that the liquid is petrol which provides a reason against drinking it (given the motives of the agent), not the belief that it is.

¹⁸ 1985: 148.

¹⁹ A person can have a reason to act or to form an attitude, even if she does not know that the fact obtains. Williams' view of reasons allows for this.

community in question.²⁰ An outsider to the community will be able to understand their concept, and judge whether or not it is correctly applied to new cases, provided she can “grasp imaginatively its evaluative point.”²¹ But when invited to participate in a way of life which includes using the concept she may well decline, echoing Oscar Wilde’s famous remark, “‘Chaste’ is not one of my words.”²²

Williams attempts to account for the kind of respect that the practices of communities other than our own calls for, while allowing some stand-offishness: I don’t have to be or to become a member of a community - I don’t have to share its practices - in order to understand and respect them; I can acknowledge that *they* have reasons to lead the kind of life they do, while denying that I have reasons to do the same. Thus, his account seems to be ideally suited to both accommodate the liberal ideal of respect for different communities and cultures, and Wilde’s refusal to join in - making sense of both, or at least trying to do so.²³

On a more theoretical level, Williams strives to combine the truth-aptness of judgments applying thick concepts and even the possibility of ethical knowledge with

²⁰ Comparing thick concepts with certain kinds of slang that can only be used by members of a group, Williams writes: “there is a condition that has to be satisfied if one is to speak in a certain way, a condition satisfied by the locals and not by the observer, and in both cases it is a matter of belonging to a certain culture.” (1985: 144)

²¹ 1985: 142

²² During his trial, Oscar Wilde retorted to the prosecutor’s question “I put it to you, Mr Wilde, that this is blasphemy. Is it or is it not?” “Sir, ‘blasphemy’ is not one of my words.”

²³ Of course, not all practices command respect (or even toleration) according to the liberal. Similarly, not all thick concepts you decline to use yourself will be acceptable if used by members of a different community. The outright rejection of some concepts cannot be easily reconciled with the relativism that reasons internalism seems to bring in its wake. However, some philosophers have argued that reasons internalism is compatible with a more universalist account of reasons; see for instance C. Korsgaard (1986); M. Smith (1994). If so, i.e. if there are internal reasons that we all have, perhaps there are also thick concepts that we all ought to be guided by (or at least: thick concepts that we all have reason not to be guided by). Since Williams himself is more inclined to embrace some sort of relativism, I will not pursue the issue here.

internalism about reasons.²⁴ It is reason internalism that is supposed to explain the difference between members and outsiders, rather than the separation of the descriptive from the evaluative that Blackburn proposes. Understanding a thick concept, even if just ‘from the outside’ requires grasping its evaluative point, Williams claims. There simply is no descriptive content which could explain how a thick concept is guided around the world.²⁵ The rule for using and understanding a thick concept is different from the rule for using any descriptive concept (and attaching one of the range of appropriate attitudes). Therefore, even the outsider is not someone who uses the concepts ‘descriptively’.²⁶ Williams’ claim then is that the correct application of a thick concept yields ethical knowledge and provides reasons for those who are inclined to use it at all, but he rejects the objectivity of the ethical knowledge thus gained, because the use of the concepts cannot be endorsed by an outsider to the ethical community in question. The outsider can vouch for the concept’s correct application, but wouldn’t want to use the concept herself.

²⁴ As Gerald Lang pointed out to me, Williams denies that thick concepts provide reasons in the example of the brutal husband: “There are many things that I can say about or to this man: that he is ungrateful, inconsiderate, hard, sexist, nasty, selfish, brutal (...) There is one specific thing the external reasons theorist wants me to say, that the man has reason to be nicer.” (1989: 39) In this passage Williams argues against the external reasons theorist’s claim. But this is perfectly compatible with my approach: Williams denies that thick concepts provide *external* reasons (for everyone independently of his or her motives); but this does not commit him to denying that they can provide reasons, as long as those are *internal* reasons. That is, Williams doesn’t wish to deny that a good husband who takes the inconsiderateness of an action as a reason against the action does have a reason not to be inconsiderate. The man isn’t mistaken in taking inconsiderateness as a reason. But we have to understand his reason as an internal reason.

²⁵ Williams relies on McDowell’s rule-following argument for this point which I will not discuss in this essay, since my concern is not with the justification of Williams’ view of thick concept but with its compatibility with his internal reasons account.

²⁶ It is not clear to me that this is sufficient to reject the two-component analysis. There are different issues involved. One is the separability of descriptive and evaluative meaning components of the concept, and the second that it can be used descriptively. Those are quite independent: It may be possible to use a concept descriptively even if the elements are not analytically separable. E.g. inverted commas-use can be a descriptive use of a concept that does not require separability. (I am grateful to Pekka Väyrynen for pressing me on this point.) And conversely, the components may be analytically separable without there being a purely descriptive use of the concept.

2. The role of reasons internalism

What explains the difference between the member's and the outsider's perspective? Why is it that the outsider would not endorse the community's use of the concept?

If the outsider were to consider whether to endorse the community's use of their thick concepts, she would probably ask herself questions like 'would it be good to lead a chaste life?' or 'are there good reasons to be chaste?' But in posing these questions, she will, Williams thinks, find that the community's way of life cannot be supported by any considerations that are independent of their actual dispositions. It is their disposition to be guided by the concept which provides them with reasons to act accordingly. The outsider is an outsider precisely because she does not share the relevant dispositions. At this point Williams' discussion of thick concepts connects with his internalism about reasons. The disposition to use the concept is the element of the 'subjective motivational set'²⁷ that is crucial for having a reason.

Put schematically, the propositions regarding thick concepts whose truth Williams sets out to defend are the following ones:

- TC: *Thick concepts*. Thick concepts are both world-guided and action-guiding.
- Non-S: *Non-separability*. The separability thesis proposed by Blackburn (et al.) is false.
- LK: *Local knowledge*. Members of a community which uses thick concepts can have ethical knowledge when forming judgments which employ those concepts. – This is Williams' brand of ethical cognitivism.

²⁷ 'Internal and external reasons', p. 102 et passim.

PR_(member): *Practical reasons*. The members of a community have reasons to act accordingly.

PR_(outsider): An outsider who understands the concepts does not have those reasons.

RI: *Reasons Internalism*. (RI explains the difference between the two PR claims.)

The rejection of separability is part and parcel of the kind of cognitivism that Williams defends. On his interpretation of TC, the correct application of thick concepts yields evaluative knowledge. As we have seen above, this makes the view vulnerable to Blackburn's challenge: some thick concepts may have correct applications, but many of us are not prepared to accept that they provide reasons for actions. However, PR_(member) answers the challenge: the reasons are reasons only for members of a community that uses the concept. PR_(member) is paired with LK: the evaluative knowledge that is obtained by applying thick concepts is not objective knowledge. Evaluative knowledge of the kind in question needn't have normative implications. And yet it may. This, however, is puzzling. Why are the evaluative facts, that both members and outsiders can know, reasons for action only for members? Why are they action-guiding only for them? RI is supposed to explain the difference. Reasons internalism is crucial for explaining the member /outsider distinction.

Williams' suggestion is appealing, but does it withstand scrutiny? LK is certainly a problematic claim, but so is the combination of the basic claim, TC, with RI, as I will show presently.

3. TC and practical reasons

According to Williams' interpretation of TC, the application of the concept is world-guided, and the facts it refers to provide reasons, i.e. are action-guiding,²⁸ albeit only for members of a community which uses the concept. To explain how this can be so, we have to resort to Williams' internalism about reasons, the view that a person has a reason to act in a certain way if and only if she can reach the conclusion that she should act in that way by a sound deliberative route from her existing motives.²⁹ Being a member of a community consists *inter alia* in having a disposition to use various thick concepts and to act accordingly. The disposition to use those concepts sets members and outsiders apart, and it is also a condition for having a reason, as it provides the element of the motivational set that internalism requires. But can internalism really explain how TC is compatible with PR_(member) and PR_(outsider)? How do thick concepts figure in an internalist account of practical reasons?

Suppose that I believe that P(T) which is a proposition expressed in applying a thick evaluative concept T. And suppose P(T) is true. Does the fact that P(T) give me a reason for action? It depends on whether I am a member of a community that uses T, or an outsider. And this in turn depends on whether I have a disposition to be guided by T.³⁰ Assume first that I am an outsider and therefore don't have the relevant disposition. In that case, I could still believe that P(T), Williams tells us, but I wouldn't have a reason to act. Assume next that I am a member of the relevant community. In that case, my

²⁸ This is in keeping with Williams' claim (cited above) that "[i]f a concept of this kind applies, this often provides someone with a reason for action". (1985:140)

²⁹ "What are the truth conditions for statements of the form 'A has a reason to φ [...]?' ... A could reach the conclusion that he should φ (or the conclusion to φ) by a sound deliberative route from the motivations that he has in his actual motivational set..." Williams, 1989: 35 (*et passim*).

³⁰ Note that this understanding of 'community' is not in keeping with the ordinary use of the term. In its ordinary use, I can be a member of a community even if I do not have a disposition to be guided by some of its central concepts.

(true) belief that P(T) provides me with a reason.³¹ Why? According to the broadly Humean view that internalism is based on, the belief that P(T) must be appropriately linked to my motivational attitudes for me to have a reason. Since being a member, I have the relevant disposition, there is a suitable link.

Let's substitute 'cruel' for T, and assume that I am a member: I have a disposition to disapprove of and avoid cruel actions, and I believe that P(T), i.e. that a particular action is cruel. Provided my belief that P(T) is true, I have an (internal) reason to prevent or avoid the action. How exactly are we to understand this reason?

(i) *The conditional interpretation*

On one interpretation of this view, the fact that makes P(T) true provides a *conditional reason*. Let me explain. Williams provides an analysis of the truth conditions of reason statements, writing "A has a reason to φ iff A has some desire the satisfaction of which will be served by his φ -ing".³² Later, he changes the formulation somewhat, stating "What are we saying when we say someone has a reason to do something? [...] A could reach the conclusion that he should φ (or a conclusion to φ) by a sound deliberative route from the motivations that he has in his actual motivational set."³³ The first formulation is probably not much use in our context. Desire satisfaction has no obvious role to play when we explain the reasons of people who respond to evaluative facts. The second formulation may fare better.

But there is a problem with it. It seems that Williams attempts to analyze a *pro tanto* concept, 'reason', in terms of an all-things-considered one, 'should' (or 'the conclusion to φ '). Surely, having a reason is not sufficient to establish that a person

³¹ Note that according to Williams false beliefs do not give rise to reasons. Williams 1980: 103.

³² 1980: 101.

³³ 1995: 35.

should do what she has a reason to do. Whether or not she should do so, will depend, *inter alia*, on her other reasons. What Williams should have said is, I think, this: ‘What are we saying when we say someone has a reason to do something? A could reach the conclusion that *he has a reason to φ* by a sound deliberative route from the motivations that he has in his actual motivational set.’ If he had said this, he would not, of course, have offered us an analysis of the concept of a reason (as ‘what are we saying’ may seem to suggest), but rather of the conditions under which reason statements are true. But offering an analysis of the concept of a reason in terms of ‘should’ isn’t part of the ambition of reasons internalism – to my knowledge, Williams doesn’t argue for it anywhere.³⁴ Determining the truth conditions of reason statements on the other hand is the explicit aim of Williams’ approach. I will therefore proceed as though Williams had expressed himself in this way, because it avoids the glitch in moving from *pro tanto* to all things considered.

Furthermore, while Williams sometimes focuses on truth conditions, he wishes to offer an explanation of why a person has a reason. This becomes clear when he rejects externalism about reasons as incomprehensible or a “bluff”³⁵ because it fails to properly explain why the person has a reason in situations where it may be true (e.g.) that it would have been better had she acted differently.³⁶ If so, and coming back to thick concepts, the internalist claim would be this: An evaluative fact is a reason for a person, if and only if, and *because* P(T) is appropriately linked to her existing motives. If and only

³⁴ For a number of arguments why such a projects hold little promise anyway, see Dancy (2004), chapter 2.

³⁵ 1980: 111.

³⁶ Compare: “this externalist account does not sufficient distinguish what [A has a reason to φ] says about him from other things that might be said about him.” From Williams, “Replies” in Altham & Harrison (edd)1995: 191f.

if, and because the person has a motive from which she could reach the conclusion that she has a reason to avoid cruel actions, the fact that this action is cruel gives her a reason to avoid it. I will call this *the conditional interpretation of reasons internalism*.

But while this interpretation may work well in other contexts, there is an immediate worry when it comes to explaining the action-guiding role of thick concepts: According to RI, any fact whatsoever can provide a reason in this way. Take the fact that this is ice cream, or a chair, or even a saucer of mud, and assume that the agent desires the item. In each case, there may well be a sound deliberative route from the belief that the fact obtains to the conclusion that there is a reason to act. Hence each of these facts can be a reason in the very same sense in which evaluative facts are reasons.

On the conditional interpretation, the evaluative facts to which judgments employing thick concepts refer are no more closely related to actions than any other kind of facts. Thus thick concepts would be action-guiding only because the motive that they are relating to is. But any fact, when appropriately linked to a person's desires, would be action-guiding in the very same sense.

If we follow the conditional interpretation we seem to have lost our subject: There is nothing special about thick concepts, and in particular they are no more action-guiding than any other concepts, be they ethical or purely descriptive. On the conditional interpretation TC is true not only of thick concepts, but of descriptive concepts as well. 'Chair', for instance, is surely world-guided, and, provided a person has a suitable desire, it is action-guiding as well. Thus the conditional interpretation leads to a leveling of all concepts: There is nothing special about so-called evaluative ones. The point of TC is, however, that there is: that judgments employing thick concepts (if true)

are different from others in their action-guiding role. We should therefore reject the conditional interpretation.

(ii) *The belief /desire model of reasons*

Alternatively, we could approach reasons internalism from its traditional interpretation as a belief/desire account of reasons. On this interpretation, reasons are combinations of (true) beliefs and desires. But in that case, the view will be even more obviously false, because then it would be the combination of the true P(T) belief and the person's disposition to be guided by T which together provide her with a reason. And thus it is not the evaluative fact that the thick concept refers to which provides the reason – ever. Not even for members of the community. In addition, this interpretation of reason internalism leads to the same leveling of all concepts that the conditional interpretation brings in its wake: All concepts would be equally 'world-guided and action-guiding', whether they are evaluative concepts, or just any old concepts.

(iii) *Motivating beliefs*

But there is an alternative. Perhaps an evaluative fact provides a person with a reason because – if she knows of it – it also supplies a suitable motivation. P(T) beliefs are motivating for the person who holds them whereas beliefs whose content is merely descriptive are not. Hence, the person has a reason simply because of her (true) belief that T: the evaluative fact that T is a reason for anyone who believes P(T), because such beliefs are as such motivating, and *therefore* suitably related to the person's motivational set.³⁷

³⁷ I take it that Williams wouldn't be worried about the suggestion that beliefs as such can be motivating. He is not fussed about the desire / belief distinction, and states explicitly that beliefs can be motivating. [See however, Smith, in this volume, who disagrees.] Cf. "Does believing that a particular consideration is a reason to act in a particular way provide, or indeed constitute, a motivation to act? [...] [T]his claim

However, now it seems difficult to understand how an outsider who forms the same belief could fail to have a reason. If the belief as such is motivating, how can it fail to motivate outsiders? Thus, we cannot maintain the $PR_{(member)}$ and $PR_{(outsider)}$ distinction. If the outsider can acquire and ascertain the same belief as the member why would it be motivating only for one of them? The answer seems to be: because only one of them is disposed to act accordingly. But if so, the disposition to act must be independent of the belief - but necessary for having a reason, i.e. the interpretation of judgments employing thick concepts as motivating beliefs must be false as well.

I will come back to discussing a possible rejoinder on behalf of 'motivating beliefs' in (vii), but let's first have a closer look at the structure of the problem.

(iv) *The dilemma*

Williams' reasons internalism has it that a person has a reason to φ iff and because there is a cogent deliberative route from her (true) beliefs to the conclusion that she has such a reason. The person has a reason if her beliefs are suitably connected to her existing motives. But where does believing P(T) figure in her practical deliberations? To put it simply: Either the P(T) beliefs are themselves motivational states which are *ipso facto* suitably related to the motivational set, so that the evaluative facts they refer to provide reasons when a person becomes aware of them. Or they are not, and the motive for acting on true evaluative beliefs is independent of having the belief.

indeed seems plausible... in fact so plausible, that this agent, with this belief, appears to be one about whom... an *internal* reason statement could truly be made: he is one with an appropriate motivation in his S." (1980: 107) A view of this kind is not committed to internalism but it may be interpreted in an internalist way. McDowell (1995) in his discussion of Williams' account of reasons brings out what the difference comes to: According to the internalist, when the agent acquires a motivating belief a new reason has been created for her; according to the externalist, the "[reason] statement must have been true all along; in coming to believe it, the agent must be coming to consider the matter aright." (McDowell 1995: 72) For our purposes it suffices that there is a way for the internalist to make sense of the possibility that there are motivating beliefs, which refer to reasons.

The *motivating beliefs* interpretation is false because it would lead to denying the member / outsider distinction. But the alternative is false too, because in that case P(T) beliefs are no more action-guiding than descriptive beliefs and, even when they are true, the facts that they refer to do not provide reasons. Therefore TC is false. The fact that makes the belief true must be supplemented with a suitable motive for there to be a reason on the belief/desire model. And we have seen that the conditional interpretation of TC offers no consolation: Saying that P(T) beliefs provide reasons, if and only if, and because they are combined with suitable motives puts them on a par with any other belief that a person may have, and thus the evaluative has no special place when it comes to explaining action-guiding beliefs and reasons. Let me illustrate the problem in some more detail by looking at Adrian Moore's interpretation of Williams' view.

(v) *'Embracing' thick concepts?*

Adrian Moore suggests that a P(T) belief provides a reason for someone who "embraces" the concept T where 'embracing' requires that one "feels sufficiently at home with the concept to be prepared to apply it oneself."³⁸ He uses 'Sabbath' as an example of a thick concept which, when applied (correctly) by a religious Jew will give her various reasons for acting. A non-religious Jew knows how to apply the concept and can therefore form the same belief, but does not have any reasons to act accordingly, because she does not 'embrace' the concept. And finally, non-Jewish people may not even know how to apply the concept correctly.

However, the idea of 'embracing' a concept inherits all the problems sketched above. And furthermore, it does not do justice to the reasons in question. First, the religious Jew believes that every Jew has a reason to honor the Sabbath, whether or not

³⁸ Moore 2006:137.

she embraces the concept. Thus, the religious Jew (i.e. the 'member') would be systematically mistaken about her reasons. She would (mistakenly, on this account) deny that she has a reason in virtue of 'embracing' the concept. Secondly, if the content of the belief is the same in the case of the religious and the non-religious Jew, why is it that only one of them has a reason to act, but not the other? As Moore sees it, 'embracing' is supposed to supply the necessary motivational element which reason internalism requires. But now we are back with the dilemma sketched above: Is the belief as such motivating? If so, the non-believer cannot acquire it. Or is 'embracing' what establishes the link to independent motives, or provides an independent motive? If so, the fact that the belief refers to (when true) is not a reason for either members or non-members, and thus, once again, TC is false. And once again, the conditional interpretation cannot be the remedy, because it leads to denying that evaluative concepts are related to agency in any special way. Thus, it seems that the idea of embracing a concept does not help to get out of the dilemma. (Just for the record, and to make clear that reasons internalism is not the culprit: On an externalist view of reasons, it would be even more obscure how members and outsiders can acquire the same beliefs about evaluative facts, but only members would have reasons. It is not even clear where to look for a relevant difference to explain the asymmetry. If the fact that makes the belief true provides a reason for members, it should do so for outsiders as well. Plainly, the $PR_{(member)}$ and $PR_{(outsider)}$ distinction requires the truth of reasons internalism to have any plausibility to start with.)

(vi) A disposition to form beliefs?

Am I misunderstanding the role of the specific motivational elements in question, that is, of the dispositions which are relevant to belonging to a community? After all, we

should think of them not simply as dispositions to behave in certain ways, but as dispositions to judge that certain things are valuable.³⁹ In other words, the disposition is tied in with a structure of belief and reasoning. The members of the community have a disposition to hold beliefs which can be expressed in truth-apt propositions. But claiming that they have a disposition to hold certain beliefs may be a perfectly trivial thing to say. A moral realist, for instance, need not deny that people do things because they believe something to be valuable, and that they acquire beliefs of this kind because they have certain dispositions to reason and think about the matters in question. What provides the reason, however, is (according to the realist) the true proposition that the belief expresses or the fact that obtains when the proposition is true. Thus, the dispositions which are relevant to reasoning and forming beliefs do not establish a distinction between member and outsider reasons. They do not vindicate $PR_{(member)}$ and $PR_{(outsider)}$. Both members and outsiders have dispositions of this kind, and their role is the same. If, on the other hand, we understand the dispositions not as dispositions to form beliefs but as motives and desires in the ordinary sense they will not be shared by members and outsiders. While having reasons may depend on them (according to RI, it does), we are back with the dilemma: On the one horn, judgments applying thick concepts may entail motives, but then the outsider will not be able to make those judgments. On the other horn, the judgments need to be conjoined with independent motives for a person to have a reason. But then the proposition expressed by the belief

³⁹ Williams claims that a virtue is an “intelligent disposition”: “It involves the agent’s exercise of judgment, that same quality of practical reason, and so it is not simply a habit.” (1985: 36) Since the virtue-concepts are examples of thick concepts the idea of having ‘intelligent dispositions’ of this kind may more generally underlie his understanding of what it means to be a member of a community.

does not provide a reason (neither for members nor for outsiders). Either way, the $PR_{(member)}$ and $PR_{(outsider)}$ distinction cannot be combined with TC.

(vii) *Defending the motivating-beliefs-interpretation*

But there may yet be another way of explaining the difference between outsiders and members – thereby showing that the *motivating beliefs*-interpretation is correct after all. Remember that the problem with the idea that beliefs which apply thick concepts are as such motivating, was that it doesn't allow for the member/outsider distinction with regard to reasons. Everyone who forms the relevant beliefs would be suitably motivated, and therefore have a reason to act. But perhaps a variant of the Fregean sense/reference distinction can help.⁴⁰ This interpretation of the member/outsider distinction is not one that Williams would endorse. But since we have already seen that Williams' view is unlikely to be consistent, it may be worth investigating this new suggestion, which purports to incorporate many of the features of Williams' account, even though not all of them (but if I am right, nothing will salvage *all* the pieces).

If I believe that the Morning star is beautiful, and you believe that the Evening star is beautiful, we believe the same thing about Venus. But we don't believe the same proposition: the sentences that express our respective beliefs do not have the same meaning. Might it be that there is a similar difference between member- and outsider-beliefs, even though they are about the same evaluative facts? Perhaps the meaning of 'cruel', when a member believes 'setting a cat on fire is cruel' is different from the meaning of 'cruel' in the outsider's belief which can be expressed as 'setting a cat on fire is cruel'. And yet according to the current suggestion, the member and the outsider are

⁴⁰ I am grateful to Pekka Väyrynen for pressing me on this point.

not talking past each other: they are referring to the same evaluative fact, and the outsider is not using the phrase in inverted commas.

But what accounts for the difference in meaning? In the Morning star / Evening star example, the reason why ‘the Morning star is beautiful’ and ‘the Evening star is beautiful’ have different meanings is that ‘Morning star’ and ‘Evening star’ are not interchangeable *salva veritate* in intensional contexts. But in our member / outsider example, the situation is different. Both believe that setting the cat on fire is cruel, and they use the same sentences to express their beliefs, and therefore there is (as yet) no reason to think that they apply different concepts.

However, the difference in meaning may consist in the very fact that the concepts play different inferential roles when used by members and outsiders respectively: they draw different conclusions from the fact that the concept applies, and if a concept A plays a different inferential role from concept B, then A and B are different concepts (so the current assumption). But there is commonality too: members and outsiders apply ‘cruel’ to the same actions, and modify or withdraw their judgments under similar conditions – apparently they track the same property, or refer to the same property. Yet from ‘A is cruel’ the member draws the conclusion ‘A is to be avoided’, whereas the outsider draws no such normative conclusion. Hence while both members and outsiders use their concepts to refer to the same property, they use different concepts (they use ‘cruel’ in a different sense).⁴¹ Since they use different concepts, they don’t disagree. Maggie (member) believes there is a reason to avoid cruelty (applying her concept of cruelty); and Otto (outsider) believes that Maggie has a

⁴¹ For a discussion of a somewhat similar suggestion see Gibbard’s discussion of ‘brutal’ and ‘wumpua’ in Gibbard (2003b), pp. 164ff.

reason to avoid cruelty, but that he, Otto, doesn't – given his different concept of cruelty. Their respective beliefs accord with Williams' description of the situation. (But as mentioned, this is nonetheless not suggested as an interpretation of Williams' view, but as a revision. Williams believes that Maggie and Otto employ the same concept.) If sound, the current suggestion can accommodate all of Williams' claims, except for the one that members and outsiders apply the same concepts.

Now why is it that Otto does not use Maggie's concept of cruelty? Because he lacks the disposition, or motivation to be guided by it. And *ex hypothesi* this is the only difference between them. But here then is a problem with this suggestion: Can a difference in concepts come down to a difference with regard to just one of the inferences that the concept licenses, namely the difference as to whether or not, when the concept applies, there is a reason to prevent or avoid actions that instantiate the property that the concept refers to? To explain why this is doubtful, imagine the following scenario: there is disagreement among members whether or not a certain thick concept provides a reason. They agree that some action would be generous (say), but some find that generosity would be inappropriate in the given circumstances and that therefore there is no reason to be generous on this occasion; others believe that since the proposed action would be generous there is a reason for performing it. For there to be such disagreement between members, their disposition to be guided by the concept must be subtly responsive to differing circumstances (not a simple on/off mechanism to be guided by the concept whenever it applies): they are disposed to be guided by it in the right circumstances, and the dispute is precisely about whether those circumstances currently obtain. In this case, the members refer to the same property and there isn't a difference in the meaning of the concept of generosity that they

employ. But in the current case, there is a disagreement about one of the implications of the concept applying. The explanation why the fact that an action would be generous does or does not have normative implications in this situation is sought in features of the particular circumstances.

How is this disagreement about normative implications different from the member's and the outsider's application of their different concepts? According to the suggestion we are currently investigating, the difference is that in the member /outsider application of the concept having or not having the normative implication makes for a difference in concepts, and therefore there is no disagreement. Could the members settle their dispute in this way? Instead of trying to argue about how the circumstances are relevant, could they simply agree that they use different concepts (since they disagree about the normative implications of the fact that the concept applies in the current case)? According to one concept of generosity, there is reason to be generous in the situation at hand; according to another there is not? Hardly. Such a reply would fail entirely to respond to the problem that the members perceive, and are concerned about: the question whether in the current case the fact that an action would be generous provides a reason for so acting. But why then would it be true that in an exactly similar situation when members and outsiders use the concept, but only members come to the conclusion that they have reason to act in a certain way, they use different concepts? Why wouldn't this be a case of disagreement as well? After all, the outsider differs from the member only in that she lacks the disposition to be guided by the concept, and therefore lacks the motivational link that reasons internalism requires. To put it more generally, two concept applications cannot differ only with regard to their normative implications. Their content must provide some explanation of this

difference. Therefore the sense / reference distinction doesn't help to reinstate Williams' approach. After all, we know that the difference between the member and the outsider is a difference in motivation. The difference between believing that P(T) without being motivated and believing P(T) while being motivated does not seem to be a difference in the meaning (or 'sense') of 'T'.

Instead there are only two options at this juncture (as far as I can see): either the beliefs are not motivating as such, but only when combined with an independent motive, or the outsider is using the expression in inverted commas after all. The first alternative would (obviously) bring back the first horn of the dilemma. But the second doesn't fare better: it brings back to the second horn. According to it, everyone who *genuinely* uses a thick concept has a reason to act accordingly. Members and outsiders are in that regard on a par – at least thus far, we have not countenanced the possibility that the outsider doesn't genuinely use the thick concept when she applies it.

(viii) *Inverted commas*

But why not run with inverted commas? Perhaps this is exactly the right way of describing the difference between members and outsiders: The member believes that setting cats on fire is cruel, and the outsider believes that setting cats on fire is “cruel” – distancing herself from the implication of the member's belief that there is a reason to avoid cruelty. The outsider may, as Williams puts it, ‘imaginatively grasp the evaluative point’ of ‘cruel’ – she understands that members believe there to be reasons not to act cruelly. But while she understands this, she doesn't share the view. Isn't that exactly what the inverted commas idea is after? And isn't it also intuitively the right way to think about members and outsiders?

Well, consider how this works on the internalist view: There is a sound deliberative route from the fact that an action is cruel to the conclusion that there is a reason to avoid cruelty, but there is no sound deliberative route from the fact that an action is “cruel” to the conclusion that there is a reason to avoid “cruelty”. Why not? Because the outsider doesn’t believe that “cruelty” provides reasons. But whether there is a sound deliberative route to the conclusion that there is a reason to φ cannot turn on the question whether the person already believes that there is such a reason. No acceptable view of reasons can allow for this – be it internalist or not. On any account of reasons it must be possible that an agent’s belief that there is (or isn’t) a reason to φ can turn out to be false.

(ix) Linguistic observation

Might it be that the outsider’s belief is different altogether? Rather than believing that setting cats on fire is “cruel”, she may only believe that the locals have applied their concept of cruelty correctly when stating ‘setting cats on fire is cruel’. If so, it would be unsurprising that this belief does not provide the outsider with a reason. It is just a linguistic observation. However, this move doesn’t help, because there is no reason to assume that the outsider does not have a reason to avoid cruelty in this case. Compare a father who rejoices that Little Peter, his five-year-old, has applied the concept of cruelty correctly when he states ‘setting cats on fire is cruel’. There is no reason to assume that only the son, but not the father, has a reason to avoid cruelty. The linguistic observation is simply beside the point, and we would have to start all over: why is it that the outsider who makes the observation about the correct use of the concept refuses to use the concept herself? Why is it that she is right to do so, while the members of

the community are equally right to be guided by their concepts? I don't see how the linguistic-observation interpretation could help to answer any of these questions.

(x) *Modes of believing*

Perhaps we should embrace the first horn of the dilemma after all: perhaps P(T) beliefs can be acquired in two different modes. For members of the community, when they acquire a belief of this kind, it will be motivating, because it taps into existing motivations and dispositions. For outsiders on the hand, when they acquire a belief of this kind, it will not be motivating. This may in the end be the best way of bringing together the various aspects of Williams' account. It amounts to saying that whether beliefs, deploying thick concepts, are motivating is contingent on a person's existing dispositions just as Williams wishes. But the content of the belief is shared between those who are motivated and those who aren't. And the content is evaluative.

But if this is the right interpretation of the proposed view, there are then two possibilities:

1. *Evaluative facts aren't reasons.* Even though both outsiders and members can share the same evaluative beliefs, and those beliefs can constitute ethical knowledge, only members have reasons to respond to the evaluative facts, because they have an independent motive to do so. TC is then false, because the facts that make judgments employing thick concepts true are never, on their own, reason giving; or
2. *Rejecting reasons internalism.* TC is true, and both members and outsiders have a reason when a thick concept is applied correctly, but only members are motivated to act on the reason. Outsiders have the same reason, but lack the motivation. That is, RI is false, and with it the

distinction between $PR_{(member)}$ and $PR_{(outsider)}$. Motivation is not necessary for having a reason.

Williams is bound to reject (2), and would therefore perhaps endorse (1). As I have shown above (1) is a consequence of both the conditional and the desire/belief interpretation. The problem with (1) is that it does not do justice to the special role of thick concepts for explaining reasons – the role that Williams after all set out to make sense of in introducing the notion of thick concepts. (2) has a better chance of explaining the special role of thick concepts for our understanding of reasons. But it has problems as well, other than that it is incompatible with reasons internalism. (2) invites Blackburn's challenge back in: If there is no member/outsider distinction with regard to reasons, we have no reply at all. Shouldn't we reject to be guided by at least some thick concepts? But (2) tells us that when the concept is applied correctly, both members and outsiders have a reason to act.

Let me pause for a moment to say a little more about the failure of explaining the special role of thick concepts that seems to count against (1), before I come back to the prospects of (2) and Blackburn's challenge. Can evaluative facts be 'special' even if in some ways their role in explaining reasons seems to be the same as that of any other fact? Here are two suggestions for explaining why evaluative facts warrant special attention nonetheless: (a) They are community-making. Those who are guided by them, who 'embrace' them, as Adrian Moore puts it, form an ethical community. (b) They tell us what to do in a way descriptive propositions do not.

I am inclined to disregard (a), because the sense of community that underlies Williams' discussion is a strange one anyway.⁴² Communities as we know them ordinarily allow for doubts and criticism. Someone who is not inclined to be guided by a certain concept does not thereby become a mere observer of the community's practices. Our sense of community is much richer than that of Williams' 'hypertraditional society', and therefore not really captured by this discussion. 'Embracing' a thick concept is community-making in a sense of community which is just terminological and, as far as I can see, of no ethical interest.

(b) may be more important though. The difference between evaluative facts and others in being reason-giving is that the evaluative fact tells a person who is guided by the relevant concept what to do. For a person who is guided by the concept of cruelty (i.e. has the relevant motives) the very fact that an action is cruel is sufficient to give her a reason to avoid or prevent certain actions. There is no parallel in the case of non-evaluative facts. That something is a chair – assuming that chair is one of the concepts that the person uses – isn't as such a reason for anything. It depends on the actual content of the motives what reason (if any) she would have: if the person is exhausted the fact that this is a chair may give her a reason to approach it and sit down (etc.). Possibly a reasons internalist could appeal to this difference in order to explain her interest in thick concepts. The difference is real enough. I doubt that Williams' interest is spurred by this observation, but even so, it offers a possible retreat for an internalist. Perhaps the internalist's interest is mainly in the possibility of ethical knowledge anyway, rather than in any special role of thick concepts in explaining reasons. While it remains

⁴² Williams seems to acknowledge as much when he calls the community he deals with a "hypertraditional" society: "maximally homogeneous and minimally given to general reflection" (1985: 142)

true that any concept is both world-guided and action-guiding on this view (and thus TC, as a claim that purports to capture what is special about thick concepts, is false), the way in which thick concepts are action-guiding – the way in which they tap into preexisting motivation – would distinguish them from descriptive concepts.

A preliminary conclusion is that reasons internalism does not help to explain how thick concepts can be action-guiding, if their action-guidingness is supposed to set them apart from non-evaluative concepts. At best, the way in which they are action-guiding may be different (as explained in (b)).

There are numerous ways of remedying the account: Most obviously, we could reject TC, and claim that the facts that make judgments employing thick concepts true are not reasons, or else that they are reasons only inasmuch as any fact whatsoever can be a reason (with the difference mentioned in (b) above). That is, we could abandon the idea that there is a special class of evaluative concepts which is crucial for our understanding of practical reasoning, and in particular of the reasoning of the virtuous person.

We could also reject Non-S, and claim that the outsider can understand and master only the descriptive content of the concept, and therefore she will not be motivated to act accordingly. Because she doesn't acquire a motive in applying the concept, she does not (if RI is true) have a reason to act. This suggestion would fit well with the view that beliefs that are expressed by applying thick concepts are motivating beliefs. The worry about the motivating beliefs suggestion (in section iii above) was that it does not allow for drawing the member /outsider distinction. But if the outsiders' beliefs are just descriptive in content, whereas members acquire evaluative beliefs, the

distinction could be drawn nonetheless, and this may suffice for answering Blackburn's challenge.⁴³

Or we could reject RI, and with it the distinction between PR_(member) and PR_(outsider). Perhaps thick concepts do provide reasons for anyone – members and outsiders alike – but only members are motivated to act accordingly. This is the possibility I above sketched as (2): *Rejecting reasons internalism*. But it leaves us with Blackburn's challenge unanswered.

4. Blackburn's challenge, again

Williams believes that all our thick concepts are limited in basically the same way: They are reason-giving only for those who are members of a community which uses them. If it appears to us as though some thick concepts ought to be rejected whereas others are acceptable, it is because the acceptable ones are actually ours. They are not, in any other way, different from the ones that we reject. According to Williams we cannot single out some thick concepts as morally acceptable in the stronger sense that they do not just reflect our actual acceptance, but ought to be accepted by others as well.⁴⁴

Williams' reason for approaching the problem of objectionable concepts in this way is that the outsider cannot endorse the locals' use of thick concepts – if she did, she would simply have become a member. She could endorse the use of some thick

⁴³ It is not obvious what exactly the answer would be. I am not going to pursue this option here since it is one that Williams would clearly reject.

⁴⁴ Blackburn's view may be similar in this regard. He too believes that it is due the actual attitudes of those who employ a certain thick concept that it gets its evaluative content. Or perhaps, on a different interpretation, Blackburn denies that thick concept have evaluative content. See Väyrynen (2009), fn39. As he understands Blackburn, the evaluation is part of conversational implicature, but not of the concept's conventional meaning.

concepts in a non-parochial way only if she had a way of vindicating them which is independent of having certain dispositions or, at least, imaginatively, sharing them. But Williams believes that there is no such independent viewpoint. As Scanlon puts it (on Williams' behalf), "[w]e will always, as it were, be looking through some of these dispositions rather than at them."⁴⁵ Scanlon calls this the *no-escape thesis*.

Scanlon himself accepts the no-escape thesis, yet believes that there is a way of vindicating the use of some thick concepts and rejecting the use of others by following what he calls "*the substantive strategy* of trying to characterize morality in a way that makes clear why it, and the kind of life it makes possible, are things that we have reason to value."⁴⁶ Scanlon sees this strategy tied in with a cognitivist version of separability that I introduced (but set aside) above,⁴⁷ proposing a reductive account of thick concepts in terms of descriptive and thin ones. E.g. there is a descriptive content to promise-keeping, and those who use the concept of promising imply that there is a reason against breaking promises. Whether or not they are right about this will depend on whether the concept of promising can be accommodated by the correct moral theory.

Something like 'the substantive strategy' could be pursued independently of separability and the possibility of giving a reductive account though. It may allow us to give an answer to Blackburn's challenge which is compatible with any of the proposed analyses: reductive views that rely on non-cognitivist or cognitivist separability, as well as non-reductive views like the ones that Williams and McDowell propose, according to which thick concepts are irreducibly evaluative. But this requires interpreting the substantive strategy somewhat differently than Scanlon: Scanlon hopes that moral theory

⁴⁵ 2003: 281.

⁴⁶ Ibid. (my emphasis, UH)

⁴⁷ cf. p. 5.

(‘the theory of right and wrong’, i.e. a theory which explains the thin concepts) can provide the requisite test which then vindicates the use of some thick concepts, as for instance, the concept of promising. An alternative strategy would be to test for emptiness: we should reject thick concepts if the properties they refer to cannot be instantiated. That is, the question whether the property that a concept such as chaste or blasphemous refers to is action-guiding simply depends on whether there is such a property. Trying to develop such a version of the substantive strategy here would lead too far afield. Suffice it to say that it would test for objectionable thick concepts in the very same way in which we single out other concepts as objectionable (e.g. ‘witch’).

The possibility of the substantive strategy in either interpretation allows us to see that Blackburn’s challenge does not forge a particular view of the analysis of thick concepts, let alone the one that he favours.

Williams’ attempt to answer the challenge by combining thick concepts with his reasons internalism has, however, proven unsuccessful. The view that thick concepts provide reasons (more precisely: the properties they refer to do) is incompatible with reasons internalism.⁴⁸

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⁴⁸ My warmest thanks to Pekka Väyrynen, Gerald Lang and Joseph Raz for extremely helpful comments on earlier drafts. I am also grateful to two anonymous referees of OUP for their comments and suggestions.

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