

## Disentangling Disentangling

This audience will not need reminding that the issue of ‘thick’ words has had a prominent place in discussions in moral philosophy, for at least twenty years. I have myself attempted a discussion of them, on at least three occasions.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, I am not sure that I can say much more than I have said already. I am prompted to try, however, by the recent appearance of Hilary Putnam’s collection of papers, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy*. Here, the thickness of some evaluative terms is the central lever used to dislodge the dichotomy and to precipitate its advertised collapse. The question I shall address is whether this lever is rigid enough to perform this job, or indeed whether the collapse of the dichotomy, as Putnam conceives of it, is better effected by other means. But the interest is wider than that, for Putnam is of course not alone. He himself makes handsome references back to Iris Murdoch and John McDowell, while he also salutes the tradition of American pragmatism as containing precursors. Were it not for his other excesses, Richard Rorty would also be a contemporary pragmatist ally.

Indeed, I suspect it is fairly orthodox to suppose that the thickness of some terms, and the impossibility of disentangling an evaluative and a descriptive component out of them, is an ingredient in things that many of us wish to applaud: the demise of positivism and its contempt for value theory, the resurgence of first-order ethics as a subject, the parallel resurrection of political philosophy, and, as Putnam stresses, the demise of *homo economicus* and the resurgence of pluralistic accounts of the good in writers such as Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen. Those like myself, who are unconvinced by the use made of disentangling, must stress and stress again our attachment to these civilized things if we are to get a hearing.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Reply: Rule Following and Moral Realism’ in Holtzman & Leich, *Wittgenstein: To Follow a Rule*, ‘Through Thick and Thin’, part of a symposium with Allan Gibbard, in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 66 (1992), and *Ruling Passions*, especially pp. 92 – 104.

## **Loving the Thick**

Thick terms then, have taken up the moral high ground. My problem is with whether they should have, not with other occupants of the high ground. But I shall start by voicing a heretical doubt about the service thickness does to moral theory, the service celebrated by those I shall call lovers of the thick.

To make my point I shall distinguish between thickness, as it is understood by those hostile to disentangling, and the same phenomenon described differently.

Thickness is a term of art, and it should surely strike us as odd that Williams needed to find a term for what he was aiming at, when on the face of it perfectly good words existed already. Ordinary people talk of loaded words or loaded descriptions. I believe, as everyone does, that many words are loaded, and loaded with many different things. I am more troubled with the idea that they are thick, where thickness implies that we have a unitary concept and hence that we cannot disentangle or usefully separate the different things being done by the one term. The idea behind thickness is that a candidate, such as ‘chaste’ or ‘courageous’ simply does the one thing. If we like to think in these terms, we could say that it ought to get no more than a homophonic entry in a truth theory that fully exhibits the structure of our language and our doings: ‘X is courageous’ is true in English if and only if X is courageous. I shall talk of thick concepts as the advertised product of this way of looking at things, and thick terms will be those expressing thick concepts.

To illustrate the specific claims associated with thickness, let me tell of a very crude claim that I heard recently (far too crude for Putnam himself, I hasten to add). The claim was that expressivists such as Gibbard and myself as well as precursors such as Hare or Stevenson, commit the “fallacy” of failing to recognize that a word can do two things at once: both describe and evaluate. The truth is of course exactly the reverse. It is lovers of the thick who deny that there are two things we are doing. They say that we are doing the one thing, describing something as courageous, for example. Expressivists recognize that there are two activities going on. It does not matter in the least if we manage to do both things at once. In fact, there are many more than two things to do, since positive or negative evaluations make up only one of the dimensions of stance which we can communicate. Furthermore lexical choice is but one kind of instrument for expressing a practical stance. Intonation and emphasis are at least equally flexible and often equally powerful. Consider how many ways I might say ‘He is an ally of Tony Blair’ — amusedly, incredulously, contemptuously,

reassuringly, condescendingly, and so on and so on, and sometimes in combination. “Tell all the truth but tell it slant” said Emily Dickinson, “success in indirection lies” and she was right that the slant can be indicated in the most subtle and indirect ways. We may be more successful if the load can be spread across a whole speech, as in Anthony’s deliberately back-firing eulogy for Caesar.

The everyday metaphor of a loaded description inherits the idea that a load is something that is put upon something else, and that can equally be taken off. Things can be said in derogatory ways, but rephrased to avoid the derogation. Lovers of the thick have to resist the view that this is typically the case, and we come to their reasons in due course. But the issue is whether we should see the unitary, thick concept as fundamental, or the idea of a loaded way of describing things, where the load can in principle be shed.

Before coming to the arguments, let me cast an eye over the consequences. My heresy is this: thickness does a disservice to ethics. It discourages critique. To take a deliberately uncomfortable example that I hoped made the point especially clear, imagine a group happy in the habit of appraising women as cute. We may want to say that there is something wrong with them, along the lines of this: they admire and respond excitedly (or perhaps enviously, if they are women) to the non-threatening, infantile, subservient self-presentations that some women consciously or unconsciously adopt. There is a group amongst whom women are successful by presenting themselves as there to be patronized, like pets or babies (frequent terms of endearment). And that, we say, is bad.

Now this critique involved disentangling. It involved separating the features picked upon—the subservience and the rest — and the reactions of admiration and appreciation that they elicit from the group, and then finding it abhorrent that those features generated those reactions. It would be all right, or at least better, if other features such as intelligence and wit generated those reactions, or if the same features of infantile self-presentation generated other reactions, such as compassion or a desire to educate.

While the group is unselfconscious, it may not realize what it is doing by deploying the vocabulary. It can come as a surprise to people to learn of the practical atmosphere surrounding a term. This is why consciousness-raising is a task. But if it comes as an uncomfortable surprise, then thanks to lovers of the thick, our group can mount a defense. The critique only worked by disentangling. But, they may complain,

ours is a thick concept. And then comes a litany: to call someone cute, in our whirl of organism or form of life, is not to stitch together a distinct fact and a distinct attitude. It is instead to respond seamlessly to the world, only using a full human sensibility. When young men and women grow into our way of life, they acquire a second nature, a receptivity to a certain kind of woman, the cute ones. When success arrives one has become receptive to cuteness, indeed, one simply observes it. It is a salient and welcome part of the *Lebenswelt*. Furthermore when you saw us as admiring and appraising favourable, or even choosing cute partners, you misdescribe our reactions. Our reaction, if you call it that, is really *sui generis*. It is simply that which is demanded or merited by cute women. If you wanted a term for the reaction, we would have to make one up. We might allow you to say that we cutify the relevant kind of women, the cute ones. But even that may go too far: better to stick with the cognitive success that understanding of cuteness denotes. Cutifying has nothing to do with projecting or gilding or staining—the usual expressivist metaphors—but simply with appreciating cuteness as it demands.

And having got this far our group may then go on the offensive: perhaps the supposed critique only appeals to reductionists or to the scientific, or to exiles from this way of life, and therefore need not be heard at all. You cannot criticize our singing unless you have learned our songs. Or, they may insinuate that we only reject the thick if we misunderstand the actual phenomenology: the way cuteness involves no kind of inference, but a simple single experience, whose content is describable in no other terms.<sup>2</sup>

I take it as obvious that this “defense” against the original critique does not work. The force of our critique has not been blunted. But the question for lovers of the thick is — why not? If our critique worked by disentangling, but disentangling is not to be done, then our critique depends on a false account of the phenomenon.

It is instructive here to compare, as Putnam does, the reception of thickness in moral theory with that of similar doctrines in the philosophy of science. Suppose we fasten upon four episodes, some of which Putnam also highlights. There is, with Quine, the collapse of the analytic-synthetic dualism and the substitution of general holism. There is, with Goodman, the general failure of ‘algorithmic’ confirmation

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<sup>2</sup> A similar attack is made, in a similarly futile way, by philosophers trying to attack Hume’s theory of causation, and many other naturalistic projects.

theory. There is, with Sellars, a collapse of the observation/theory distinction. And there is, with Kuhn, the growing stress on ‘extrinsic’ factors as determinants of the fate of theories, where extrinsic denotes social and cultural factors outside the textbooks, but that play a surprisingly large role in determining what gets into the textbooks.

Clearly, these four episodes played a role in generating a crisis in the philosophy of science, as well they might have done. This crisis was not just the overthrow of some parochial ‘positivist’ model of how science is to be described. The grave problem was the far-reaching threat to many of the cherished notions attaching to science: by the nineteen-seventies or so rationality, objectivity, observation or falsification, and commensurability had been mown down, each in turn.

At first sight it is strange, therefore, that ethical theory took the other tack, supposing that the parallel themes that surround the emphasis on thick concepts, far from undermining rationality, objectivity, commensurability and the rest, liberated them. Whereas the four episodes I mentioned threatened to take science off its pedestal, parallel themes were taken to elevate ethics onto one. Yet our brush with the cute must surely prompt us to ask why ethics is supposed to be able to profit from the very complexities that seemed to bankrupt science?

The thought, clearly, must have been that once science had been properly cut down to size, ethics resurrected itself from the dustbin into which the positivist account of science had thrust it. If *that’s* what observation, confirmation, theory, rationality or even truth, come to in science, goes the thought, then we can have them all in ethics. What seems to have impressed lovers of the thick less than it should have was the question of what you do with them when you have them: whether the prize is one in name only. For if science’s pedestal was lopped down by removing everything previously comprehended under the idea of authority, it is no great trick for ethics to jump up to the same height. The same jump, incidentally, was taken by theology. If cuteness can be observed, but of course only by initiates, then so can holiness.

Putnam does not directly address the question of whether thickness discourages critique. But he very strongly implies that only thickness protects and enables various kinds of subtle and civilized ethics. His particular illustration is the ‘capabilities’ approach of Amartya Sen, which argues that welfare economics needs to recognize the freedom to enjoy valuable human functionings as factors to be included in any measure of the value of a social set-up. As Sen has shown, such a

measure fits uneasily with anything like classical utility, or indeed anything indexed by simple economic measures, and it sits badly as well with the classical measure of well-being in terms of desire satisfaction, since as Sen also stresses absence of unsatisfied desire may itself be the result of the adaptation of desire to deprivation. Putnam believes that the collapse of the fact-value dualism helps Sen's project: he describes himself as 'providing a philosophy of language that can accommodate and support' this kind of economic and ethical thought.<sup>3</sup>

However, it is harder to see why Putnam believes this. His stated reason is that the terms in which this thought must be conducted are themselves entangled: he cites terms like 'valuable functioning' 'functioning a person has reason to value', 'well nourished', 'premature mortality', 'self respect', 'ability to take part in the life of the community'<sup>4</sup>. He is perfectly correct that these terms involve valuations. In a warrior society death in battle in the late teens might not count as a premature death whereas in ours it would. In a traditional society, a disenfranchised woman might count as taking part in the life of the community, whereas in ours she would not, and so on. But what is not addressed is the question of why these valuations require thick terms rather than loaded terms, or indeed whether they actually require either. For we can say well enough what Sen approves of and what he regrets, and what he would have us approve of in the way of progress and what he would not. Hence Putnam actually evades the question that he ostensibly raises, of whether Sen's approach is compatible with Sen's own prescriptivism, expressed in the earlier paper to which he refers.

Putnam is right, of course, that Sen's approach, like any substantial ethic, can only be supported if there is space for substantial, rational, discussion of values.<sup>5</sup> He reminds us of the melancholy fact that some positivists, particularly in the nineteen-thirties, denied that there was space for such discussion. His particular example is the economist Lionel Robbins, who indeed made hair-raising pronouncements of just this kind. A. J. Ayer and perhaps Carnap could be put in the dock beside him. But for

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<sup>3</sup> p. 64

<sup>4</sup> p. 63

<sup>5</sup> But only a weak sense of 'rational' – what I call a Hume-friendly sense—is necessary. In this sense, rational discussion of an end or a value will proceed in the light of other ends or other values. It will not take off from a Kantian landscape of pure rationality informed by no aims, no values, no desires.

more than fifty years since then, and two hundred years before, expressive theorists have taken great care to acknowledge that discussion of attitudes and stances is fundamentally important. Indeed expressivists claim that they have a particular insight into *why* discussion of values is important. It is important because when you change someone's mind about a value, you change their stance towards the world, and that will typically change what they do and what they support and what they regret and what they campaign for.

Not only is discussion important, but there are better and worse ways of conducting it, and it is the good ways that are collected under the umbrella 'rational'. Manipulation, concealment, evasion, fantasies, arguments ad hominem, ad baculum, and the rest are bad. Addressing peoples' concerns, unveiling the truth, testing commitments against cases, sketching analogies, expanding open-mindedness and so on are good. Can expressivists draw the distinctions here? Certainly. Even when the aim of discussion is to change the other person's mind (which is not always the case), it is not true that the end justifies any means. Only some means are compatible with respect for the other person. Changing the other person's mind — changing their stance towards the world — is a fine art, but expressivists as much as anyone else can distinguish between my bringing it about that someone want something by deception and manipulation, and bringing it about by revealing truths about it that, in one's own eyes, ought to impress the subject favourably.<sup>6</sup> It is the same with valuations and appraisals. Furthermore, the 'Neurath's boat' account of the epistemology of such processes, which Putnam implies is the private property of lovers of the thick, is in fact common property. Both lovers of the thick and those who prefer an approach in terms of load and attitude can agree on a holistic, anti-foundational, fallibility, coherentist method of aiming at reflective equilibrium.

For these reasons, then, we should resist any general tendency to believe that love of the thick abets the authority of ethics, or helps us to understand the relationship between different ethical perspectives or different ways of living. Indeed, as my first example shows, we should believe exactly the reverse, that emphasis on the thick only engenders a creeping complacency, a separation of those with whom

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<sup>6</sup> I fear that Bernard Williams's notorious distinction between internal and external reasons has clouded counsel here. I say more about this in *Ruling Passions*, pp. 264—6.

we can talk from those whom we cannot, and an easy excuse for turning our backs on the latter, excising them from the sphere of discourse.

Putnam, clearly, does not fear these worrying consequences of loving the thick. Before discussing Putnam directly, however, I shall outline some of the issues on which I have previously taken a stand.

### **Representation and Attitude**

I am inclined to distinguish between attitudes, or other stances towards things, and representations of how things stand. I think there are a number of reasons for doing this. The simplest, and certainly the motivation that has received most prominence in these debates, derives from Miss Anscombe's celebrated 'direction of fit' metaphor. Representations of how things stand must fit the world whereas it is the world that must fit, or be desired to fit, or be regretted for not fitting, our attitudes. The distinction is traditional: what a person believes and what he desires, for example, have always been held to be two different things. This is not undermined by the allegedly Aristotelian thought that liking or desiring something is the same as believing it good, since that equation can be read more as a comment on believing good than on liking, as it was by Hobbes, for example.

This might sound uncontroversial, but 'cognition' has imperialistic ambitions. Even emotions have been described as nothing more than cognitions. I resist those ambitions. To take an uncontroversial (so far as I know) example, suppose I describe someone who has just received a surprise as confused, or having his head in a whirl. I am not describing his beliefs, but his difficulty in coming to beliefs. Being unable to stabilize or settle upon some beliefs is a distinct state, and distinctly described by saying that an agent has his head in a whirl. It is the most dreadful dogma that all that can be said about an agent's mental state is sayable in terms of the content of their beliefs—having your head in a whirl is a counterexample. Equally when I say that someone is an ally of Tony Blair, with contempt, surprise, amusement, fear or cunning in my voice, I make public facts about myself, but not by voicing further beliefs. Rather, I put into the public domain my practical or emotional take on the one belief.

Employing the distinction between attitudes and beliefs does, of course, open me to the demand to say something about representation itself. This I am happy to do: representations play a distinctive role in the explanation of success in action. When I



token to myself a sentence such as “the university library is over there” I am typically successful, if I act upon it, because the university library is over there. No explanation of my success that failed to mention the library would do. Similarly if I talk of things having a property I am typically successful, when I act upon such a representation, because the property is instanced in some case or in some pattern of cases.

Some might scent an opening here. Why not extend the account to cover representations of things being good or right? Might we not say that actions derived from tokings of sentences like “That is the right thing to do” are typically successful, when they are, because whatever was picked out *was* the right thing to do? My answer to this is complex. I admit that in some circumstances we can say this. But I deny that they form a pattern. If our interest is explanation, we will reject such explanation in favour of ones that look at the underlying circumstances. As Jeremy Waldron points out in an elegant essay on Nick Sturgeon’s example, we could say, casually as it were, that the Donner party died because Passed Midshipman Woodward was no damned good. But we couldn’t say it as anything except a summary or slogan, where what was summarized would be a much more complicated history told in quite other terms. There would be no interesting commonality between an explanation of the fate of the Donner party, and an explanation of the fate of the British labour party, although each could be told in terms of individual people being no damned good.

This is where thick terms first make their appearance. For if we advance explanations using such terms, interesting commonalities may indeed emerge. If the Donner party perished specifically because Passed Midshipman Woodward was pig-headed, and the Labour party perishes because Tony Blair is pig-headed, we do have a common pattern, and one which has been exemplified and repeated throughout human history. Indeed, this repeated pattern will be the reason why vices get their bad name, and virtues get their good names, names which, in Hume’s terms, force an avowal of their merits. The rationale for having a word like ‘pig-headed’ lies largely in the characteristic way in which projects fail when people are insufficiently attentive to other things that may be true than whatever they happen to believe, given the evidence and the stakes.

So do the representative credentials of thick terms simply declare themselves, given this account? No, unless we have taken a prior stance on the issue of disentangling. For we do not know yet what is doing the explaining. ‘Pig-headed’ is

indeed a loaded term. Was the load an integral part of the explanation? Was it essential to the history that we tell it with the term pig-headed carrying its evaluative charge? On the face of it, we can imagine the same history of how the labour party perished written in terms of Tony Blair's capacity for conviction and indifference to varieties of hypothesis, without at all committing ourselves on whether these traits (or for that matter the demise of the labour party) are good things or not. We would not have to choose the overtly loaded vocabulary. Perhaps the load does no explanatory work. If an executive explains his success at getting cheap raw materials by boasting that they are supplied by w\*\*s, his explanation is no better than if he said that they were supplied by the third world, but his way of presenting the explanation is nastily overloaded.

Often, however, because of the way in which the load drives the extension, it may be harder to get rid of the particular term. Suppose, carelessly, we thought that 'acolyte of X' was simply a derogatory term for 'student of X'. We might then suppose that there is no difference between explaining why Y was at the conference by saying that Y is one of X's students, or by saying that Y is an acolyte of X. This is wrong, because the derogation points to something specific that is corrupt or wrong about the relationship between X and Y, something beyond Y just being a student of X, and it may be just this that explains why Y is at the conference. It is not because Y learns from X, or X is Y's professor, but because of the extent of Y's devotion, or the nature of X's acceptance of that devotion. But of course, we can get past the loaded vocabulary as we say this: indeed, I just did (I return later to the reasonable suspicion that something thick or loaded still remains).

So far we have learned that, as far as critique goes, thinking in terms of loaded terms is better than loving the thick, and so far as representation goes, there is no problem about maintaining the non-representative or non-receptive nature of the loads which we make our descriptions carry.

There is another moral to this brief account of representation. One of Putnam's most effective strategies is to claim that the breakdown of the fact-value distinction is to be expected, given modern pessimism about ever finding a substantive concept of a fact. It is only, he implies, if we are wedded to the old eighteenth-century conception of a fact as something that can be pictured, or perhaps to some equally discredited

positivist successor, that can any longer sustain the distinction.<sup>7</sup> But I deny that this is so. For our brush with representation shows that whether or not we see a stance as representational is tied in with our best accounts of explanation (in particular, the explanation of success of action based upon it). There is no reason why an approach based on such a notion should not certify a representation/stance distinction without in any way inheriting empiricist or positivist simplicities, and for that matter without in any way trespassing upon modern deflationism about the concept of a fact.

### **Thickness and the Fact Value Distinction**

Putnam has several reasons for thinking of many words as thick. The most prominent is supposed to start from the premise he attributes to Iris Murdoch and John McDowell, that when a term involves an evaluative element (if, indeed, it is permissible for lovers of the thick to put it that way) there is no saying just which things the term applies to without either sharing, or at least appreciating, the evaluative outlook of those who use it.

I call this a premise, not an argument, because it needs an argument to bring it to bear on the issue. Somehow, we have to be brought to see that it is only if there is a unitary, thick concept expressed by a term that this premise could be true. Or at least, that this premise is best explained by supposing that there is a unitary, thick concept expressed by a term.

This is not true on the face of it, because there is a perfectly good explanation of the phenomenon on the hypothesis that a word is loaded, not thick. If a term is loaded, the load can well play a role in determining the extension. You do not call someone pig-headed unless you have an unfavourable take on the way he forms or maintains his convictions. If I cannot cotton on to the contours of your favourable and unfavourable takes on such things, indeed I cannot predict who you will call pig-headed. Similarly if I cannot understand your sense of humour I will not be able to understand why you laugh at some things and not at others. If queer things make you panic, I cannot predict when you will do so. I do not know what sets you off. But this is no argument that what happens when you *are* set off is that you do no more than make a representation of a feature of things. Nor is it an argument for denying that on any particular occasion on which you are set off there is something to which you were

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<sup>7</sup> pp. 20 —23.

responding, even if across the board the class of things that elicit this response is what I called ‘shapeless’ — sharing no significant commonality except that they so strike you.

We can, of course, go on to discuss whether you *should* be set off as you are, either whether it is a case of evaluation, or of humour, or of emotion, or of any other stance. We want to know whether we should be like-minded. But this is no argument that in being like-minded we are simply describing or representing the world in the same way, as opposed to the much more natural way of putting it, which is that we are reacting to it in the same way, or adopting the same stance towards it.

Some words, particularly derogatory words of nationality and race, are not prone to this subtlety. They carry their extensions, described in other terms, as part of their dictionary entry. But in others the load determines the extension, as I have described.

Some words that are alleged to be thick have quite a flexible relationship with any particular attitude or stance. Sometimes at any one time, a variety of attitudes and stances may attach to one word (no one attitude is attached to English words for place of origin, like Geordie or scouse, although their use is a signal that some attitude or other is in the offing. It might be affection, or contempt, or something else again). Sometimes the load is more a matter of ‘passing theory’ or context and purpose than it is of standing theory or semantic convention. I myself have difficulty hearing ‘courageous’ as inevitably admiring. After all many values are contested, and we have to be able to say what we are contesting and what the rivals are bargaining for. Other words slip off one load, and begin to bear others. Words are often ready to be decoupled from particular stances with which they have been associated — witness the political ambition of many marginalized groups to ‘reclaim’ the vocabulary that expressed their marginalization. But you can only decouple what was coupled in the first place. To revert to my original metaphor, you can only unload something that was loaded. But for the lover of the thick there can be no such ambition. All you can do is junk one term, and replace it by an (accidentally? unfortunately?) homologous one.

Going onto the offensive, we might raise nasty questions about the identity criteria for thick concepts. When do they arise, and when do they go out of use? I have illustrated this with the example of a group who begins to find fat unattractive, and to use a sneery intonation to express their derogation of it. ‘He is fat↓’ they say,

in that contemptuous tone. Have they acquired the new thick concept yet? Presumably not: it was not a conceptual advance but a social dislike that originated their doings. Suppose now a piece of vocabulary arrives to do what the intonation did: they find the word 'gross', just as ageists find 'wrinklies' and philistines call people like us 'eggheads' and we call them 'yobs'. Was this the conceptual advance? Again, there is no reason so to describe it. When things get better and the social divide loses its significance, there is no conceptual loss, just an emotional gain.

Putnam's other main argument is more original, and I would like to close by considering it. He introduces it by quoting the famous passage with which Quine finishes his essay 'Carnap and Logical Truth'

The lore of our fathers is a fabric of sentences. In our hands it develops and changes, through more or less arbitrary and deliberate revisions and additions of our own, more or less directly occasioned by the continuing stimulation of our sense organs. It is a pale grey lore, black with fact and white with convention. But I have found no substantial reasons for concluding that there are any quite black threads in it, or any white ones.

Putnam quotes with approval Vivian Walsh's addendum, that the composite may as well be red with values, but they too will be spread over the web, making it always pinko-grey. In other words, what we say must always be an indissoluble compound of fact or observation, conceptual or theoretical take on that fact, and the values infusing that choice of fact or way of taking it.

Putnam is careful here, since he himself has denied some of the excesses that Quine prompted. He does not oppose limited use of an analytic/synthetic distinction, for instance in cases of definitional abbreviation (which Quine himself allowed to be intelligible, as was pounced upon by Strawson and Grice). He now expresses himself by denying an analytic synthetic dualism or dichotomy, an unbridgeable gulf between things of one kind and things of the other, with implications for the way they should be treated, and still more for the questions it is worth asking. For one of the effects of Quine's work was to stop us from asking how the analytic and the synthetic are distributed, for instance over Newton's three laws of motion. The whole has empirical significance, but how the empirical and the definitional are distributed ceases to be of concern. It is not, as the positivists would have had it, a sign of confusion or

insufficient analysis, but a sign of health, that we cannot say what is definition and what is doctrine. Similarly in the case of values, which is why Putnam's book is called the collapse of the fact value dichotomy, not of the fact-value distinction.

This raises many questions, as of course Quine's own attack does. It is not really clear what the metaphor of everything having a tinge of pink comes to when, for instance, we reel off unloaded descriptions of the external world. I shall return to this in the context of Putnam's insistence on the pervasive presence of epistemic norms that enable us to make even the most flat and unloaded of descriptions. But meanwhile there is a different question. How much does Vivian Walsh's extension undermine what anybody sensible might want from a fact-value *distinction*? Those who have wanted such a distinction have not typically demanded that evaluation and appraisal, what I have called the load, be allocated precisely to particular words or sayings. For Quine, the impossibility of saying that one sentence represents convention and that another sentence represents fact was of paramount importance, because the single sentence is the only possible candidate for analyticity. But for most defenders of a fact-value distinction, such as Hume, it is simply does not have to be true that it is a single sentence that carries the load of value.

Let me illustrate with a closely parallel example. Suppose I believe in a distinction, or even a dichotomy, between describing a natural scene on the one hand, and expressing nostalgia for a lost childhood on the other. And now suppose I come across a poem which clearly does both, but where in some sense the load of nostalgia is spread across the whole poem. No bit of the poem is white with pure description, and no bit is red with nothing but nostalgia, but the whole effect is undeniably pink. Does this undermine my distinction, or even dichotomy? Surely not. It is simply no part of the interest or propriety of the distinction that the load must be carried by a precisely determinate word or phrase or other trope. Perhaps it was done by a tiny accumulation of hints and choices nudging the mood as the poet wished. Similarly we can be sure that a drawing of Tony Blair by some cartoonist is derogatory, without needing to say which bit does the trick. As critics, or as emulators, we will want to discover how the thing is managed. But as consumers we can just remain pleased or shocked that it was. By saying that there is a fact-value distinction, or equally a geography-nostalgia distinction, we need mean no more than that there is a feat to be managed. The load must be placed somewhere, and skill lies in knowing how best to place it.

Hence, used for this purpose, Walsh's extension of Quine's metaphor misfires. The analytic-synthetic distinction, in Quine's view, is *intrinsically* tied to distributing meanings to sentences one at a time. But the fact-value distinction, like the geography-nostalgia distinction, is not. It really *does not care* how the evaluative load is distributed.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly suppose we allow that there may be no such thing as a purely neutral description of a scene. There may always be pink in the offing. Would this undermine a geography-nostalgia distinction? No, because the geography may be whatever is left after we ignore the different kinds of pink it comes in. If one book describes the Alps the noble elevation of the Alps, and another describes their towering and menacing grandeur, the Alps and their height are what are left if we abstract from the difference. If what is left still shows tinctures of pink, we can repeat the process as often as we need.

We do not actually need to worry whether we ever arrive at pure white. This picks up the point left dangling above, the fear that if there is always pink remaining, the process of peeling off layers of it is somehow futile. I follow Nietzsche in reversing the issue. There can be a point in a process if something is achieved at each stage of the process, not only if there is an end-point, (something like a limiting frequency or descriptions asymptotic to pure white in the long run). One might even suggest that the fact-value distinction is best conceived as a methodological recommendation—the way to approach individual issues in particular contexts, when disentangling needs to be done before we can make any progress.

The point is parallel to one frequently made in the philosophy of science. The Sellarsian idea of all observations being theory-laden only unsettled the idea that science is responsible to observation for a very short time. For it was rapidly realized that this responsibility is only threatened if the theory that loads the observation is the very theory that is under test, and this need not be the case. When it is not the case, theory can still be confirmed or undermined by independent observations: ones that themselves require no standpoint on the theory itself. Similarly here. If we discuss,

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<sup>8</sup> As far as the philosophy of language goes. Practically there may be advantages one way or another: for instance, intonation is more readily deniable than vocabulary, which is why PC bans on vocabulary can backfire. Anthony could disown the intended effects of his speech.

say, whether a death is premature or not, and someone suggests that this is so whenever the subject is healthy at the time, their contribution is not nullified by the fact that 'healthy' itself carries a shade of pink. Provided soldiers and victims of car accidents can be agreed to be previously healthy, which they can, then the suggestion delineates at least a class of premature deaths.

Perhaps Putnam need not oppose that, nor we him. We can meet Putnam half-way. As I have described, he is conciliatory about distinctions but harsh about dichotomies or dualisms. His purpose is to rescue intelligent ethical thought, argument about ends as well as means. Putnam wishes to make room for what he sees as an insight of Iris Murdoch, that there can be an expansion of our understandings given by increasing attention to things like courage and justice, or cruelty or harm. The positivists such as Lionel Robbins were blind to this possibility: the other side of their fact-value dichotomy was occupied by nothing but a dustbin.

If that was the dichotomy or dualism, then good riddance to it indeed. And we can also applaud one of Putnam's strategies for getting rid of it, which is to point out the way in which things on the good side of the divide, such as scientific theories, only get there with the aid of things from the dustbin: epistemic values and stances on things like plausibility, simplicity, economy, and even probability. Conviction, or cautious acceptance, or skepticism, are themselves stances, as are explanatory preferences or taste in theoretical avenues. I too think it is good for theoretical scientists that they realize their dependence on epistemic values and choices, and it was bad of positivism to disguise it from them. Here a note of caution is appropriate, however. For it is one thing to point out the pervasive presence of epistemic values in determining what we believe. It is another thing to say that those values pervade the content of what we believe. The pink does not seep into what we say, even if it plays a role in getting us to say it. Robert Millikan had to make choices and deploy values to arrive at a measure for the charge on the electron, but it makes no sense to suppose that the fact that the charge on the electron is around  $1.60217733 \times 10^{-19}$  coulombs inherits those choices and values. Some say that Millikan had to be self-confident and even a little bit devious to get the results of his classic paper, but the charge on the electron is neither self-confident nor devious.

Putnam is certainly right that we can increase our understanding of all kinds of human phenomena by all kinds of traditional humane and literary studies. We learn more of what cruelty might be from Henry James, or more of what bigotry might



mean from Salman Rushdie. Do-gooding itself is rendered ambivalent by Dickens. Simple-minded words of praise and blame give way to nuance and qualification and judgment. In other words we learn—and it is indeed learning—to contour the directions of our praise and approval and admiration, or of our contempt or discomfort or disgust. It deserves to be called learning because at the end of it we are better than we were at the beginning, even if we cannot prove this to those who remain differently minded.

In this paper I have not attempted to deny the prevalence of ‘load’. Nor have I denied that values infuse intellectual choices, nor that the discussion of values is a dustbin of no intellectual interest or rigour. Finally, I do not deny that many issues present themselves initially as entangled—in the Paris conference, Putnam cited ‘does my child have a problem?’ or ‘is there a reason to <make some decision>?’ as the kinds of question that do. All that I hold is that in context, and for the purpose of enabling discussion and critique to go forward at any particular junction, the right methodological route is to distinguish as well as we may. We advance one step of fact at a time, distilling the residue of disagreements of value as far as we can, until if we are lucky (but only if) any that remain prove slight or tractable.

It is sometimes thought that the expressivist concentration on attitude at the expense of representation is some kind of denial that in these areas learning and understanding can increase. This was no part of Hume’s view, is no part of my position and should be no part of anybody’s.